

ROMAN CATHOLICISM

INTRODUCTION

There are 1.2 billion Catholics worldwide, which constitutes roughly one half of Christians. In the USA, their numbers are the largest in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Boston, and Philadelphia, and there are almost 800,000 Catholics in the five Indianapolis dioceses (<http://bit.ly/1yt6Dv8>).

While their ancient history is filled with wars and corruption and their modern history contains abuse and cover-up, most of us know the average catholic to be a good person doing good things.

We've often heard, though, that the most dangerous lie is the one that's wrapped up with truth. And that is the case with the Catholic Church. While Christ can be found there and while some Catholics probably are truly born-again, the official theology of the Catholic Church constitutes another gospel and is being used by the god of this world to blind people, "to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:4).

So, we want to study this particular world religion, understand what their official doctrine and practice is, evaluate that against biblical Christianity, and consider how to minister the true gospel to these people. To do that, we're going to heavily reference the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, so that we're learning "straight from the horses mouth" (<http://bit.ly/1yt7VpO>). I'll also suggest *Roman Catholicism* by Loraine Boettner for those who wish to do additional study and who are zealous for the protection of the true gospel recovered during the Reformation.

When it comes to Catholic doctrine, this is the crux of the issue: Catholicism denies *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) and *Sola Fide* (faith alone).

DENIAL OF SOLE SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY

Doctrine

They believe in three streams of spiritual authority.

- Catholic authority is found in the "Deposit of Faith" which includes:
 - *Sacred Scripture* — 73 books total (39 OT books, 7 apocryphal books, 27 NT books)
 - *Sacred Tradition* (Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum*; Council of Trent) — teachings that have been handed down from the time of the Apostles, since apostolic authority flowed to the succeeding bishops (CCC, 78, 80, 881-882). "The Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, 'does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence'" (CCC, 82).
- Furthermore, they believe in papal infallibility—"The Roman Pontiff...enjoys infallibility...when, as supreme pastor and teacher of all faithful...he proclaims by definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith and morals" (Vatican Council I & CCC, 891 & 2051).

Finally, while they encourage Catholics to read the Bible, the church reserves the ability to rightly interpret it for itself, via the Magisterium (Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum*; CCC, 2034 & 2050-2051). "The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church alone" (CCC, 84). Thus, when Scripture doesn't clearly validate their teaching or when it apparently contradicts it, they twist their interpretation of Scripture to fit what they believe or they say that Scripture "implicitly" teaches their doctrine (cf. CCC, 1122).

Response

Sacred tradition

- Isaiah 8:20 — "To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn."
- Matthew 15:2-3 — "'Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat.' He

answered them, ‘And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?’”

- John 17:17 — “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”
- Colossians 2:8 — “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.”
- 2 Timothy 3:14-17 — “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”
- 2 Peter 1:3 — “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.”
- 2 Peter 1:19 — “And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” → Scripture didn't originate from man's imagination or impulse, but is God's revelation from God's Spirit. So, we should follow its teaching as we would follow light in a gloomy place, until it comes to completion.

Apostolic succession

- It is based on a flawed interpretation of Matthew 16 that misses the wordplay between the name “Peter” and “this rock” (and misses the geographical/historical contextual allusions) and concludes that “this rock” is Peter.
- The early Church fathers disagreed, and taught that “this rock” was Peter's confession.
- Christ alone is foundation of the church per 1 Corinthians 3:11, Ephesians 2:20, 1 Peter 2:4-8.

- Peter thought of himself as far less than that according to 1 Peter 5:2—he was just one of the “elders.”
- There is no NT proof for this interpretation.

Papal infallibility

- Galatians 1:6-8 — “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.”
- Galatians 1:11-14 — Paul confronts hypocritical, legalistic Peter (i.e., the first pope) for adding works to faith.
- History records moral corruption, material covetousness, and doctrinal inconsistencies among the popes. Since these same men would agree that “your walk talks and your talk talks, but your walk talks louder than your talk talks,” such moral corruption undermines their verbal infallibility (Mark 7:20-23; Titus 1:15-16).

Priestly interpretation

- John 16:13 — Jesus promised the Holy Spirit's help to the apostles, those who would record much of our New Testament.
- Acts 17:11 — “Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.”
- Ephesians 1:17 — “[I pray] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him.”
- 2 Peter 1:19 — “And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”

DENIAL OF SALVATION BY FAITH ALONE

Doctrine

They ultimately believe that people may be saved by faith plus “good works.”

- *Justification* — Justification means “to cleanse us from our sins and to communicate to us ‘the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ’ and through Baptism” (CCC, 1987). “It conforms us to the righteousness of God, who makes us inwardly just by the power of his mercy” (CCC, 1992). → This sounds good, but how does their theology flesh itself out?
- *Faith* — Faith in Jesus Christ is important, for His “blood has become the instrument of atonement for the sins of all men” (CCC, 1992).
- *Baptism* — Faith is expressed and evidenced in baptism. “Justification is conferred in Baptism, the sacrament of faith” (CCC, 1992; cf. CCC, 1213 & 1253 answers why faith through baptism). “Baptism is necessary for salvation...The Church does not know of any means other than Baptism that assures entry into eternal beatitude” (CCC, 1257).
 - “The Church and the parents would deny a child the priceless grace of becoming a child of God were they not to confer Baptism shortly after birth” (CCC, 1250).
 - What about those who aren’t baptized? → It is as if they acknowledge that something is more important here than baptism, but they aren’t willing to give it up.
 - CCC, 1258 — the unbaptized who are martyred: “[they] are baptized by their death for and with Christ. This Baptism of blood, like the desire for Baptism, brings about the fruits of Baptism without being a sacrament.”
 - CCC, 1259 — those who die during their preparation for baptism: “their explicit desire to receive it, together with repentance for their sins, and charity, assures them the salvation that they were not able to receive through the sacrament.”
 - CCC, 1260 — non-Catholic spiritual seekers: “It may be supposed that such persons would have *desired Baptism explicitly* if they had known its necessity.”
- CCC, 1261 — unbaptized children who die: “the Church can only entrust them to the mercy of God...Indeed, the great mercy of God who desires that all men should be saved, and Jesus’ tenderness toward children which caused him to say: “Let the children come to me, do not hinder them,” allow us to hope that there is a way of salvation for children who have died without Baptism. All the more urgent is the Church’s call not to prevent little children coming to Christ through the gift of holy Baptism.” The Councils of Lyons and Florence and the canons of the Council of Trent declare that unbaptized infants who die are confined to eternal to “limbo” (*Limbus Infantum*).
 - Interestingly the CCC (1214 & 1216) teaches immersion, although they usually practice sprinkling or pouring.
- *Forgiveness* — But, the cleansing and forgiveness of justification only pertains to past sins (i.e., original sin) and eternal punishment (CCC, 1263). Future sins and temporal punishment are dealt with through the sacraments. Therefore, they effectively deny the sufficiency of Christ’s atonement.
- *Sanctification* — So, faith in Christ is merely the gate to salvation, but the path itself is works. In essence, then, Catholicism combines justification and sanctification. “Justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man” (CCC, 1989). “Justification includes the remission of sins, sanctification, and the renewal of the inner man” (CCC, 2019). Essentially, then, justification means “to make righteous.”
 - “Since the initiative belongs to God in the order of grace, *no one can merit the initial grace* of forgiveness and justification, at the beginning of conversion. Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, *we can then merit* for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification, for the increase of grace and charity, and for the attainment of eternal life. Even temporal goods like health and friendship can be merited in accordance with God’s wisdom” (CCC, 2010). But, cf. 1 Corinthians 4:7; Romans 8:32; James 1:17

- “No one can merit the initial grace which is at the origin of conversion. Moved by the Holy Spirit, we can merit for ourselves and for others all the graces needed to attain eternal life, as well as necessary temporal goods” (CCC, 2027).
 - *Sacraments* — The sacraments are the means of sanctification. “Absolution takes away sin, but it does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused. Raised up from sin, the sinner must still recover his full spiritual health by doing something more to make amends for the sin: he must ‘make satisfaction for’ or ‘expiate’ his sins. This satisfaction is also called ‘penance’” (CCC, 1459). NOTE: This is another gospel!
 - Their necessity:
 - “Celebrated worthily in faith, the sacraments confer the grace that they signify” (CCC, 1127).
 - “The Church affirms that for believers the sacraments of the New Covenant are *necessary for salvation*” (CCC, 1129).
 - “The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us” (CCC, 1131).
 - “If any one saith that the sacraments of the New Law are not necessary unto salvation, but superfluous; and that, without them, or without the desire thereof, men obtain of God, through faith alone, the grace of justification...let him be anathema” (Council of Trent, Canons 4, 9, 12, 14).
 - Their order:
 - Initiation (CCC, 1121)
 - Baptism — imparts sanctifying grace and erases original sin
 - Confirmation — the giving of the Holy Spirit at age 12
 - The Holy Eucharist — the re-presentation of Christ (CCC, 1409 & 1413) as an unbloody sacrifice for sin, in which the elements are transubstantiated into His actual body and blood (CCC, 1376)
 - Healing
 - Penance (confession) — provides forgiveness/absolution (confession) and payment (penance) for sins committed after baptism; otherwise, an unconfessed mortal sin (i.e., sin in a “grave matter” “committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent” [CCC, 1857]) “causes exclusion from Christ’s kingdom and the eternal death of hell” (CCC, 1861); absolution/forgiveness can be granted by a human priest—“bishops and priests, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, have the power to forgive all sins ‘in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit’” (CCC, 1461).
 - Anointing of the Sick
 - Service & Mission
 - Holy Orders — ordination for ministry
 - Matrimony
- *Purgatory* — “All who die in God’s grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven” (CCC, 1030). Here, Catholics finish paying sufficiently the temporal punishment for their sins.
 - The basis for this is found in 2 Maccabees 12:39-46 and in what they see to be implied in Matthew 12:31—“He who is truth says that whoever utters blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will be pardoned neither in this age nor in the age to come. From this sentence we understand that certain offenses can be forgiven in this age, but certain others in the age to come” (CCC, 1031).
 - While they are vague as to what the nature of this suffering is, some Catholic theologians teach that this includes real and terrible torment (Boettner, Loraine, *Roman Catholicism*, chapter 10, p. 220).

- In essence, this is the Catholic's hope—that after they die, they will go to a place of suffering to continue to pay for their sin until God deems it satisfactory and they can finally enter heaven. This was so burdensome to Martin Luther that he grew to hate God (cf. his quote in the conclusion). This can hardly be considered “good news.”
- For those in purgatory, their time can be shortened through “almsgiving, indulgences,...works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead,” prayers for them (CCC, 1032), and intercession by the saints.
- In the past, this has also led to the sale of indulgences, which was a money-making machine (cf. Tetzel—“As soon as the gold in the casket rings; the rescued soul to heaven springs.”)!

Response

- Christ's substitutionary sacrifice is sufficient — Jesus cried, “It is finished” or “Paid in full” from the cross (John 19:30)! He had earned perfect righteousness (Matthew 3:15; Hebrews 2:10; 4:15; 5:8; 7:26) and offered Himself as a full payment (Matthew 27:46; 1 Peter 3:18; Hebrews 7:27; 9:27-10:14—“once for all”), which He credits to the account of those who believe (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24)! Romans 8:1 reminds us that “in Christ Jesus” there is “no condemnation,” because according to 1 John 2:2, “He is the propitiation [wrath-absorber] for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.” The true gospel defines justification, then, as “being declared righteous” because we are clothed by faith in the righteousness of God (cf. Romans 3:21-28; 4:5; Galatians 2:16; 3-4). This salvation is eternally secure.
- Therefore, salvation is by grace alone through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5-6) and cannot be earned (Romans 3:20; 4:5; Galatians 2:16). God wants heart-repentance, not penance (Isaiah 55:7).
- Saving faith is publicized in baptism, not expressed that way. Otherwise, baptism as the expression of faith quickly becomes baptism instead of faith (i.e., you just do the ritual, without even mental assent to the supposed faith). Furthermore, water baptism does not initiate us into the church, but the Spirit's baptism (1 Corinthians 12:13).

- Justification does not equal sanctification. In justification, Jesus is our Savior from sin's penalty, and that is a judicial sentence rendered at a point in time and cannot be reversed. In sanctification, Jesus is our Savior from sin's power, for it does still wage war within us. We do still deal with the effects of sin—the earth has been cursed by sin (Romans 8), the image of God in us is still broken but being recreated (2 Corinthians 3:18; 5:17; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10), and our sin nature is still warring against the new man (Romans 7; Galatians 5)—but we are not paying the temporal punishments of sin. One day (at death or the rapture), we will be rescued from sin's presence through our Savior's glorification of us (Romans 8; 1 Corinthians 15).
- There is only one Mediator and one Man whose merits provide a treasure house for us (1 Corinthians 1:30; Colossians 2:3, 9-10; 1 Timothy 2:5-6). There is no “Treasury of Merit.”
- The Lord's Supper is merely a memorial, enjoyed “in remembrance” of Christ and providing us with an opportunity to worship, reflect, confess, and anticipate. Christ's sacrifice was “once for all” (Hebrews 7:27; 9:27-10:14), and it was necessarily bloody (Colossians 1:20; Hebrews 9:22).

OTHER HERETICAL DOCTRINES

Veneration of Mary

- Immaculate Conception (CCC, 966) — Mary was born without sin and remained sinless
- Assumption of Mary (CCC, 966) — Mary never died, but was instead taken bodily into heaven
- Veneration (a form of worship) — “exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things” (CCC, 966); “she is a ‘preeminent and...wholly unique member of the Church’” (CCC, 967)
- Role in salvation — “Mary, Mother of the Church” (CCC, 963); “In a wholly singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope, and burning charity in the Savior's work of restoring supernatural life to souls. For this reason she is a mother to us in the order of grace” (CCC, 968); “She did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation....Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix” (CCC, 969); also called “Redemptrix,” Christ's “associate in the

redemption”; Pope Leo XIII (1891) said, “As no man goeth to the Father but by the Son, so no man goeth to Christ but by His mother.”

- **Response** [also applies to “prayers to the saints”]: John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Colossians 1:15-20; 1 Timothy 2:5

CONCLUSION

Dr. C. D. Cole in a sermon delivered at Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Toronto; Boettner, chapter 12, pp. 257-258—

The basic and fatal error of Romanism is the denial of the sufficiency of Christ as Savior. It denies the efficacy of His sacrifice on the cross. Romanism has a Christ, but He is not sufficient as a Savior. What He did on Calvary must be repeated (in the mass) and supplemented (through works of penance), and this makes priestcraft and sacramentarianism necessary. Romanism is a complicated system of salvation by works. It has salvation to sell, but not on Isaiah’s terms—without money and without price (Isaiah 55:1). It offers salvation on the installment plan, and then sees to it that the poor sinner is always behind in his payments, so that when he dies there is a large balance unpaid, and he must continue payments by suffering in purgatory, or until the debt is paid by prayers, alms, and sufferings from his living relatives and friends. The whole system and plan calls for merit and money, from the cradle to the grave, and even beyond. Surely the wisdom that drew such a plan of salvation is not from above, but is earthly and sensual.

Boettner, chapter 8, p. 190—

In fact, history seems to record that the Catholic Church’s “long range design is to bring all people into subjection to her, to put her stamp of ownership on every person possible.

So, as gospel-stewards, Jesus-followers, commissioned-ambassadors, as light-bearers—

1. **How are we to evaluate the institution of the Catholic Church?**

Galatians 1:6-12 — *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ [i.e., in context, by adding works to faith in Christ]. But even if we or an*

angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man’s gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

- The “gospel” of faith + works is not “good news,” and is an astonishing and inferior alternative to the true “gospel” of grace!
- False gospel messengers are not to be ignored, coddled, or given the benefit of the doubt—they are “accursed.”
- We must be bold in this, ultimately desiring only the approval of God and not the friendship of man.
- The true gospel is God-given, so as its source is divine, so its protection must be prioritized.
- So, our view of the Catholic Church institution should have some holy indignation about it (i.e., are you going to believe the beauty and elegance of Rome or the bluntness and earnestness of Paul?). And, our view of the individuals within it should become more and more gripped by the burden that they might be deceived (cf. Matthew 7:21-23; 13:24-30, 36-43).

2. **How are we to evangelize individual Catholics?**

Some simple suggestions:

- While we could argue that the institution of the Catholic Church is a manmade system of religious manipulation (warned against in Colossians 2:8-10), it is unwise to try to demonstrate this to an individual you are working with. It will come across like you’re attacking something very dear to him/her. So, deal with him/her directly as an individual, leaving aside the problems of the institution.
- Help them see where Catholic tradition contradicts clear teaching from Scripture. This is especially obvious in

Romans and Galatians in regards to the one true gospel, and it was this contradiction that was so instrumental in Martin Luther's conversion. You can even use their Catholic Bible to do this.

- Ask them questions about their understanding of Catholic theology and how it affects their view of their own salvation. This is meant to help them see just how dependent upon works they are for their justification, payment of sin's punishment, and eternal life. Contrast that with passages of Scripture that highlight the riches of the sufficiency of Christ's atonement (i.e., "It is finished"/"Paid in full" vs. purgatory).

Many are the modern day Martin Luthers living among us—they are laboring under the burden of earning God's favor.

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, "As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!" Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted.

At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'" There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a

totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me.
(<http://bit.ly/1yt5q71>)

To these modern-day restless religious ritualists, simply share the gospel of salvation by grace alone (*Sola Gratia*) through faith alone (*Sola Fide*) in Christ alone (*Solus Christus*), and pray that the testimony of Martin Luther will become theirs through Scripture alone (*Sola Scriptura*) to the glory of God alone (*Soli Deo Gloria*).