

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH TEACHES

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1. Why believe there is a God?

A Catholic believes that God exists because:

- His intelligence tells him that the world must have had a beginning; a First Cause; i.e., a Creator.
- His conscience tells him that Right differs from Wrong, and that he ought to choose and to do the Right : there exists therefore a First and Absolute Authority over him; i.e., a Law-Giver.
- History shows him that mankind has always, by a natural instinct, worshipped a god or gods.

God, then, whom Catholics believe for these and other reasons to exist, is certainly Creator and Law-Giver, and has a right to complete service from Catholics.

God, being the First Cause, must be Infinite, and must contain in Himself, to an infinite degree, all the qualities or perfections He has caused, and all possible qualities and perfections. Among these are Intellect and Will. God therefore is Infinitely Wise and Infinitely Powerful.

And since all "evil" is a defect - a privation of some perfection that should be present - and since there can be no defect on the Infinite, God is, too, infinitely good.

Therefore, it is INCOMPARABLY IMPORTANT that Catholics should know what God wills in regard to themselves, for an all-wise God must have made them for a purpose, and an all-good God must have had a good purpose.

To neglect this purpose would be folly : to defy it, sin.

How is a Catholic to know the will of God?

History proves that mankind at large comes to very different conclusions, and many men come to none.

Experience shows that men cannot solve the problem by study alone. Many men have no time, nor the intellect, even if they have the desire, to study. Even if successful, they would arrive but slowly and doubtfully at a conclusion. But all seek to know now, and for certain, what the meaning of life is, and how to deal with it.

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Therefore, in practice, mankind needs to be told, and by a Voice which cannot lie. Not even Conscience is sufficient. Consciences differ, or are silent, or uneducated, or uninformed, or distorted, or "talked down".

So, in practice, a direct message from God is needed, knowable with certainty - that is, a DIVINE REVELATION.

A point to ponder:

"But if God is infinite, how can my mind, which is finite, ever know Him?"

My mind certainly cannot know God as God knows Himself, for only the Infinite can have an adequate, i.e., an infinite knowledge of the Infinite.

But my mind can have a knowledge about God, which is true, just as it can have ideas about God which are false and can be shown to be so.

My mind can obtain this knowledge by thinking rightly, especially if it is trained to do so, for no one expects to do a thing perfectly right, at once, and without any assistance.

But also, as we saw, my mind is able to be helped by an outside Voice that can speak with authority and cannot lie - if such a Voice exists.

It gives the "Revelation" that in practice, I need, and which is referred to in the next chapter.

2. The Claims of Jesus Christ:

Jesus Christ claimed to bring and give this Revelation in a complete and unique way:

"All things are given over to Me by the Father and no-one fully knoweth the Father save the Son and he to whom the son shall will to reveal Him" (Matt. xi. 27; Luke x. 22)

"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life: no man cometh to the Father save by Me . . . Without Me, you can do nothing" (John xiv. 6, xv. 5).

He was recognised by His followers as making this claim:

"To whom else should we go? . . . Thou hast the words of everlasting Life" (St. Peter, in John vi. 68).

"Our salvation exists not in any other : for there is no other name under Heaven given among men wherein we must be saved" (St. Peter, in Acts iv. 12). Compare St. Paul, Phil. ii. 10.

Jesus therefore claimed To GIVE the revelation we need, and to be the ONLY ONE to give it COMPLETELY and with full AUTHORITY; and His followers fully recognised that this claim was made.

To justify His claim, He had to show that He was the ENVOY and MOUTHPIECE OF GOD, and he did this:

- by the unparalleled quality of His life and doctrine
- by working miracles in proof of the divine sanction of His mission. (God alone can work miracles: so if God, by a · miracle, had sanctioned what was false, He would Himself be a liar); the supreme sign of, and seal on His Divine · Mission, was His rising from the dead, or Resurrection.

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· by fulfilling in Himself all that the Jewish prophets had foretold of the destined Saviour of the world, and of Him only.

History supports His claim. The history of Christianity is essentially unlike that of other religions.

So mankind must believe that JESUS CHRIST WAS RIGHT WHEN HE CLAIMED TO SPEAK WITH DIVINE AUTHORITY: that is, to give the world that Revelation of which it stood in need.

If, then, Jesus Christ gave a necessary, unique, infallible, and complete Revelation, it is again of supreme importance to know for certain:

- a) what He SAID
- b) what He MEANT

How can this be determined?

Here, as before, Study and Conscience are not enough:

But if I pray, will not the Holy Spirit guide us 'into all truth?' (John xvi. 13) That might have been Christ's only method for helping me get at the Truth: yet I, and other men, may pray and get no answer, or else arrive at different conclusions. Not all these conclusions can be true: even if all be partially true. Contradictory statements cannot both be true, and earnest Christian men contradict one another on many matters.

A collection of students or consciences, i.e., a non-infallible "Church" is not enough: Unguaranteed teachers can offer no more than what they think probable. And, in practice, the various Churches do not agree upon Christ's doctrine; and within the Churches, other than the "Roman Catholic", official teachers contradict one another.

A book is certainly not enough:

Even if I consider that the New Testament can tell me with certainty what He said, it cannot always tell me what He meant. Good and learned men interpret the same words differently. Again, it was long before the New Testament was written, collected or widely available. And how do I know what is "the New Testament"? There were other Gospels, Epistles, books of "Acts" and of "Revelation" besides those now gathered in one volume. How do I know that all those now included, and only those, were rightly included? The New Testament never mentions itself, nor what composes it, nor its qualifications for being believed.

Finally, Christ gave no hint that we were to get at His words, or at their meaning, through a book, and nor did the Apostles.

("But is not the New Testament inspired?" Yes: but who says so? Neither Christ nor itself. Why, then, do we believe that statement? And what exactly does "inspiration" mean?)

The only Teacher who could speak with certainty about what Christ said and meant would be one who was contemporary and who could answer questions with a superhuman Authority. This calls for a CONTEMPORARY, EXTERNAL, INFALLIBLE TEACHER.

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Is there any man, or body of men, now existing, which can claim to meet this need?

There is only ONE - the Pope, and the Church of which he is the the Head.

The Pope and the Church alone in the world, claim:

a) to have been instituted by Christ

b) to have continued unchanged ever since

c) to be safeguarded by Him from ever teaching Untruth. They claim to be the INFALLIBLE GUARDIANS, HERALDS, AND INTERPRETERS OF THE REVELATION OF CHRIST.

They are thus, just what is needed if their claim be justifiable.

How can this claim be investigated?

By examining whether Christ did in fact found that sort of Church.

If He did, it is the Roman Church*, or nothing. For if Christ founded a Church and said it would last for ever, it must be somewhere now. If it were nowhere, His word would have collapsed and His claims would be discredited. So if it is agreed that He did found a Church, and that the sort of Church He founded coincides with the sort of Church that the Roman Church is, and with no other, then the claim is justified.

N.B: *Until it has been shown that the Pope's Church is Christ's Church, i.e., the Catholic Church, it is convenient and logical to call it simply the "Roman" Church.

3. The Church:

Jesus Christ collected a body of disciples, but also a "close corporation" of twelve men, whom He "sent" to teach and admit yet other disciples into His religion; i.e., the APOSTLES.

The Apostles were TO REPRESENT CHRIST AS HE DID THE FATHER.

As My Father has sent Me, even so, I send you (John xx. 21).

He that heareth you, heareth Me, and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me, and he that despiseth Me, despiseth Him that sent Me (Luke x.16).

Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Matt. xviii. 18).

Christ therefore guaranteed that their doctrine and rulings should be His, even as His were God's.

Again, this was necessary, if their position was to be different from that of the "Scribes and Pharisees". These could only offer their probable personal opinions about what Moses taught, and make rules which Christ called "commandments of men" (Mark vii. 8). Christ taught and legislated with GOD'S AUTHORITY and so were His Apostles to do; else their hearers would have been no better off than those of the Scribes and Pharisees.

To the Apostles, Christ gave a Head, chosen from among them yet summing up their office in himself, namely, St. Peter.

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Thou art Peter (i.e., Rock), and upon this Rock will I build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matt. xvi. 18).

To thee will I give the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Matt. xviii. 18).

Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you (plural) that he might sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for THEE (singular) that THY faith fail not; and, once thou art converted, confirm (establish) thy brethren (Luke xxii. 31).

In the Acts, St. Peter is seen exercising this office of Head, even over the other Apostles.

This Teaching and Governing body, with its Head, was to be a permanent institution.

Go and teach all nations, baptizing them, etc., and behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the world. (Matt. xxviii. 19-20).

As Christ needed official representatives, or successors, to reach places and ages which He could not, and did not, the Apostles also needed them for they were not destined to reach "all nations," nor to live for ever. In fact, if after their death authoritative teachers and legislators had ceased to exist, all future generations would have been back in the old uncertainty about God's doctrine and His will, and Christ's work would have been defeated. Therefore, the Apostles were to have successors, with an office substantially similar to theirs, just as they were successors of Christ, and held an office similar, in these points, to His. Also, it was the Church that was founded on Peter and over which he was given complete jurisdiction - not just one generation, nor one section of the Church; and what was not on that Rock was on sand and destined to fall.

In order therefore to ensure:

- a) CERTAINTY
- b) PERMANENCE
- c) UNIVERSALITY to His teaching and legislation,

Christ created a SOCIETY intended to be world-wide and world-enduring; governed by officials representing Himself in doctrine and law-making, admitting members on definite conditions of obedience of mind and action, and by a special ceremony. These officials are headed by, established and shepherded by St. Peter. In matters of doctrine they are safeguarded from telling a lie; in matters of legislation, from enforcing a wrong. God authorizes their doctrine and their law.

If then a modern institution wishes its claim to be Christ's Church to be admitted, it must reproduce at least the following elements:

A social and institutional structure

A Unity of Government, containing officials carrying on, unbrokenly, the office of the Apostles, and a Head, carrying on that of St. Peter

A doctrine uttered, and a legislation imposed, with infallible authority exercised by or derived from its Head

Identical conditions throughout of admission and membership

And the essential tendency to become world-wide, i.e., universal.

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NO CHURCH, save the "Roman", even dreams of claiming to contain these elements, or even looks as if it did.

4. The Roman Church

The "Roman" Church, however, claims to, and in fact does, meet the criteria specified above. She is governed by Bishops and a Pope, who descend in an unbroken line from the Apostles and St. Peter.

She teaches with authority a doctrine which is identical in all parts of herself, and in all periods of her history; and imposes an authoritative legislation on all her members. She is super-national and inter-national and is in a true geographical sense world-wide, and able to become even more completely so.

She possesses therefore the characteristics of UNITY, APOSTOLICITY and CATHOLICITY that must be in any Church which claims to be that which Christ founded, and alone possesses them.

The Roman Church therefore claims to be infallible. By INFALLIBILITY she means that:

- a) The Faith of the Believing Church, as a whole, cannot be false.
- b) The Faith of the Teaching Church, expressed in certain representative or official ways, cannot be false.

These ways are:

THE EXPRESSED AGREEMENT OF THE CHURCH'S ACKNOWLEDGED TEACHERS that a doctrine is revealed, even if it be not "defined". If in the ordinary exercise of their teaching office they are officially approved in so teaching, there is a sure guarantee that their doctrine is the Church's belief, and cannot be false, though it may be inadequate.

A COUNCIL composed of a sufficiently representative number of her Bishops, whose decrees are recognized and become authoritative through their confirmation by the Pope. The Pope speaking as Pope "ex cathedra" i.e., from the chair of Peter.

PAPAL INFALLIBILITY means therefore that:

When the Pope speaks as the successor of St. Peter, and therefore as Head of the Church and "Vicar" of Christ, and is teaching the entire Church by defining this or that to be part of the Catholic Faith as revealed by Christ, he is safeguarded from teaching falsehood.

His infallibility does NOT mean:

- a) impeccability: i.e., that he cannot sin
- b) omniscience: i.e., that he knows everything
- c) inspiration: he is not positively inspired to teach this or that, still less to teach anything new; he is prevented from teaching, if he teaches with the intention of binding the whole Church irrevocably, anything false. It does not therefore concern his private opinions; nor even all his public pronouncements; nor his doctrine with regard to what is not part of the "Deposit of Faith," which he must guard, hand down, interpret and define.

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Note I: DEVELOPMENT:

Development of Doctrine - The Church cannot invent new doctrines, but she can understand and explain her doctrines more and more perfectly. She cannot alter their substance, but can improve their statement.

In successive periods, different doctrines have been attacked or wrongly explained, e.g., the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Sacraments. The Church thereupon examined her dogmas, stated them more accurately, and defined them more positively. What doctrines she thus dealt with depends usually on which were being attacked or misinterpreted; thus e.g., the Sacraments were more fully treated in the thirteenth century, and the Trinity and the Incarnation in the fourth and fifth. Thus doctrine grows, but dogma does not alter; theology is elaborated, but the Faith remains unchanged.

Note II: OTHER CREEDS:

The Church does not say that there is nothing true nor good in other creeds. Indeed, what is altogether bad could not exist. She is glad when a religious system retains, or contains, any item of truth - for example, belief in the Sacraments in the "Orthodox" oriental churches; belief in the divinity of Christ among conservative Anglicans; belief in God and the value of prayer among Mohammedans. She declares that whatever is good and true anywhere, is contained in herself, in a pure and undiluted form, in logical order, and by Divine Authority able therefore to be believed in under divine sanction and with unshared certainty. She does not condemn other creeds for the truth they possess, but for the truth they have lost or have never had, or possess in a diluted form and for less good reasons.

This entire matter is dealt with more explicitly in the then Cardinal Ratzinger's Declaration, which can be read in its entirety at :

<http://www.catholicfirst.com/TheFaith/ChurchDocuments/DominusJesus.htm>

5. Catholic Dogma:

NOTE: - It will be remembered that it is not intended here to offer proofs that the Catholic dogmas, taken separately, are true; but to display with sufficient clearness what the Church's doctrine is, in coherent form. However, if you have by now been led to think sympathetically of the "Roman Church" as reasonable in her claims, and probably the Church founded by Christ Himself, you will already be prepared for drawing the practical conclusion that if she teaches truth, each of her doctrines, even unproved departmentally, is true.

I. THE HOLY TRINITY

I: - The Catholic Church teaches that

- (i) GOD is, and can only be ONE as to His Nature; yet that
- (ii) GOD is, not only One, but THREE as to His Personality.*

That this is so is

- (a) a dogma, that of the Holy Trinity;
- (b) a Mystery:

that is, a truth guaranteed to us by God, but such in its nature that the human intellect cannot adequately grasp it. Theology may discuss it, but cannot explain it fully, being but human thought dealing with what is by nature above human thought.

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II - The " Three " in God are named " Persons," because in them is at least all that we mean by Personality, without the limitations of human personality. They are respectively named Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, partly because of the special relation they are to be thought of, by us, as bearing to one another; and also, because of the special relations in which we stand to them. In practice, the Catholic worships the Father as his Creator and Providence, the Son as his Redeemer, and the Spirit as living in him and sanctifying him; and the Three as being none the less One God, equal to one another and possessing one identical Nature and Substance.

*This may be illustrated by Human Nature, which requires two distinct persons for its completeness, male and female, while its personalities may be multiplied indefinitely. God's Nature is One and yet requires three Personalities, and having these is utterly complete and incapable of further communication. How? Why? Herein lies the Mystery of the Trinity.

II. THE SUPERNATURAL LIFE

I - A stone is not "alive": a flower is at least alive: a dog has a higher kind of life than a flower, and a man than a dog.

Therefore there are different kinds of life, one higher than another. Reason cannot show there is no higher kind of life than man's. The Church says there is.

II.-She teaches that IT WAS AND IS GOD'S INTENTION freely to RAISE HUMAN LIFE TO A SUPER-HUMAN LEVEL; i.e., to give to man a higher kind of life than his own; one he could not claim; nor, by his own efforts, merit; nor could be merely improved into, as, e.g., a flower can be improved into being of a better quality as flower, but not into being e.g., an animal; this life is also given the name of " Grace," in so far as it is God's "free gift," which gratia means. It is nothing less, indeed, than a participation in the Divine Life, so far as man can appropriate it.

III - To each higher kind of life belongs an appropriately higher kind of knowledge. A flower-cannot "understand" anything, nor a dog what a man can. So if there be a higher kind of life than man's, it will contain truths, and a way of knowing them, essentially above the co-natural grasp, or faculty of man. He may know about them if he be told by competent Authority; but he cannot exhaust these superhuman truths by his human knowledge. Such truths are called Mysteries; the Trinity is one of these. "Grace" also assists the intellect to believe even naturally ascertainable truths, like God's existence, in a new and supernatural way. Finally, each kind of life implies a greater likeness to, and therefore union with, God. A dog lives by instinct in accord with natural law. Man can choose to live in accordance with it, and put his human will in union with God's will. To supernatural life belongs a supernatural union.

III. THE FALL AND ORIGINAL SIN

The Church teaches that:

I - GOD GAVE THIS SUPERNATURAL LIFE TO THE FIRST MAN AND WOMAN He created, so that they not only had a human body and a human indestructible soul, and duties of natural worship and obedience to God's law, but a supernatural life of grace and a destiny of supernatural union with Him.

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II - But the human soul has the faculty of free will. God would not therefore force this special privilege on them, but allowed them to reject it if they chose. He made it a conditional gift, dependent on their obedience to a special command addressed by Him to them.

III - They disobeyed this command, and He therefore withdrew His special gift of supernatural life, and left them merely on the natural level.

This is the dogma of THE FALL: i.e., THE REJECTION OF A SUPERNATURAL LIFE.

IV - But the first man was regarded as no mere isolated unit, but "socially," i.e., as representative of the race. In his deprivation, therefore, the race was involved; and his descendants were born deprived of that special Life they were intended to have. This is the dogma of ORIGINAL SIN: i.e., our lack of a supernatural life intended for us.

IV. THE REDEMPTION

I - God did not will, however, that this deprivation should be final. Yet we cannot, by our natural efforts, ever win a supernatural thing. The supernatural life had to be given back to us. God might have done this in many ways.

II - He chose to do it through a SECOND ADAM, that is, a second Representative of the race, in whom we might be incorporated, as we were in the First Adam.

III - But He did more than He originally did. He did not simply create a second man, merely human, who should have the chance of making the right choice.

God's Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, was Himself to become man, not only receiving, but containing, by nature, that supernatural Life, inasmuch as He is God.

IV - If, then, men by their free choice - itself necessarily assisted, though not of course coerced by grace - make themselves one with the Second Adam, they unite themselves to the source itself of supernatural life, and are better than restored to the position they had lost. [NOTE - Those who are thus "incorporated" with Him form His Body, which is the Catholic Church, and it is at once clear that all who are not so incorporated do not possess that supernatural life which is supernatural salvation.

"Outside the Church," then, "there is no salvation". However, see towards the end of this compilation where "baptism of desire" is explained. Know also that the grace of Christ's salvation was also "retrospective," and those who lived even before His actual Incarnation could "incorporate" themselves with Him by a sufficient "desire" to do all that God should will. The whole doctrine of the Incarnation, the Church, and the Sacraments, is only the working out for and by man of this recovery of the supernatural Life].

V. THE INCARNATION

Of Jesus Christ, the Church teaches that He:

I - ... (i) was GOD, in the full sense,

... (ii) MAN, in the full sense,

... (iii) yet ONE PERSON.

II - WAS BORN of a woman, yet had no human father (this is the dogma of the VIRGIN BIRTH).

III - DIED upon the Cross, ROSE again, body and soul; and after a certain period departed from His visible life on earth.

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IV - This death, then, was a supreme act of worship to God; a SACRIFICE OF OBEDIENCE which better than annuls Adam's disobedience, for it was truly offered by man, since Christ was man, and was fully worthy of God, since He was God. Though all the acts of Our Lord, being those of a divine Person, were infinitely satisfactory to God, God attached the consummation of our Redemption to the consummation of Our Lord's life, namely. His death freely died upon the Cross. Since in order to appropriate that Death and its benefits we have to incorporate ourselves in Christ, He is truly said to have died for us, but not just instead of us.

V - His death is also a symbol of that terrible sin which slays the supernatural life in the soul, for on the Cross Christ represented sinful man for whom He was atoning; so, too, His resurrection was the symbol and promise of our restoration, as well as a proof that in Him that Life is indestructible.

VI. THE SACRAMENTS

(a) Introductory

- i. God willed to restore the world through Jesus Christ, God and Man.
- ii. Christ willed to continue His work through means which were neither merely spiritual nor merely material; but, like Himself, both; i.e., THE CHURCH AND THE SACRAMENTS. In the Catholic Religion, therefore, you must attend to one general object, the implanting of a supernatural life in man, and to one general method, the achieving of this spiritual result through partly material means.

Thus:

1. Christ is God and Man.
2. Man is soul and body.
3. In the soul, beside its natural life, a supernatural life is to exist.
4. That life is inserted, developed, and if necessary restored, in ways which include a material and natural element as well as a supernatural, spiritual one, thus suiting the whole man.
5. The chief of these are the SACRAMENTS - material transactions which symbolize, and effect, a spiritual result.
6. They are not therefore, mechanical or magical in their results, which are a combination of what I do in using them, and what God does in giving them and working through them. Thus the Church has, besides the three essential "Notes" mentioned above, a fourth, i.e., Holiness; for not only is Holiness visible to a heroic degree in her Saints, but her whole "machinery" is arranged for the imparting and developing of the supernatural Life, or grace.

b) Baptism

I - Man is born into the natural life, the world, in the natural way. Man must be born into the supernatural life, the "Kingdom of Heaven," in a supernatural way.

This NEW BIRTH, this inserting of the new life, is brought about (so Christ ordained) by Baptism.

Unless a man be born again of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven (St. John iii. 5).

Go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (St. Matt. xxviii. 19).

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In Baptism, therefore, the material element is the pouring of water and the pronouncing of these words: the spiritual result is the new birth into the supernatural life of special union with God: the washing away of "Original Sin". It is, too, a symbolic "burial with Christ," in view of "resurrection" with Him.

II - As Birth can only happen once, so Baptism cannot be repeated.

As Birth is the opposite of Death, Baptism is not only the opposite of that deprivation of "grace," which is Original Sin, but the annulling of all actual sin, which is spiritual death, unless, indeed, I will to keep that sin in me; that is, will to remain supernaturally disunited from God; in that case the effects of Baptism are as it were held up, until I alter my will and allow them to operate.

So necessary is it that this New Birth should be made sure of, that converts about whose baptism there is any doubt are conditionally baptized when they become Catholics.

(c) Confirmation

I - In natural life the change from boyhood to youth marks a crisis; it needs special care; and leads to new responsibility, duty of work, and temptations.

In the supernatural life, Birth is followed, normally, by a need of new strengthening; to meet this Christ instituted the Sacrament of Confirmation, of which the material part is the laying on of the Bishop's hands and an anointing with consecrated oil, as athletes used to be anointed. The effect is a special strengthening by God of the supernatural life.

II - As "adolescence" comes once only, so Confirmation can be administered only once. It, like Baptism and Ordination, impresses an indelible stamp or "character," on the soul.

(d) Marriage

I - A crisis in human life comes when a man and woman join their lives together and marry.

Human marriage is a contract between two persons. CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE is still that contract, but it is no mere human contract any more, owing to the supernatural life which is in the two parties and unites them in a special way to God.

(N.B: - Baptized persons, even though not in a "state of grace," obtain the Sacrament, but illicitly. Cf. too Gen. ii. 24.)

That is, the contract becomes also a Sacrament: the contract remains as the material element; and God imparts to the man and woman a special grace suited to their new state of life. Not only do they join themselves to one another, but GOD JOINS THEM (Matt. xix. 6).

II - St. Paul says marriage is the most perfect human symbol of the intimate union of Christ with His Church, and this, we have seen, is the continuation and reflection of the union of the divine and human natures in Himself.

Hence Marriage is ordained to be ONE, for He was one Person, and His Church is one: and INDISSOLUBLE, for in Him the divine and human natures are never to be separated, nor is He from His Church. There is then no such thing as an experimental or temporary marriage, nor divorce.

Not only, then, is infidelity within marriage an act of injustice, because each married person owes himself or herself to the other, but an insult to the Incarnation of which marriage is the

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symbol; and not only is impurity even outside of marriage an offence against Christ, supernaturally united to the soul, but marriage itself can be misused.

Artificial birth-restriction is such an abuse; for, while it is not necessary to have children, yet acts of which the only full natural consequence is the conception of a child, may not be performed in such a way as to be at once prevented from fulfilling their primary end. Human instinct is always against this interference with the processes of Nature: economic conditions are usually appealed to, as making the birth or upbringing of more children impossible or "wrong". It is, then, these conditions that must be rectified; not the human body interfered with. But so difficult is self-control, in or out of Marriage, that the Church is clearly right in attaching supreme importance to the practice of all sorts of self-control, in mind and body, from childhood up. Self-Control should never be confused, as it usually is, with Self-

Repression. State-Sterilization of the (possibly or actually) "unfit " is also wrong

(i) because it is almost unknown who are "unfit,"

(ii) it leaves human instinct unmodified and therefore provokes "safe immorality," and

(iii) because an assault on bodily completeness is not justified merely as a "public protection"

Offences against public well-being can be punished in various ways, mutilation included: but mental defect is not a crime; many ways of neutralizing its possible consequences are available, e.g., proper treatment of venereal disease; hospice care for the defective, and others.

(e) Holy Orders

Another crisis in a man's life may be the CONSECRATION of himself, in a special way, to God's Service.

I - In His Catholic Church Christ instituted not only the Pope, but also BISHOPS AND PRIESTS.

It is the peculiar function of Bishops to ordain; of Priests, to administer the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Penance. God has chosen throughout to use men as ministers, and material things as means.

II - In this special consecration of a man to God's service a special grace is needed:

the Sacrament Of ORDERS supplies this; its material part is the ordination or consecration by the Bishop, and the spiritual part is that which makes a man "a priest for ever," or a Bishop. It is obvious that if I do not "intend" to do, by my action, what the Church intends - still more, if I intend to do something different, I do not do what the Church does. The Elizabethan bishops certainly did not intend to ordain "Massing-priests" nor to make "Mass-houses" of their churches. Changes in the Anglican ordinal, open acts such as destruction of altars, the law of the land itself, as well as innumerable written statements (not to mention martyrdoms) prove this. Therefore, as from the Reformation, bishops have not ordained priests within the Established Church; and since only priests can be made bishops, there have been no bishops in the Established Church since then, whatever name they may call themselves by.

(f) Extreme Unction

I - The final crisis in a man's earthly history is his death. Here especially he needs a strong assistance.

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He is given the "LAST SACRAMENTS" that is, a special Communion called Viaticum," or "journey money";

And a final anointing ("extreme unction" of which the effect is to restore him to health of body if so God wills (see St. James v. 14, 15), and always to that of the soul, if he needs it; also peace of soul, freedom from sin and the effects of sin, and spiritual strength for coping with bodily weakness. It is God's medicine for soul and body: oil was used, not only to strengthen the strong, but to refresh the weak and wounded.

II - The Last Anointing can naturally be given only once in the same illness, but Viaticum may be given as often as is suitable.

(g) The Eucharist

(i) THE REAL PRESENCE

I - A man's life is not wholly made up of crises. He needs his daily food.

So, too, his supernatural life needs its constant suitable nourishment. This is chiefly given in THE SACRAMENT OF CHRIST'S BODY AND BLOOD.

II - The Church teaches that when Christ said " This is My Body, this is My Blood " He meant the words in their full sense, and that WHAT WAS BREAD AND WINE BECOMES, BY THE PRIEST'S CONSECRATION, CHRIST HIMSELF

III - This change is called TRANSUBSTANTIATION, for under the appearances of bread and wine, which do not change, a different thing is made present, namely Christ Himself, instead of the bread and wine.

How this can be is one of those mysteries which the human mind can never adequately grasp or explain.

(ii) MASS

The use to which Christ intended this Sacramental mystery to be put is twofold: Sacrifice, and Communion.

I - MASS, to which all Catholics are bound to go, when possible, on Sundays and certain festivals, is THE CHRISTIAN SACRIFICE offered to God in adoration, expiation, gratitude, and intercession.

II - It is the same Sacrifice as that of Calvary because the Victim and the Priest are the same - namely, Christ, who offers Himself to His Father - the only Sacrifice worthy of God and adequately able to redeem the world. Yet since the Sacrifice was fully accomplished on the Cross, the Mass does not actually redeem, but continuously applies redemption. On the Cross, Christ redeemed the world, the race: by Mass, redemption is appropriated by me, in my generation and person.

III - When therefore I assist at Mass, and join my will to Christ's, I join in carrying out the work of Redemption, and, as a Christian, co-operate with Christ. Even if I be not "in grace," I fruitfully assist at Mass, because I offer Christ, as Christ offers Himself, to the Father. But if I be united by grace to Him, I participate in Him both as priest and victim, and exercise a supernatural work of enormous power and dignity.

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Thus it is clear why the Mass is the centre of Catholic practical religion, and the intelligent joining in the offering of Mass one of the greatest actions I can perform.

(iii) HOLY COMMUNION

I - When I receive into myself Christ's Self, under His Sacramental appearance of Bread and Wine, my soul is nourished by His Real Presence, and my supernatural life is strengthened and developed by Communion with that life itself in its source. It is God's will that men should reach Him through Christ, and Christ's that we should enter into visible as well as spiritual Communion with Himself, through the Blessed Sacrament.

The Church rules that we should go to Holy Communion at least once a year, and desires that we should go as often as possible.

II - Christ is a living person. Where, therefore, any part of Him is, all of Him is. He is wholly present both under the veil of Bread and under that of Wine: hence to receive Him under either, is to receive Him wholly. Therefore when the Church, who has the right to regulate the administration of the Sacraments provided she does not alter their substance, has decided that Christians shall receive Him under the form of Bread only, she is not defrauding them.

(h) Penance

(i) ACTUAL SIN AND ITS CURE

I - I can weaken the supernatural life by getting out of touch with God, and strengthen it by Communion with Him. Can I kill it?

Yes: by MORTAL SIN: i.e., if I offend against God by defying His will

(a) in a grave matter

(b) by a deliberate act, i.e., fully aware of what I am doing, and with the full consent of my will.

I disunite myself, in this way, from Him; I reject His "grace"; my soul dies supernaturally; my sin is "mortal."

If the matter is trivial, or I do not know God's will clearly, or if I am, surprised into my act and do it without fully free choice, it may be "venial," and my soul is weakened but does not die.

II - If I kill my soul by sin, can it be brought, to life again?

Yes: as God gave the world a second chance, so He does for the individual. So long as I live on earth, God will always help me to the restoration of my supernatural life on certain conditions.

These are CONTRITION and the USE, when possible, of the SACRAMENT OF PENANCE.

(ii) THE SACRAMENT

I - CONTRITION is being sorry for my sin on God's account. I may grieve for my sin because it has offended God and violated His law; or because it has caused the sufferings and death of Christ; or because it has deserved for me God's punishment.

The moment I repent my sin by an "act of perfect contrition" it is forgiven, though the duty of seeking absolution in the Sacrament of Penance remains. "Perfect contrition" is sorrow for my sin because I love the God whom I have offended.

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II - With contrition **MUST** go **RESOLVE NOT TO REPEAT THE SIN**; else I am not truly sorry. But as I cannot begin to be sorry without God's grace assisting me, so neither can I keep my resolve without His grace. I resolve, therefore, not trusting to my own strength for success, but to His co-operating love.

N.B: Being contrite is not the same as feeling contrite; and resolving to sin no more is not guaranteeing to sin no more. I cannot altogether control my feelings, and I can give no such guarantee.

III - If, then, I have committed a grave sin I must:

(i) confess to a priest that and any other mortal sin committed since my last confession

(ii) I must repent of them on God's account

(iii) I must resolve, with His help, not to sin again.

The Priest will then give me Absolution, according to Christ's rule:

"Whose sins ye remit, they are remitted to them " (John xx. 23), and a penance (see below); and my supernatural life is forthwith re-established.

N.B: To efface sin is only one part of this Sacrament; it confers grace and help for the future, and may be profited by even if no grave sin be on my conscience.

(iii) **PUNISHMENT AND INDULGENCES**

I - With all guilt goes **PUNISHMENT**.

If the love at the back of my sorrow were quite perfect, God would cancel all my punishment: but my love is usually imperfect, and even after forgiveness of sin some penalty is usually left for me to pay. In the material world violation of law brings its penalty mechanically: in the free world of the spirit penalties may be more or less remitted according to the goodness of the human will and the choice of God. The residue remains to be paid either in this world or in the next.

My penance, imposed by the priest in God's name, stands for part of that penalty or for all.

II - In the Early Church penalties for sin were very heavy, e.g., seven days of fasting. Later, easier duties were substituted for these, e.g., the recitation of seven psalms. The recitation, therefore, of these psalms was said to have attached to it an "INDULGENCE" of seven days, i.e., of penance.

An Indulgence, then, is the remission of a certain amount of penance, on certain conditions, by the Authority which imposed that penance. A prayer, therefore, to which "forty days indulgence" is attached, means that if I recite this prayer the Church lets me off the forty days' penance she would, in earlier times, have imposed. It never means that I have forty days' licence for committing sin, nor that I get forty days off Purgatory (of which, more explanation follows below). There are no days in Purgatory. It does, however, imply that I am let off that amount of punishment in the next life which would have been cancelled had I performed the old "canonical" penance.

Finally, no merely human virtuous act is of avail for superhuman salvation. Our acts are supernaturally meritorious only when we unite them to the merits of Christ our Saviour.

6. The Next World

(i) Heaven and Hell

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I must die, either quite guiltless, or gravely guilty, or not wholly cleansed yet not gravely stained.

I - If I die GRAVELY guilty, with my will set against God's, with no supernatural life in me it follows I cannot enter into the supernatural results of what I have not got. I am supernaturally separated from God; and God, who always gives a man a sufficient chance in this life, does not give him another in the next. This eternal supernatural separation is HELL.

Because I might have had supernatural union and joy, my state is one of remorse; and because I ought to have had it, of punishment. The punishment which reaches me from within myself is called the Punishment of Loss; that which comes from outside of me is called the Punishment of Sense, and the Church, following Christ's example, calls this, as He did, fire (Matt. xxv. 41).

II.-Children who die unbaptized before they come to the use of reason, or those adults who so die and are in God's sight equivalent to children, do not, consequently, obtain the supernatural joy and life: but since they neither could, nor (in God's providence) should have had it, their state is not one of remorse, nor of punishment for personal sin, but of natural happiness.

N.B: If a heathen (or other) believes sufficiently in a God who "rewards and punishes" and on His account repents his sins, he has "implicit faith": i.e., the consequences of such a belief are "wrapped up" in his vague but comprehensive faith. If he desires to do what God would wish him to, did he know what it was, he has "baptism by desire". He is baptised by his desire, which is different from "desire for baptism" such as a man might have on a desert island.

III - If I die in "grace," and all punishment for past sins has been remitted, I pass straight into conscious supernatural communion with GOD, which is to be IN HEAVEN.

(ii) Purgatory

I - Most men, we may surmise, die with their will substantially right with God's, yet imperfectly so, and with their debt of punishment only partially paid.

Their wills, therefore, have to be made perfectly right, and their debt fully paid, so that their complete union with God may become possible.

II - The period during which this is done is that of PURGATORY. If I genuinely love someone, and see myself unworthy of him or her, this itself is pain, and should be purifying. Such is Purgatory. The soul, freed from the illusions of the world, has seen God more clearly, and also its sin. This, and whatever other pain God may inflict upon it, gradually bums away its imperfections, and it reaches its full joy.

III - Finally, since we are, and remain, men, and not mere souls nor pure spirits like the angels, we shall at the end be perfect men, body and soul. This is the RESURRECTION OF THE BODY. We shall in some way have that unity of spirit governing matter which now makes us soul and body, yet one person.

IV - Souls in Purgatory can be helped by our prayers, because in them and us the same supernatural life exists. We are in communion with them, as with the saints in heaven and the just on earth.

N.B: Even in sinners, though grace does not at the moment exist, yet it may exist, and our prayers can help them. Only the souls in hell are wholly separated from grace. We may,

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therefore, pray to and for the souls in Purgatory, to the saints in heaven; and the saints pray for us.

This is the COMMUNION OF SAINTS, resulting from an identity of supernatural life.

(iii) The Saints and Our Lady

I - As not all men on earth achieve a supernatural life equal in intensity or in "amount," though it be identical in sort, so neither in heaven are all souls equal in joy and glory.

II - After the perfection of Our Lord, none is higher than that of the BLESSED VIRGIN, His Mother.

1 - The Church teaches that to Mary, in view of her unique office - i.e., that of becoming the Mother of God's Son made flesh - was from the beginning of her existence given that supernatural life which is given to us in baptism. This is her IMMACULATE CONCEPTION. This she never violated by any actual sin.

2 - She is rightly called MOTHER OF GOD, because Jesus Christ, her Son, is true God and true man, in one person; her Son therefore is God, and she is God's Mother. Thus the Immaculate Conception does not mean that she had no human father, nor does her title Mother of God mean she was eternal, or Mother of God-head.

3 - As we are God's sons, and brothers of Christ, so Mary must be OUR MOTHER, too, and uniquely powerful to help us.

This doctrine issues into practical consequences - All men are created by, and will be judged by, the same GOD. God is the only Supreme Authority. But, being all of them His sons, they are all brothers of Jesus Christ, and therefore brothers of one another. Therefore no man, or trade-group, or class, or nation, or race may exploit any individual or group of individuals merely for his own advantage. Therefore strict duties connected with personal power, money, commerce, war, treatment of the underprivileged etc., arise from what has been said.

"Capitalism" and "Communism" are neither of them unthinkable as theories, nor wrong in themselves. But both theories have been gravely misused: both Capitalists and Communists, individually or in groups, have committed grave sins against Justice, human or divine, and still do.

But in all ways wrong is the doctrine of the "Almighty State" of which modern dictatorships and their would-be imitators are the contemporary example. A State so "supreme" as to brook no rival of any sort can:

(i) grant no rights to the individual

(ii) tolerate no such thing as the family with its group-rights, of which one is the right to educate its children as it thinks spiritually best, calling on the State to assist it but not to supplant it

(iii) permit no authority to any trade guild or union, nor to judges nor to doctors who become mere servants of the State and must cease to attend to justice or health as such but seek only to further the interests of the Government

(iv) tolerate no association rendering allegiance to any higher authority (as Religious Orders, especially, do), above all, if they be super-national, as the Church is

(v) and it logically cannot allow people to believe in God, the soul, or the after-life; for God, and Conscience, are authorities that refuse to submit to earthly dictation; and heaven offers a Hope that the State cannot. Therefore State-Absolutism (often mis-called Communism) must of necessity be atheist and materialist and persecute those who are anything else.

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7. Conclusion

The contents of this web page are not an exhortation to you to become a Catholic, nor a proof of the truth of Catholicism, nor an exhaustive instruction about Catholic belief. But they provide a scheme composed of the Church's essential dogmas. Into this scheme you can fit further secondary details as you go on. You see how the different organic parts of the thing cohere. If you knew what is in this compilation your knowledge of the faith would be like your knowledge of a man if you knew but his skeleton: it would need flesh putting on it; and God, together with a certain practice of it, as of prayer, would have to bring it all to life. You will need to pray to the Holy Spirit and ask to be given the gift of FAITH to be able to accept these Mysteries and thus eventually to be received as a true member of the Church that Christ founded.

At present I see that God created me, and must govern me. But I need to know His will: He must tell it to me. He did this through Christ, and Christ chose that His Voice should continue to be heard, no less authoritatively, through a Church. Only one existing Church fulfils this function of authoritative and safeguarded teaching, and realizes the other characteristics of what He instituted.

Round the central doctrine of the supernatural life all her doctrines concerned with man's soul may be grouped; and as God worked through Christ, and Christ through other men, so all her work is sacramental and includes a material and a spiritual element. She is suited to this life, and in our supernatural sonship and brotherhood all true human dignity, equality and liberty, are rooted; and to the next, which is to last eternally.

In return for the effort that went into producing this web site, you are enjoined to add it to your Favourites so that you can locate it in the future, and also to e-mail your friends with its address so that they too can learn and benefit from it. The aim is to make the teachings of the Catholic Church as widely known as possible through the medium of the Internet.

The contents of this web page are based on a CTS pamphlet "Words of Life" compiled by the late Fr. C. C. Martindale SJ to whom the transcriber is greatly indebted.

A pocket-sized booklet is now available with a new preface and comments on changes of emphasis since Vatican II which have been added by Fr John Edwards SJ. The booklet has been retitled "Becoming A Catholic" and can be obtained from:

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