

Roman Catholic Theology

- I. Introductory Terms
 - A. Council of Trent (1545-63): Council of the Counter-Reformation that definitely stated Catholic teaching in clearly anti-Protestant terms.
 - B. Vatican I Council (1869-70)
 - 1. Convened and led by Pope Pius IX
 - 2. Defined the pope's authority to speak infallibly in matters of doctrine
 - C. Vatican II Council (1962-65)
 - 1. Called by Pope John XXIII
 - 2. Brought a sense of "openness" to the RCC (e.g., encouraging Bible study, friendly gestures to non-Catholics, dropping Latin)
 - 3. However, no *doctrinal* change
 - D. "The Profession of Faith of the Roman Catholic Church"
 - 1. This creed was drafted originally at the time of the Council of Trent—hence the name of Pope Paul IV.
 - 2. It was revised after Vatican I—hence the name of Pope Pius IX.
 - 3. Although old, this creed is still considered an authoritative summary of Catholic teaching.
- II. The Nicene Creed (Article 1)
 - A. History
 - 1. Much older than the Tridentine confession from Trent
 - 2. Originally composed at the Council of Nicea (325) and Council of Constantinople (381) in response to the Arian heresy
 - B. Significance
 - 1. Basically an orthodox summary of Christian truth
 - 2. Shows that Catholicism is orthodox on many points of teaching
- III. On Tradition and Scripture (Articles 2 and 3)
 - A. Catholic Oral Tradition: "apostolic and ecclesiastical traditions"
 - 1. Catholics say that Christ gave the apostles a body of teaching in addition to that set down in Scripture. The church is the alleged custodian of this Tradition.
 - 2. It is Scripture *and* Tradition in RC theology.
 - 3. Not mentioned in creed: "Deuterocanonical books," additional books in the canon officially endorsed during the Counter Reformation, Jewish works called the Apocrypha by Protestants
 - B. Right of interpretation belongs to the church only. The *Magisterium*, or teaching authority, means that the church alone has the right to interpret what the Bible teaches and demand submission to its interpretation.
 - 1. "According to that sense which our Holy Mother Church has held and holds": defined through councils or, more recently, papal pronouncements (e.g., Assumption of Mary)
 - 2. "To whom it belongs to decide upon the true sense and interpretation of the holy Scriptures": the right of regulating teaching
 - 3. "The unanimous consent of the Fathers"
 - a. The RCC does not argue that the Fathers are infallible. Rather, it says that one may find church tradition in the writings of the Fathers. It provides another resource for supporting and a guide to Oral Tradition.
 - b. Peter Abelard's *Sic et Non*, however, which quoted the Fathers on both sides of many issues, demonstrated just how "un-unanimous" that agreement often is.

IV. On the Sacraments (Article 4)

A. Definition

1. Sacrament = “A visible sign of an invisible grace” (Augustine) Even this definition can be expressed differently:
 - a. Always conveying grace (RCC)
 - b. Conveying grace through faith (some Protestants)
 - c. Memorializing grace
2. They are “necessary for . . . salvation” but not all are necessary “for every one” (i.e., everyone does not receive all seven). These sacraments *convey the grace* necessary for holy living and ultimately salvation.
3. To be performed according to the “received and approved ceremonies of the Catholic Church”—otherwise they are not sacraments
 - a. Three—baptism, confirmation, and holy orders “cannot be repeated without sacrilege.”
 - b. Two—holy orders and matrimony—are generally exclusive.

B. The Seven Sacraments

1. Baptism
 - a. Equated with regeneration by the Holy Spirit, baptism—or at least the *desire* for it—is necessary for salvation.
 - b. It washes away the taint of original sin and any sins committed before baptism.
2. Confirmation
 - a. Given to a communicant when he comes of age, it is usually performed by a bishop who anoints the subject with oil and lays hands on him.
 - b. Supposed to strengthen the believer by conveying the grace needed to lead a Christian life. It marks full membership into the church and traditionally has come shortly after the person has made his first confession and received his first Eucharist.
3. Eucharist
 - a. The name actually comes from word for “giving thanks” or “thanksgiving.”
 - b. Celebrated as part of the Mass & discussed more fully under Article 6: “On the Mass.”
4. Penance
 - a. The sacrament of penance is the result of mistranslation and evolution.
 - 1) The Gk. word for repentance (*metanoia*) stresses a change of mind resulting in a change in behavior. Jerome’s Latin Vulgate, however, used “do penance,” stressing the change in behavior.
 - 2) Penance developed after times of persecution as a means to restore “the lapsed” who had denied their faith and had to go through a process of readmission to the church.
 - b. Confession to a priest is part of this sacrament. Every Catholic (since the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215) must make oral confession to a priest at least once a year. The priest prescribes a course of penance & pronounces absolution from the eternal penalty of the sin.
5. Extreme Unction
 - a. Also called “last rites” and—more recently—“anointing of the sick” or “commendation of the dying”
 - b. Supposedly based on James 5:14, it involves hearing the confession of someone expected to die and anointing him with oil; can also involve the Eucharist.
 - c. Formerly it was not usual to repeat it, though it could be. It is more common today to offer it multiple times.

6. Holy Orders
 - a. Ordination to the priesthood
 - b. Limited to the unmarried, although widowers may be ordained; only men may be ordained as priests. Those who are already married and priests in recognized churches (e.g. Orthodox, Episcopal) may convert and be married priests.
7. Matrimony: Marriage is a *sacrament* to Catholics

V. On Original Sin and Justification (Article 5)

A. Reference to Trent

1. The creed here merely affirms belief in “all and every one of the definitions and declarations of the sacred Council of Trent on original sin and justification.”
2. We will study the selections from the Canons and Decrees of that council that follow the creed (pp. 3-4).
3. Note that we quote only sections that demonstrate the difference between Catholicism and Protestantism. Protestants would agree with some of the decisions of the Council of Trent (e.g., against Pelagianism).

B. Original Sin

1. Range of Views
 - a. Pelagianism: No original sin—all men have the ability to keep God’s commands.
 - b. Semi-Pelagianism: All men have the ability to turn *initially* to God but that his salvation is completed with the help of God’s grace.
 - c. Semi-Augustinianism: The initial turning to God is the result of God’s grace but that after that initial turning, the individual actively cooperates with God’s grace in salvation. This is the Catholic view in theory.
 - d. Augustinianism: Salvation is entirely of God’s grace with no contribution of man.
2. Free will “is by no means extinguished” in fallen sinners (6th Session, Chap. 1). Although Catholics supposedly teach the initial grace must come from God, they still seem to assert that remnants of free will still exist in fallen man (although see Chap. 5).

C. Justification (*italics added in quotations*)

1. Justification by faith *and* works
 - a. Faith is *necessary*, for Catholics, but it is not sufficient for justification by itself.
 - b. Catholics view justification as the result of conversion, which is partly the result of one’s own actions: “to *convert themselves to their own justification*, by *freely assenting to and co-operating with* that said grace” (6th Session, Chap. 5).
 - c. Catholics say works increase one’s justification: “They, through the observance of the commandments of God and of the Church, *faith co-operating with good works*, increase in *the justice* which they have received through the grace of Christ, are *still further justified*” (6th Session, Chap. 10).
 - d. Catholics say works are the means by which justification “is . . . *preserved* and also *increased* before God” and that works are not “merely the fruits and signs of Justification” (6th Session, Canon 24).
 - e. The RCC attacks the idea that through justification “the debt of eternal punishment is blotted out in such wise that there *remains not any debt of temporal punishment to be discharged* either in this world, or in the next in Purgatory” (6th Session, Canon 30).
2. Infused righteousness
 - a. Importance of concept: Man is not *declared* righteous in justification, as Protestants argue; he is actually *made more righteous*. Catholics confuse justification w/ sanctification.

- b. Application
 - 1) The RCC expressly mixes justification w/ sanctification: “not remission of sins merely, *but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man*” (6th Session, Chap. 7).
 - 2) The RCC sees Christians as possessing righteousness rather than being wholly justified by Christ’s righteousness: “we are justified from its [justice’s] *being inherent in us*”; it is “*infused into us*” (6th Session, Chap. 16)
 - 3) The RCC sees justification as a result of our merits: “good works” = “good merits”; “good works,” the church argues, “truly merit increase of grace” (6th Session, Canon 32).

VI. On the Mass (Articles 6 and 7)

A. Definitions

1. *Mass*: The service in which the Eucharist is celebrated; term usually used in RC services, although some liturgical Protestant churches (e.g., some Episcopalians) use the term
2. *Transubstantiation*: belief that “truly, really, and substantially the body and the blood, together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ” are present in the sacrament.
 - a. Unlike any Protestant group, they teach that “the whole substance” of the bread and wine *become* the body and blood of Christ and remain so, although the “accidents” (taste, appearance) remain the same.
 - b. This change takes place when the priest elevates the “host” (the bread) during the Mass.
 - c. Since the host is actually, substantially Christ, it is to be worshipped just as Christ Himself is worshipped and must be carefully preserved if any is left over.
3. *Separate Species*: “a true sacrament is taken under the one species alone.”
 - a. Although Catholics hold that the bread is actually the body and the cup is actually the blood, they traditionally allowed laymen to partake only of the bread to safeguard against accidental spilling of “Christ’s blood.”
 - b. But, they say, the whole sacrament may be received in just the bread with the priest partaking of the cup for everyone.
 - c. Today (post–Vatican II) the laity often take the cup

B. Catholics believe the Mass is “a true, proper, and propitiatory sacrifice.”

1. Catholics say that the Mass is a reoffering of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross.
 - a. They argue that in the words “this do in remembrance of me” (I Cor. 11:25) that Christ ordained the apostles and their successors as priests to offer His body and blood; the Council of Trent specifically condemns anyone who does not believe this interpretation (Session 22, Canon 2).
 - b. They also argue from the fact that Christ is “a priest *for ever* after the order of Melchisedec” (Heb. 5:6) and therefore constantly re-offers His sacrifice.
 - c. This teaching is tied to RC idea of a special priesthood.
2. Catholics, as mentioned before, say the sacrifice of the Mass is not a different sacrifice from that of Calvary but a reoffering of the same one.

VII. On Purgatory (Article 8)

A. Rationale for Purgatory

1. Purgatory is where people go after death who are in a state of grace (but not saints) to be purified before entering heaven.
2. Here, they pay for unconfessed venial sins or for the temporal punishment for forgiven mortal sins. This price is any which was not paid on earth through confession and penance.
 - a. Mortal sin is any sin that if one commits and does not confess before death leads to hell.
 - b. Venial sin: Sin that if not confessed before death does not damn one to hell

- c. Christ's death is the basis of satisfaction for the *eternal* punishment, but confession, penance, and purgatory are the basis of satisfaction for *temporal* punishment.

B. Catholic Arguments

1. II Maccabees 12—When Jewish leader Judas Maccabeus discovered that some fallen Jewish soldiers were carrying idols, he and the other Jews “betook themselves unto prayer, and besought him [God] that the sin committed might wholly be put out of remembrance” (v. 42). The author of the book goes on to say that if Judas had not believed in the resurrection of dead, “it had been superfluous and vain to pray for the dead” (v. 44) and that “he made a reconciliation for the dead, that they might be delivered from sin” (v. 45)
2. Catholics also claim to see purgatory in Paul's description of one “saved; yet so as by fire” (I Cor. 3:15) and in Christ's granting of the binding and loosing authority of the keys (Matt. 16:19), but the main authority is really church tradition.
3. Catholics further believe “that the souls therein detained there are helped by the intercessions of the faithful.” By prayers, saying of Masses, buying indulgences, Catholics believe they can shorten the stay of those in purgatory.

VIII. On the Saints (Article 8)

A. Definition of a “Saint”

1. To Catholics, a saint is someone who has done enough meritorious works so that he or she can go directly to heaven without a stay in purgatory.
2. Saints are recognized (not actually “made”) by the church by a process called *canonization*. This involves formal investigation by a Vatican department and the declaration of the pope.

B. Veneration of Saints: “The saints” and Mary too “should be honored and invoked.”

1. Honoring Saints

- a. Catholics agree that only God should receive “worship” (*latreia*), as clearly taught in Scripture (Exod. 20:2-6; Matt. 4:10).
- b. They argue that saints should receive “veneration” (*douleia*), a kind of high honor.
- c. Mary should receive “superveneration” (*huperdouleia*).

2. Invoking Saints

- a. Catholics say that one may pray to saints and Mary to ask them to intercede on one's behalf with the Father.
- b. This work of the saints & Mary is considered a “delegation” of Christ's sole mediation taught in Scripture (I Tim. 2:5).

C. Relics of Saints: “Their relics are to be venerated.”

1. Relics are “physical remains and effects of saints” (*Catholic Almanac*), either something closely personal (an actual piece of the saint or something connected with his death) or just something associated with him.
2. Every altar in a Catholic church must contain a relic of some saint. Venerating relics earns one merit and years out of purgatory.

IX. On Images (Article 9)

A. Terms

1. Image: a representation of the saints—statues, paintings; the crucifix is a common “image”
2. Icon: painted images used in the Orthodox Churches
3. Reliquary: object made for preserving and displaying a relic
4. “Due honor and veneration”—Catholics again argue that no one should “worship” images but simply “venerate” them. Furthermore, one does not actually venerate the image but rather

the person for whom it stands. The “venerator” should focus his mind on the reality represented by the image.

B. Position of Mary in the RCC

1. Introduction

- a. Since this article contains a reference to “the ever-Virgin Mother of God,” it is a good place to discuss the place of Mary in Catholicism.
- b. Mariology: Teachings concerning Mary (“Mariolatry” to Protestants)

2. “Ever Virgin” (used in the creed)

- a. The RCC believes that Mary remained a virgin the rest of her life; this belief is of enormous symbolic importance to the RC teaching of the holiness of celibacy. Refs. to Christ’s “brethren” (e.g., Matt. 12:56) they say are cousins or Joseph’s children by a previous marriage.
- b. An indifferent issue to Protestants, Luther, Calvin, and Wesley even thought it true. Mary’s status as “ever virgin” is important only if one accepts the RCC position on the holiness of celibacy and as a basis for the exaltation of Mary. If one rejects RC teaching, this point is of little importance.

3. “Immaculate Conception”

- a. Teaching that Mary was born without taint of original sin.
- b. Pope Pius IX made this teaching a dogma of the RCC in 1854.
- c. “Proof Texts”
 - 1) ”Thou art fair, my love; there is no spot in thee” (Song of Sol. 4:7); “my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled” (5:2; see also 6:9).
 - 2) Classic Text: Ezek. 44:2 (Douai Version)—”The Lord said unto me, this gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened and no man shall pass through it, because the Lord God hath entered into it, and it shall be shut for the prince.”
- d. The fact that Mary called Christ “my Saviour” (Luke 1:47) means only that His sacrifice preserved her from original sin, according to Catholics.

4. “Assumption of Mary”

- a. This is the belief that at the end of her life, Mary was bodily assumed into heaven; she assumed the union of spirit and body that all believers will share at the Second Coming.
- b. The Assumption of Mary was declared a dogma of the church by Pope Pius XII in 1950. It leaves open the question of her death.
- c. Because she is sinless (and also holds a place above every other creature), the idea is that she could not undergo physical corruption.

5. “Mother of God” (used in creed)

- a. This term has been of particular importance since the fifth century. As originally used, it meant only that Christ was fully God, but it lent itself to Mariolatry.
- b. Mary was the mother of Christ, who is “very God of very God.” However, in performing that role, Mary did not earn a special place that makes her an object of veneration. She was “blessed . . . among women” because she had received a special gift. Rather than being a source of grace (“Hail Mary, full of grace . . .”), she was the *recipient* of grace.

X. On Indulgences (Article 9)

A. Indulgence: the remission of the temporal penalty for sin granted under certain prescribed conditions by the church

1. The idea is connected with penance and the performance of works to pay the temporal (non-eternal) penalty of sin.

2. An indulgence may be *partial* (in which the church provides a remission equal to that the penitent earns) or *plenary* (doing away with all of temporal punishment for sin).
3. Since indulgences may be granted to those who do good works by giving money to the church, this practice became—to common people—“buying indulgences.” Such a practice is contrary to RC doctrine. But some popes and other leaders were sadly willing to use the misperception in order to raise funds.

B. Idea of “treasury of merits” or “treasury of the church”

1. The source of the merits dispensed is the “treasury of merits,” or “treasury of the church.”
2. The merits in this treasury are the “superfluous” good works performed by the saints, above what they needed to get to heaven.
3. In addition, the treasury contains the infinite merits of Christ, since He needed to perform no good works and therefore has “extra” works in abundance.

XI. On the Supremacy and Authority of the Church and the Pope (Articles 10-11)

A. Supremacy of the RCC

1. “Holy Catholic Apostolic”: terms applied to the visible church, the RCC
 - a. “Holy” is a characteristic of the true, invisible church—“a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:27). Such could be true of the RCC only spiritually, which is to grant the Protestant argument.
 - b. “Catholic” means simply “universal.” It is not, however, legitimately applied to a visible body. The true catholic church is Christ’s body (Eph. 1:22-23) and is a spiritual body, “a spiritual house” (I Pet. 2:5; see also II Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:19-22).
 - c. “Apostolic” Catholics say refers to apostolic succession, the authority handed down through the bishops.
 - 1) We argue that the church is apostolic in that it was “built upon the foundation of the apostles” (Eph. 2:20) and their teachings. A church is “apostolic” only if it adheres to the apostles’ doctrine.
 - 2) Paul argued (Gal. 1:8-9) that the standard of teaching was not the person of the messenger but the content of the message. (Note also II Cor. 11:13 and the church at Ephesus in Rev. 2:2.)
2. The church’s teachings are those “delivered, defined, and declared by the Sacred Canons and Ecumenical Councils,” especially Trent and Vatican I.
 - a. Catholics recognize 21 ecumenical councils, whose decisions are binding. They start with Nicea I (325) and run up to Vatican II (1962-65).
 - 1) Trent is stressed because it is the fullest statement of RC teaching, esp. in opposition to Protestantism.
 - 2) The reference to Vatican I (“the ecumenical Vatican Council”) was added to stress papal infallibility.
 - b. The “canons” are Canon Law, the law code of the church. The revision of 1983 organized these into 1,752 canons (rules or statutes).
3. “Mother and mistress of all churches”
 - a. “Mother of churches”: All other churches derive their efficacy from the RCC
 - b. Only the RCC has infallible teaching authority to declare what is and is not the truth.
 - 1) In the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20), Christ, of His authority (“power”) supposedly bestowed teaching authority on the apostles and their successors when He said “teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” Today, the body of bishops under the pope is the custodian of truth.

- 2) When Jesus promises the disciples “the Spirit of truth” who “will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13), He likewise confers teaching authority as the spokesmen for the Holy Spirit.
- 3) Catholics obviously must read these views into the Scripture. The Great Commission, e.g., is not limited to the apostles, and John 16:13 can actually be interpreted as teaching that believers look to the Holy Spirit (and His written word) instead of a Magisterium. Noting the RC use of Scripture in such passages, McCarthy notes, “What the Church *believes* and *practices* determines what the Scriptures *teach* or *mean*.”

B. Supremacy of the Pope

1. Titles
 - a. “Bishop of Rome”
 - b. “Roman pontiff”: from the Roman word for priest
 - c. “Vicar of Jesus Christ”
 - 1) States that the pope is the representative of, or substitute for, Christ on earth (as in vicarious, or substitutionary atonement). He is the church’s *visible head*.
 - 2) This title contributes to the traditional Protestant tendency to call the popes (or papacy) the “antichrist.”
 - d. “The successor of Blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles”
2. “Primacy of the Roman pontiff” is based on the supposed primacy of Peter and succession from him. The pope, as Christ’s vicar, is the leader of the church.
 - a. Matthew 16:13-19 is a key passage. Note the following—
 - 1) It is by no means certain that Peter is “the rock.”
 - 2) If he is the rock, it is by no means clear that this designation means he was the first pope.
 - 3) If one allows (for argument) that Peter was made the earthly head of the church by Christ, there is no scriptural (and therefore binding) evidence that the line of popes are his successors.
 - b. RCC claims John 21:15-19 upholds Peter’s position by his 3-fold confession of love for Christ and Christ’s 3-fold commission to tend His sheep.
3. “His infallible teaching authority”
 - a. Nature of Papal Infallibility
 - 1) When the pope speaks *ex cathedra* (“from the chair” i.e., of Peter), he is protected from error.
 - a) Infallibility extends only to religious questions.
 - b) Infallibility is freedom from error, not omniscience.
 - 2) Declared by Vatican I Council in 1871, the only Scripture proof quoted by the decree was Luke 22:32, probably the main “proof text” of papal infallibility—“I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.”
 - b. Historical arguments against infallibility
 - 1) Errors of Peter, esp. Paul’s rebuke of him for holding aloof from Gentile believers and not walking “uprightly according to the truth of the gospel” (Gal. 2:11-16).
 - 2) Moral Failings: “papal pornocracy” (10th cent.) & Renaissance papacy (15th cent.)
 - 3) Doctrinal Errors
 - a) Pope Zosimus pronounced Pelagius orthodox, violating a conciliar decision
 - b) Honorius I (625-38) was condemned for the heresy of monothelitism by the Council of Constantinople III in 681

- 4) Historical arguments are useful but not clinching; only scriptural arguments have real weight.

XII. Roman Catholicism and Other Faiths

A. Background

1. The creed affirms adherence to the “true Catholic faith, without which no one can be saved.”
2. The creed refers to “all heresies which the Church has condemned, rejected and anathematized.” This is a point that many would argue has changed since Vatican II in the 1960s. How true is the suggestion that Catholics have changed?

B. Impact of Vatican II

1. Catholics adopted a kinder tone (e.g., “separated brethren”)
2. The non-Catholic churches are nonetheless imperfect because they are separated from Rome
3. Basic to unity are “proper” baptism, real presence in the Eucharist, and apostolic succession
4. Does allow Catholics to participate in ecumenical discussions

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