

Roman Catholicism: A Biblical Analysis

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There are two types of religion in the world today: religions of the *imagination* (what men and demons have made up) and the religion of *revelation* (what God by His grace has given to man in the Bible). The purpose of this booklet is to examine some important Roman Catholic doctrines in the light of the Bible and determine if these doctrines are in harmony with, or contrary to, the clear teaching of God's Word. Because the Roman Catholic Church believes (as does the author) that the Bible is the inspired, infallible Word of God, all good Roman Catholics should study the Bible for themselves and abide by its teachings.¹ As Pope Pius XII stated, "To ignore the Scripture is to ignore Christ."²

Authority

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the Bible *and* tradition as interpreted by the Church are the final seat of authority in religion.³ Jesus condemned tradition as a rule for religious authority and exalted the Word of God: "The Pharisees and Scribes asked him, 'Why do not thy disciples walk according to the tradition of the ancients...?' But answering he said to them, '...in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrine the precepts of men. For letting go the commandment of God, you hold fast the tradition of men.... Well do you nullify the commandment of God, that you may keep your own tradition.... You make void the commandment of God by your tradition'" (Mk. 7:5-13 DB).

The Bible clearly condemns adding doctrine to what God has given in His Word: "You must add *nothing* to what I command you, and take nothing from it, but keep the commandments of Yahweh your God just as I lay them down to you" (Dt. 4:2 JB).

Using non-Christian systems of philosophy to formulate Christian doctrine (e.g., Thomas Aquinas) is also clearly condemned by the Bible: "Beware lest any man cheat you by philosophy, and vain deceit; according to the tradition of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ" (Col. 2:8 DB). The Bible teaches that we do not need extra-biblical tradition, for the Bible is all we need; it alone can make a Christian "fully competent." "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching—for reproof, correction, and training in holiness, so that the man of God may be *fully competent* and equipped for *every* good work"

¹ Bibles quoted in this booklet: **DB**—Douay Bible (1914). The Old Testament is the Douay version, the New Testament is the Confraternity edition; the complete Bible is commonly called the Douay Bible or Douay Version. Officially approved by the Roman Catholic Church. **JB**—Jerusalem Bible (1966). In common use among Roman Catholics. **NAB**—New American Bible, New Testament (1970). Officially approved by the Roman Catholic Church. **RSV**—Revised Standard Version (1952, 1971). An altered version has been approved for lay use.

² St. Jerome as quoted in Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (New American Bible).

³ Roman Catholic teaching on authority can be seen in the following documents. The Council of Trent (4th sess., 1546) stated, "Seeing clearly that this truth and discipline are contained in the written books, and the *unwritten traditions*." Cf. The Dogmatic Decrees of the Vatican Council (3rd sess., 1870), chap. 2, par. 3; the Creed of Pope Pius IV.

(2 Tim. 3:16-17 NAB). History has shown that tradition is unreliable as a guide for doctrine, as Loraine Boettner ably pointed out:

Furthermore, that the body of tradition is not of divine origin nor apostolic is proven by the fact that some traditions contradict others. The church fathers repeatedly contradict one another. When a Roman Catholic priest is ordained he solemnly vows to interpret the Scriptures only according to “the unanimous consent of the fathers.” But such “unanimous consent” is purely a myth. The fact is they scarcely agree on any doctrine. They contradict each other, and even contradict themselves as they change their minds and affirm what they previously had denied. Augustine, the greatest of the fathers, in his later life wrote a special book in which he set forth his *Retractions*. Some of the fathers of the second century held that Christ would return shortly and that he would personally reign in Jerusalem for a thousand years. But two of the best known scholars of the early church, Origen (185-254) and Augustine (354-430) wrote against that view. The early fathers condemned the use of images in worship, while later ones approve such use. The early church almost unanimously advocated the reading and free use of the Scriptures, while later ones restricted such reading and use. Gregory the Great, bishop of Rome and the greatest of the early bishops, denounced the assumption of the title of Universal Bishop as anti-Christian. But later Popes even to the present have been very insistent of using that and similar titles which assert universal authority. Where, then, is the universal tradition and unanimous consent of the fathers to papal doctrine?⁴

The Bible emphatically condemns the use of tradition as a source of authority because whenever tradition is set up alongside of Scripture, it eventually is placed above Scripture, and is then used to interpret Scripture. This is exactly what happened with Judaism in the days of Christ, and unfortunately what happened in the Roman Catholic Church: tradition and ritual became so important that it became necessary to keep the Bible away from the people. In fact, for centuries it was a mortal sin to possess and read the Bible in one’s own native tongue. The council of Valencia (1229), the Council of Trent (1545) and Pope Clement XI (1713) all condemned letting people have the Bible in their own language and reading it for themselves. Priests are quick to point out that Pope Leo XIII (1893) did urge people to read the Bible. But the Bible he referred to was the Latin Vulgate which virtually no one but priests could understand! Fortunately, in the twentieth century the “unchanging church” has once again changed her mind and allowed the laity to have the Bible in their own language. But Roman Catholics are only allowed to read church-approved Bibles which have explanations of “difficult” texts underneath each page by an authorized theologian.

So, for a thousand years, from the early sixth century to the sixteenth century, while the Roman Church held sway, the Bible remained a closed book. The Roman Church, instead of being a kingdom of light, became a kingdom of darkness, promoting ignorance and superstition and holding the people in bondage. Rome’s traditional policy of seeking to limit the circulation of the Bible and of anathematizing or destroying all copies that are not annotated with her distinctive doctrines shows that she is really afraid of it. *She is opposed to it because it is opposed to her.* The plain fact is that she cannot hold her people when they become spiritually enlightened and discover that her distinctive doctrines are merely man made inventions.⁵

⁴ Loraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), pp. 78-79.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 100-101, emphasis added.

Images in Worship

Here is the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, decreed by the Council of Trent: “The images of Christ and the Virgin Mother of God, and of the other saints, are to be had and to be kept, especially in Churches, and due honor and veneration are to be given them.”⁶ God gave clear instructions for worship: bowing or kneeling to a graven image and making a graven image for worship are forbidden: “You shall *not* make yourself a carved image or any likeness of *anything* in heaven or on earth beneath or in the water under the earth; you shall *not* bow down to them or serve them” (Ex. 20: 4-5 JB).⁷ Roman Catholics kneel before the pope and kiss his ring and kneel before the statue of St. Peter in Rome and kiss his big toe, yet the Apostle Peter forbade such conduct: “As Peter entered, Cornelius went to meet him, dropped to his knees before him and bowed low. Peter said as he helped him to his feet, ‘Get up! I am only a man myself’” (Ac. 10:25-26 NAB). As Peter refused Cornelius’ bowing, a mighty angel in heaven also refused St. John’s worship: “I fell at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, ‘No, get up! I am merely a fellow servant with you and your brother who gives witness to Jesus. *Worship God alone*’” (Rev. 19:10 NAB). Thus the Bible emphatically teaches that we can bow only before God. Roman Catholic priests, theologians and scholars insist that saints, Mary, statues and relics are not worshipped; they substitute words such as honor, veneration, and adoration for the word worship. Yet as Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones has pointed out, this clever semantic sleight of hand completely breaks down in everyday church practice:

Now there is nothing that is so condemned in Scripture as idolatry. We are not to make “graven images.” But the Roman Catholic Church is full of images. She teaches her people to worship images: they worship statues and forms and representations. If you have been to any of these great cathedrals you will have seen people doing so. Go to St. Peter’s in Rome and you will notice that there is a sort of monument to the apostle Peter, and if you look at one of the toes you will find that it is smooth and worn away. Why? Because so many poor victims of Roman Catholic teaching have been there kissing the toe! They bow with reverence and they worship images, statues, and relics. They claim to have relics of certain saints, a bit of bone, something he used, and it is put in a special place and they worship it and bow down before it. This is nothing but sheer idolatry.⁸

Pope Gregory III (elected 731) condemned the use of images in worship. Pope Constantine V (elected 740), who ruled the church for nearly sixty years, condemned the use of images of Christ as heretical because only Christ’s human nature could be depicted. A church council which met near Chalcedon on February 10, 753 (and lasted seven months), condemned the use of images in worship as being “idolatrous and heretical, a temptation to the faith that originated with the devil.”⁹ That council had 338 bishops in attendance, making it one of the largest councils held up to that time. So much for the idea of papal infallibility and the unchanging church! The Bible is clear: idolatry is false worship.

⁶ *Council of Trent*, 25th sess. (1563).

⁷ In the Hebrew “You shall not bow down” is a negative *hithpaal* imperfect; it carries the force of a causative/indirect reflexive. Thus, bowing down to a statue “as an aid to worship” causes one to worship and to serve. Attempts to separate bowing down from actual worship violate the clear teaching of the Hebrew text.

⁸ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Roman Catholicism* (London: Evangelical Press), p. 6.

⁹ Philip E. Hughes, *The Church in Crisis: A History of the General Councils, 325-1870*, (Garden City, N.J.: Image, 1964), p. 167.

Mary

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that Mary was born without original sin (this doctrine is referred to as the Immaculate Conception).¹⁰ Is this biblical? The Bible teaches that only Jesus Christ, the second Adam, was born without original sin (see Rom. 5:18, Heb. 4:15); *all* others have original sin: “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world and with sin death, death thus coming to *all men* inasmuch as all sinned” (Rom. 5:12 NAB). “Death came through one man...*all men* die in Adam” (1 Cor. 15:21-22 JB).

The Roman Catholic Church also teaches that Mary never committed actual sin.¹¹ Is this true? The Apostle John says that anyone who claims to be without sin is a liar: “If we say we have no sin in us, we are deceiving ourselves and refusing to admit the truth” (1 Jn. 1:8 JB). The Apostle Paul says emphatically that *all* people are sinners: “Jew and Greek are all under sin’s dominion. As Scripture says: ‘There is not a good man left, no not one’” (Rom. 3:9-10 JB). Mary herself admitted her need of a Savior: “And Mary said, ‘My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit exults in God *my savior*’” (Lk. 1:46-47 JB). A person without sin does not need to be saved from her sins!

Furthermore, the Roman Catholic Church teaches that Mary was a virgin perpetually (that is, her entire life). Yet St. Matthew, a Jew writing to Jews, calls Jesus her *firstborn son*, an expression used by Jews if other children were born after the first one; otherwise, “only son” would have been used: “And he knew her not till she brought forth her *first born son*” (Mt. 1:25 DB). Matthew wrote his gospel at least 35 years after the birth of Christ and evidently knew that Mary had children after Jesus was born. The Bible specifically says that Jesus had brothers; St. Matthew even tells us their names: “Isn’t Mary known to be his mother, and James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas *his brothers*? Aren’t *his sisters* our neighbors?” (Mt. 13:55-56 NAB). “All these joined in continuous prayer, together with several women including Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with *his brothers*” (Ac. 1:14 JB). Roman Catholic scholars claim that Matthew, Luke and Paul (1 Cor. 9:5) didn’t mean brother when they said brother, but meant cousin. This view, however, has no basis in Scripture at all. The Greek word *adelphos* is always translated “brother” and never “cousin.” The Jews compared the miracle-working Jesus to His ordinary brothers in an attempt to question the validity of His ministry; it would have been absurd to compare Jesus with His cousins.¹²

In order to understand the extent that Roman Catholic teaching concerning Mary has departed from the Scriptures, Dr. Joseph Zacchello has placed Roman Catholic teaching on Mary in one column and the Word of God in another column. The Roman Catholic teaching is from *The Glories of Mary* by Bishop Alphonse de Ligouri (Brooklyn: Redemptorist Fathers, 1931). The Bible quotations are from the Douay Bible.

¹⁰ The doctrine of the immaculate conception of Mary was set forth in a decree by Pope Pius IX on Dec. 8, 1854.

¹¹ “The Catholic Church, an infallible interpreter of Holy Scripture, declares that she kept sinless her life long by a special favor of God” (Bertrand L. Conway, *The Question-Box Answers* [New York: Paulist, 1903], p. 377; cf. Council of Trent, 4th sess., can. 23).

¹² The Bible teaches clearly that celibacy and marriage are not to be combined. For Mary to remain a virgin her whole life, after the birth of Christ, she would have to disobey Scripture, which a godly woman like Mary would have refused to do. “The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife her husband. For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does. Do not refuse each other except perhaps for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, lest Satan tempt you through lack of self control” (1 Cor. 7:3-5 RSV).

Mary is given the place belonging to Christ

Roman Catholic Church:

“And she is truly a mediatrix of peace between sinners and God. Sinners receive pardon by...Mary alone” (pp. 82-83). “Mary is our life... Mary in obtaining this grace for sinners by her intercession, thus restores them to life” (p. 80). “He fails and is *lost* who has not recourse to Mary” (p. 94).

The Word of God:

“For there is one God, and *one* Mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). “Jesus saith to him: I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the Father, but by me” (Jn. 14:6). “Christ...is our life” (Col. 4:4).

Mary is glorified more than Christ

Roman Catholic Church:

“The Holy Church commands a *worship* peculiar to Mary (p. 130). Many things...are asked from God, and are not granted; they are asked from Mary, and are obtained, for She...is even Queen of Hell, and Sovereign Mistress of the Devils” (pp. 127, 141, 143).

The Word of God:

“In the Name of Jesus Christ...For there is no other name under Heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved” (Ac. 3:6, 4:12). “His Name is above every name...not only in this world, but also in the world which is to come” (Eph. 1:21).

Mary is the gate to heaven instead of Christ

Roman Catholic Church:

“Mary is called...the gate of heaven because no one can enter that blessed kingdom without passing through *her* (p. 160). The way of salvation is open to none otherwise than through Mary, and since our salvation is in the hands of Mary...he who is protected by Mary will be saved, he who is not will be lost” (pp. 169-170).

The Word of God:

“I am the door. By me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved” (Jn. 10:1). “Jesus saith to him, ‘I am the way...no man cometh to the Father but by me’” (Jn. 14:6). “Neither is there salvation in any other [than in Jesus Christ]” (Ac. 4:12).

Mary is given the power of Christ

Roman Catholic Church:

“All power is given to thee in Heaven and on earth, so that at the command of Mary all obey—*even God*...and thus...God has placed the whole Church...under the dominion of Mary” (pp. 180-181). “Mary is also the Advocate of the whole human race...for she can do what she wills with God” (p. 193).

The Word of God:

“All power is given to me in Heaven and in earth” (Mt. 28:18). “In the Name of Jesus every knee should bow” (Phil. 2:9-11). “That in all things He may hold the primacy” (Col. 1:18). “If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Just: and he is the propitiation for our sins” (1 Jn. 2:1-2).

Mary is the peacemaker instead of Jesus Christ our peace

Roman Catholic Church:

“Mary is the Peace-maker between sinners and God” (p. 197). “We often more quickly obtain what we ask by calling on the name of Mary than by invoking that of Jesus. She...is our Salvation, our Life, our Hope, our Counsel, our Refuge, our

The Word of God:

“But now in Christ Jesus, you, who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace...” (Eph. 2:13, 14). “Hitherto you have not asked anything in my name. Ask, and you shall

Help” (pp. 254, 257).	receive, for whatsoever we shall ask according to His will, He heareth us” (Jn. 16:23, 24).
Mary is given the glory that belongs to Christ alone	
Roman Catholic Church: “The whole Trinity, O Mary, gave thee a name...above every name, that at Thy name, every knee should bow, of things in heaven, on earth, and under the earth” (p. 260).	The Word of God: “God also hath highly exalted <i>Him</i> , and hath given <i>Him</i> a Name which is above all names, that in the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth” (Phil. 2:9, 10).

Liguori, more than any other person, has been responsible for promoting Mariolatry in the Roman Church, dethroning Christ and enthroning Mary in the hearts of the people. Yet instead of excommunicating him for his heresies, the Roman Church has canonized him as a saint and published his book in many editions (recently under the imprimatur of Cardinal Patrick Joseph Hays of New York).¹³

Mother of God

The Roman church calls Mary the “mother of God,” a name impossible, illogical and unscriptural. It is impossible, for God can have no mother; He is eternal and without beginning, while Mary was born and died within a few short years. It is illogical, for God does not require a mother for His existence. Jesus said, “Before Abram was born, I am” (Jn. 8:58). It is unscriptural, for the Bible gives Mary no such contradictory name. Mary was the honored mother of the human body of Jesus—no more. The divine nature of Christ existed for eternity from eternity past, long before Mary was born. Jesus never called her “mother”; He called her “woman.”¹⁴

Celibacy

The pope, cardinals, bishops, priests, monks and nuns are required by the Roman Catholic Church to abstain from marriage.¹⁵ Yet Christ did not forbid the married life to Peter, who is regarded by the Roman Catholic Church as the first pope. Jesus showed his concern for Peter’s family when He healed his mother-in-law. “Jesus entered Peter’s house and found Peter’s mother-in-law in bed with a fever. He took her by the hand and the fever left” (Mt. 8:14-15 NAB). The Apostle Paul clearly states that all the apostles except himself were married: “Do we not have the right to accompanied by a wife, as the other apostles and the brother of the Lord and Cephas [Peter]?” (1 Cor. 9:5 RSV).¹⁶ Roman Catholic theologians admit that the Apostle Peter

¹³ Boettner, pp. 138-140.

¹⁴ *Is Rome the True Church?* p. 20. It is more theologically accurate to speak of Mary as the mother of Jesus’ human nature; this included more than just a physical body; it includes everything there is to being a human being except the inherited sin of Adam.

¹⁵ The celibacy of the priesthood was decreed by Pope Gregory VII (Hildebrand) in A.D. 1079.

¹⁶ The Greek in this verse, *adelph-n gunaika*, is literally translated “a sister, a wife.” The more idiomatic translation is “a Christian wife.” Roman Catholic Bibles translate this phrase as “a Christian woman” or “a sister, a woman”

was married but assert that he left his wife and family to follow Christ and remained celibate the rest of his life. But this viewpoint completely contradicts Scripture. Paul, who wrote 1 Corinthians in A.D. 58, says that at that time Peter was married. Therefore, comparing this date with the gospel of Matthew, we know that Peter was married at least 26 years. The Bible also teaches in 1 Corinthians 7:2-5 that husbands and wives must provide a steady sexual relationship to their marriage partner; exceptions are only made for short periods of prayer. Peter could not have left his wife to be celibate without disobeying God.

God has given explicit instructions in His Word for the qualifications of a bishop. (The Greek word for bishop, *episkopos*, is translated in different Bibles as elder, presbyter, bishop, and in some older versions, priest; keep in mind they are all translated from the same Greek word.) Not only is celibacy not required, but marriage and children are clearly allowed. Only having more than one wife is forbidden: “As I instructed you, a presbyter must be irreproachable, married only once, the father of children who are believers” (Tit. 1:5-6 NAB). “It behoveth therefore a bishop to be blameless, the husband of one wife...one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection” (1 Tim. 3:2-4 DB).

The Bible says that the doctrine of forbidding to get married is a doctrine of demons. “The Spirit distinctly says that in later times some will turn away from the faith and will heed deceitful spirits and things taught by demons through plausible liars—men with seared consciences who *forbid* marriage and require abstinence from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving” (1 Tim. 4:1-3 NAB).¹⁷

Was Peter the First Pope?

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the pope is the supreme head of the church on earth, that the Apostle Peter was the first pope, and that all popes are direct successors of Peter. Dr. Joseph Zacchello, who trained for the Roman Catholic priesthood in Italy and served as a priest in New York, carefully pointed out what the Bible teaches concerning the Apostle Peter. At the Council of Jerusalem Peter took part in the conversations, but the Apostle James *not* Peter presided and pronounced the Council’s decision: “And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, ‘Men, brethren, hear me.... For which cause I judge...’” (Ac. 15:13, 19). Peter calls himself an elder and not a pope: “Now I have something to tell your elders: I am an elder myself” (1 Pet. 5:1 JB). The other apostles did not recognize Peter as their chief; in fact, they sent him to preach in Samaria (not the other way around): “Now when the apostles who were in Jerusalem had heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John” (Ac. 8:14).

Saint Paul did not believe Peter was chief; in fact: (a) Paul mentioned Peter more than once but he never mentioned him with any special title of honor, such as vicar or pope, or gave

because *gunaika* is sometimes translated “woman.” But every Greek lexicographer consulted translated *gunaika* here as “wife.” The context favors “wife,” because Paul argues that he deserves financial support as the other apostles received who were burdened with the financial responsibilities of a family.

¹⁷ In Mt. 19:12 Jesus Christ teaches that celibacy is voluntary. In 1 Cor. 7:8-9 Paul says that celibacy is a gift. If people are having trouble controlling their sex drive, they should get married. “In one of the very few studies based on hard data—1,500 interviews between 1960 and 1985—Maryland psychologist Richard Sipe, a former priest, concluded that about 20 percent of the 57,000 U.S. Catholic priests are homosexual and that half of them are sexually active. But since 1978, Sipe believes, the number of gay priests has increased significantly; other therapists think the true figure today may be closer to 40 percent” (Kenneth L. Woodward, “Gays in the Clergy: Homosexual Priests,” *Newsweek*, Feb. 23, 1987, p. 58).

any indication that he held him above any of the other apostles. (b) Paul taught that those who attached themselves to Peter (or to any other apostle or person) as a distinct group were guilty of schism, because Christ is the head (1 Cor. 1:12-13; 3:22). (c) Paul did not mention the papacy when referring to the officers of the church (1 Cor. 12:28, Eph. 4:11). (d) Paul as an apostle claimed authority over the Roman church itself (Rom. 1:5-6; 16:17). (e) Paul was “behind the very chiefest apostle in nothing” (2 Cor. 12:11-12). (f) Paul expressly denied that Peter was the pope and further maintained that whatever Peter was to the Jews, he, Paul, was to the Gentiles. This certainly is incompatible with any idea of a pope in Paul’s day (Gal. 2:7,8). (g) Paul rebuked Peter without any mention of Peter’s supremacy (Gal. 2:11).¹⁸ If Peter was chief, it was the duty of Paul and of the apostles to recognize him as such, respect him as chief and teach in their writings that he was the chief; but neither the gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the epistles nor the Revelation ever mention it.¹⁹

Is the Pope Infallible?

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the pope is infallible when he speaks on matters of doctrine.²⁰ Ralph Woodrow has disproved such a claim by examining many papal statements and decisions throughout history:

The fact is that, neither in practice or in doctrine, have popes been infallible. Let us notice a few of the hundreds of contradictions to this doctrine of papal infallibility:

Pope Honorius I, after his death, was denounced as a heretic by the Sixth Council in the year 680. Pope Leo confirmed his condemnation. Now if Popes are infallible, how could one condemn the other?

Pope Vigilius, after condemning certain books, removed his condemnation, afterward condemned them again and then retracted his condemnation, then condemned again! Where is infallibility here?

Dueling was authorized by Pope Eugenius III (1145-53). But later Pope Julius II (1509) and Pope Pius IV (1506) forbade it.

In the eleventh century there were three rival popes at the same time, all of which were deposed by the council convened by the emperor Henry III. Later in the same century, Clement III was opposed by Victor III and afterwards by Urban II. How could popes be infallible when they opposed one another?

Then came the “great schism” in 1378 that lasted for fifty years. Italians elected Urban VI and the French cardinals chose Clement VII. The popes cursed each other year after year until a council deposed both and elected another!

Pope Sixtus V had a version of the Bible prepared which he declared to be authentic. Two years later Pope Clement VIII declared that it was full of errors and ordered that another be made!

Pope Gregory I repudiated the title of “universal bishop” as being “profane, superstitious, haughty, and invented by the first apostate” (Epistola 5:20-7:33). Yet through the centuries, other popes have claimed the title. How then can we say that popes are infallible in defining doctrine, if they directly contradict one another?

¹⁸ Joseph Zacchello, *Secrets of Romanism* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1948), pp. 43-44.

¹⁹ James D. Bales as quoted by Zacchello, p. 44.

²⁰ “The Roman Pontiff, head of the college of bishops, enjoys this infallibility in virtue of his office, when, as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful...he proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1994], §891).

Pope Hadrian II (867-872) declared civil marriages to be valid, but Pope Pius VII (1800-1823) condemned them as invalid.

Pope Eugene IV (1431-1447) condemned Joan of Arc to be burned at the stake as a witch. Later, another pope, Benedict IV, declared her to be a “saint.” Could this be papal infallibility?

How could all popes be infallible when a number of popes themselves denied such a teaching? Vigilinus, Innocent III, Clement IV, Gregory XI, Hadrian IV, and Paul IV all rejected the doctrine of papal infallibility. Could an infallible pope be infallible and not know it? Such inconsistency!²¹

Vicar of Christ?

The pope, according to Roman Catholic teaching, is the vicar of Christ, Christ’s personal representative on earth.²² A brief comparison will show the absurdity of such a claim.

The pope:	Jesus Christ:
• wears a triple-decked crown worth over \$1,300,000	• wore a crown of thorns (Jn. 19:2)
• claims to be head of all earthly kingdoms	• said, “My kingdom is not of this world” (Jn. 18:36—His kingdom does not originate on earth but in heaven; it extends to all institutions, including the church)
• is waited on by servants and lives in extreme wealth and luxury	• came to serve and to suffer; had “no place to lay his head” (Mt. 8:20)
• wears ornate, expensive garments	• dressed as a lowly peasant
• many popes, especially in the Middle Ages, lived in gross immorality	• lived a life of sinless perfection (Heb. 4:15) ²³

The Confessional

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that confession of our sins is to be made to an authorized priest for the purpose of obtaining forgiveness.²⁴ The Bible teaches that Christians should confess their sins to each other (not just to a priest or minister), not because Christians can forgive sins but because Christians can pray for each other and encourage each other: “Confess therefore your sins *one to another*: and pray for one another, that you may be saved” (Jas. 5:16 DB). In the early church, confession as a public act of repentance was done before the whole church, not just the minister: “And many of them believed, came confessing and declaring

²¹ Ralph Woodrow, *Babylon Mystery Religion* (Riverside, CA, 1966), pp. 102-103.

²² “The Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, and as pastor of the entire Church has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church...” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §882).

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 102 (slight alterations have been made by the author).

²⁴ *Baltimore Catechism*, p. 231.

their deeds. And many of them who followed curious arts, brought together their books and burnt them all” (Ac. 19:18-19 DB).

When the scribes asked, “Why does this man speak thus? He blasphemes. Who can forgive sins but only God?” (Mk. 2:7 DB), they were right. No one but God can forgive sins—and for a mere man to claim that he can is blasphemy. Jesus answered by saying, “The Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins” (v. 10); hence, He was not a mere man—He was God. But no priest or minister can forgive sins, because he is a man. We can go directly to God through our mediator Jesus Christ and be forgiven.²⁵

In Acts 8:22, Peter told Simon Magus to “pray to God” for forgiveness—not to himself who was supposed to be the first pope. Confession of sins is commanded all through the Bible, but always it is confession to *God*, never to man. It is a striking fact that although Paul, Peter and John dealt frequently with men and women in sin, both in their teaching and in their practice they never permitted a sinner or a saint to confess to them.²⁶

The Bible teaches that it is the privilege of every penitent sinner to confess his sins directly to God: “If we confess our sins he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (Jn. 1:9). What did Jesus say when He told the story about the Pharisee and the publican? The publican had no priest, and he did not go to a confessional. All he did was cry with bowed head, “God, be thou merciful to me a sinner” (Lk. 18:13). He went directly to God, and Jesus said that he went down to his house justified. Indeed, why would anyone confess his sins to a priest when the Scriptures declare so plainly, “There is only one God, *one mediator* also between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5)?²⁷ Actually, auricular confession of sin to a priest instead of to God was a late innovation instituted by Pope Innocent III at the Lateran Council in 1215.

Indulgences

The Roman Catholic Church claims to have the power of conferring indulgences. A partial indulgence remits a part of the temporal punishment due to sin, and thus can shorten the suffering due to the sinner on earth and in purgatory. A plenary indulgence gives an entire remission of temporal punishment.²⁸ “Indulgences derive their efficacy in remitting the temporal punishment due to sin from the superabundant merits of Christ and His saints.”²⁹

The whole idea that God can forgive our sins and then assign to us temporal punishment is connected to the idea that we can gain merit through good works, and that some saints (especially Mary) have been so good that they have extra merits stored up for us less-saintly

²⁵ Oswald J. Smith, *The Roman Catholic Bible Has the Answer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith, Prayer and Tract League, 1953), p. 6.

²⁶ Jas. 5:16, which tells us to declare our sins to one another and to pray for each other, is a command to be done by *all* Christians for mutual edification. By knowing each other’s weaknesses and bad habits we can pray and encourage effectively. This is completely different than Roman Catholic confession. The alleged Roman Catholic Scripture proofs (Mt. 16:19 and Jn. 20:21-23—the “keys of the kingdom of heaven”) really mean that the apostles and all Christians are “instructed with the Gospel” (1 Th. 2:4) and therefore can open and close heaven in the sense that if the Gospel is not preached, heaven cannot be opened; if it is preached, then heaven can be opened to the listener who responds in faith. To interpret these passages in any other manner would make them contradict the many passages which tell us to confess directly to God (Pr. 28:13, Da. 9:20, Mt. 3:6, Mk. 1:5, 1 Jn. 1:9, etc.); Scripture cannot contradict itself.

²⁷ Boettner, p. 206.

²⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1471.

²⁹ Zacchello, p. 161.

Christians. This teaching is totally unbiblical for two reasons: (1) The Bible teaches that even the best saint cannot gain merit—even for himself. The Apostle John, writing to Christians, said, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 Jn. 1:8 DB). Jesus said that even if we do obey everything we are commanded to, we do not gain merit or profit: “Even so you also, when you have done everything that was commanded you, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants; we have done what it was our duty to do’” (Lk. 17:10 DB). (2) Christ has gained all the merit a Christian will ever need. He lived a sinless life, thus fulfilling the law of God for every Christian. He died an atoning death, thus paying with His own blood the penalty due every Christian for his sins. To suggest or teach that Christians can gain merit from their own works or from the works of saints takes away from the perfect work of Christ. Good works are not done to gain merit; they are done because of our love for Jesus Christ. “There is no condemnation now for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1 NAB). “A single righteous act brought all men acquittal and life.... Through one man’s obedience all shall become just” (Rom. 5:18-19 NAB).

What kind of doctrine of this, which gives a man (the pope) the power of dispensing the superabundant merits of Christ and His saints to those (made available also to the souls of purgatory) who pay for membership in a Purgatorian Society, a Rosary Society, a Scapular Society, a Third Order Society? We Christians do not need a pope or bishop to grant us the merits of Christ as a reward for works of penance, wearing of a scapular, etc., since we are justified not by works but by faith (Gal. 2:16; Rom. 5:1).³⁰

Purgatory

According to the Roman Catholic Church there exists an intermediate state called purgatory where Christians go who are not good enough to go to heaven nor bad enough to go to hell. Any person dying with mortal sin goes directly to hell after death. Venial sin, though, can be eliminated through the tortures of purgatory.³¹

The Bible teaches that all sin will be forgiven by Jesus Christ except one: blasphemy against the Holy Spirit: “That, I assure you, is why every sin, every blasphemy, will be forgiven men, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Whoever says anything against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever says anything against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come” (Mt. 12:31 NAB). Christ in His earthly ministry often did miracles through the anointing of the Holy Spirit which He received at His baptism by John the baptist. The Pharisees, however, called forth Christ’s rebuke by their attributing His miracles to the devil. No Christian would ever attribute the miracles of Christ to the devil; therefore, the penitent Christian can be assured of absolute forgiveness for *all* sins. All sins are mortal in that all sins are deserving of hell, yet Christ will forgive all sins of those who trust in Him. In the gospel of Luke, the Lord forgave a murderous thief who only moments before was making fun of Him: “‘Indeed I promise you,’ he replied, ‘Today you will be with me in paradise’” (Lk. 23:43 JB). The thief received complete forgiveness when he looked to the Savior in faith. Indeed, Christ promised that all who listen and believe have eternal life *now*—they do not have to merit it or to suffer in purgatory for it; they *have* it: “I tell you most solemnly, whoever listens to my words, and believes in the one who sent me, *has* eternal life; without being brought to judgment he *has* passed from death to life” (Jn. 5:24 JB).

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 163-164.

³¹ Cf. *Baltimore Catechism*, sec. XIV, no. 181, p. 129; cf. the *Council of Trent*, 25th sess.

The Apostle Paul taught that when Christians die they go immediately to be with Christ; he mentioned nothing about purgatory: “But we are confident, and have a good will to be absent rather from the body, and to be *present* with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8 DB). “To depart and to be with Christ...far the better” (Phil. 1:23 DB). When a person trusts in Jesus Christ, the Savior’s perfect life and sacrificial death actually become the possession of the believer. As far as his standing in Christ is concerned, any idea of further purification is completely wrong; further purification is unnecessary. Indeed, the believer will grow in practical holiness as he seeks to love and obey Christ, yet this holiness can in no way contribute to his justification before God. All our self-righteousness is as filthy rags in God’s sight (Isa. 64:6).

The doctrine of purgatory arose long after the death of the apostles. The early Christians of the New Testament never believed in such a place as purgatory. The word appears nowhere in the Bible. The idea of purgatory and prayers for the souls in purgatory was not known in the professing church to any degree until A.D. 600 when Pope Gregory the Great made claims about a third state—a place for the purification of souls before their entrance into heaven. It was not accepted as a dogma of the Catholic Church, however, until 1459 at the Council of Florence. Ninety years later, the Council of Trent confirmed this dogma by cursing those who wouldn’t accept the doctrine.³²

Transubstantiation

According to the Roman Catholic Church, when the wine and wafer are consecrated by a priest, the substance of bread and wine is changed into the actual body and blood of Christ; this change is called transubstantiation. Underneath what appears to be bread and wine are really the body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ.³³

The doctrine of transubstantiation is a denial of the biblical doctrine of Christ. Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man, two distinct natures in one person; yet these two natures are not mixed or confused in any way. This view, set forth by the church at the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451, is accepted by Protestants and Roman Catholics alike. Yet transubstantiation attributes divine attributes to Christ’s finite human nature.³⁴ His human body, His flesh and blood, cannot be all over the world in the eucharist at the same time without having the divine attribute of omnipresence. The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is *spiritually* present—not physically present—in the bread and wine.

By studying Jesus’ teaching it becomes clear that His reference to His body and blood was symbolic. Examples of Christ using figurative and symbolic speech are numerous: He referred to Himself as a door (Jn. 10:14), a temple (Jn. 2:19), a vine (Jn. 15:5), a shepherd (Jn. 10:14), and bread (Jn. 6:35). He referred to the Holy Spirit as water (Jn. 4:14). When He instituted the Lord’s supper he called the cup the new covenant (1 Cor. 11:25). Similarly, “we know that these elements did not become the literal flesh and blood of Jesus when he ‘blessed’ them, because He (literally) was still there! He was not changed from a person into some liquid

³² *Heresies of Rome*, as quoted by Woodrow, p. 71.

³³ Council of Trent, 13th sess., can. 1.

³⁴ The mixing of the divine and human natures of Christ into one nature (Apollinarianism) was condemned by Pope Damasus. A church council at Rome (377), synods at Alexandria (378) and Antioch (379), and a council at Constantinople (381), as well as decrees issued in 383, 384 and 388, all condemned Apollinarianism as a heresy. See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), pp. 289-297.

and bread!”³⁵ “Jesus Christ, *after* He had blessed the sacrament, still called it ‘the fruit of the vine’—not His literal blood (see Mt. 26:29). Paul, too, says that the bread remains bread (1 Cor. 11:27-28).”³⁶ “If the wine did become the literal blood during the mass ritual—as it is claimed—then to drink it would be forbidden by Scripture” (see Lev. 3:17; 7:26; 17:10, 12; Acts 15:20).³⁷

“When the Roman priest consecrates the wafer it is then called the ‘host’ and they worship it as God. But if the doctrine of transubstantiation is false, then the ‘host’ is no more the body of Christ than is any other piece of bread! And if the soul and divinity of Christ are not present, then the worship of it is sheer idolatry, of the same kind as the pagan tribes who worship fetishes.”³⁸ According to the Roman Catholic Church, in the mass a true, proper, and propitiatory³⁹ sacrifice to God is offered. That sacrifice is identical with the sacrifice of the cross, inasmuch as Christ is both priest and victim. The only difference lies in the manner of offering, which is bloody upon the cross and bloodless on the altar.⁴⁰

The Bible teaches that Christ’s sacrifice was perfect, complete, final—a one-time event *never* to be repeated: “Unlike the other high priest, he has no need to offer sacrifice day after day, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did that *once for all* when he offered himself” (Heb. 7:27 NAB). “Christ...as the high priest...has entered the sanctuary *once for all*, taking with him...his own blood, having won an eternal redemption of us” (Heb. 9:12 JB). “For Christ did not enter into a sanctuary made by hands..., he entered heaven itself that he might appear before God now on our behalf. *Not* that he might offer himself there again and again, as the high priest enters year after year into the sanctuary with blood that is not his own; if that were so he would have to suffer death over and over from the creation of the world. But now he has appeared at the end of the age to take away sins *once for all* by his sacrifice” (Heb. 9:24-26 NAB). “He...has offered *one singular sacrifice* for sins” (Heb. 10:12 JB). “Christ...will never die again...he dies once for all” (Rom. 6:9-10 JB)

The Roman Catholic Church does exactly the opposite of what the Bible teaches. Christ is sacrificed thousands of times each day in the ritual of the Mass! The Roman Catholic mass, the most central aspect of Roman Catholic faith, is sin, “for it is a denial of the efficacy of the atoning sacrifice of Christ on Calvary.”⁴¹ The following table shows a comparison between the communion supper instituted by Christ and that of the Roman Catholic mass today:

The Lord’s supper	Roman Catholic mass
The bread was broken	The bread is served whole, round
Was taken at night	Taken early in the morning
Taken after a meal	Partaker must be fasting
Instituted by Jesus	A mixture of paganism

³⁵ Woodrow, p. 126.

³⁶ Boettner, p. 178.

³⁷ Woodrow, p. 127.

³⁸ Boettner, p. 179.

³⁹ A propitiatory sacrifice satisfies the justice of God and removes the penalty for sin.

⁴⁰ “If anyone says that in the mass a true and real sacrifice is not offered to God...let him be anathema” (*Council of Trent*, 22nd sess., can. 1). “If anyone says that...Christ...did not ordain that...other priests should offer His own body and blood, let him be anathema” (can. 2). “If anyone says that the sacrifice of the mass is not a propitiatory [sacrifice]...let him be anathema” (can. 3). Cf. the *New York Catechism* and the *Creed of Pope Pius IV*.

⁴¹ Boettner, p. 182.

Bread and cup represent the Lord's body and blood	Bread and wine are said to become flesh and blood
Both bread and fruit of the vine were taken	Only the bread may be eaten by the congregation
Representative of a finished work, a perfect sacrifice	Each mass is supposed to be a fresh sacrifice of Christ
A simple blessing was given over the elements	Long prayers are chanted for the living and the dead
Featured the simplicity of a common meal	Elaborate ritualism, rites ⁴²

The Roman Catholic Doctrine of Justification

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that salvation depends ultimately upon ourselves, earned by obedience to the law of the church (for example, regular attendance at mass, rosary prayers, fasting, the wearing of medals, crucifixes or scapulars, etc.). In this system God forgives only those who try to atone for their sins through fruits of penance.⁴³ This whole system exists because Christ's sacrifice on the cross is regarded as not sufficient. The Roman Catholic doctrine of justification (how a man becomes justified or perfectly righteous before God) reflects Romanism's complicated system of salvation by works.⁴⁴

Roman Catholic view	Biblical view	
Justification is God's work of grace in man.	Justification is God's work of grace in Jesus Christ. ⁴⁵	"Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24 DB).
As a man, by grace, becomes more and more righteous by obeying God's law, Church canon law, and the use of the sacraments, God will accept him.	God accepts men solely on the merits of Jesus Christ.	"For we account a man to be justified by faith, without the works of the law" (Rom. 3:20 DB).
Faith <i>and</i> good works are the basis for justification. ⁴⁶	Faith in Christ <i>alone</i> is the basis for justification.	"By grace have ye been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, that no man should

⁴² Woodrow, p. 140.

⁴³ Confusion was introduced by a mistranslation of the Greek word for "repent" to the Latin word for "do penance" (cf. *Council of Trent*, 14th sess., ch. 1); "repent" and "do penance" are completely different.

⁴⁴ "If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification...let him be anathema.... If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in divine mercy, which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that it is this confidence alone that justifies us, let him be anathema" (*Council of Trent*, 6th sess., can. 9, 12).

⁴⁵ See Robert D. Brinsmead, *Present Truth* (Fallbrooke, CA), special issue on justification by faith.

⁴⁶ "Moved by the Holy Spirit, we can *merit* for ourselves and for others all the graces needed to attain eternal life..." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §2027).

		glory” (Eph. 2:8-9 DB).
God’s transforming grace <i>infuses</i> righteousness into men who cooperate with grace. Thus, justification is <i>subjective</i> .	The righteousness of Christ is <i>imputed</i> or credited to the believer through faith. Thus, justification is <i>objective</i> .	“When a man does nothing, yet believes in him who justifies the sinful, his faith is credited as justice.... Blest is the man to whom the Lord imputes no guilt” (Rom. 4:4-8 NAB).
Our righteousness is acceptable to God. In fact, some saints have done more than what God has required, and have stored extra merit that we can acquire.	Even the best of good works are tainted with sin. Our good works contribute nothing to our salvation.	“But we are as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6 RSV). “I want only the perfection that comes through faith in Christ, and is from God and based on faith” (Phil. 3:96 JB).
Justification is a gradual process which may not even be complete in this life. It usually is completed by the tortures of purgatory.	Justification is an instantaneous act. It is whole, eternal and perfect, not piecemeal or gradual.	“I solemnly assure you, the man who hears my word and has faith in him who sent me <i>possesses</i> eternal life. He does not come under condemnation but has passed from death to life” (Jn. 5:25 NAB). “Even when you were dead in sin...God gave you new life in company with Christ. He pardoned all our sins He cancelled the bond that stood against us with all its claims, snatching it up and nailing it to the cross” (Col 2:13-14 NAB).

The Roman Catholic Church has perverted the doctrine of justification by confounding it with the doctrine of sanctification.⁴⁷ Biblically speaking, after a man is justified before God, he begins a lifelong process of sanctification where he grows in holiness and obedience to God’s law. Justification is the basis, the starting point, for sanctification (Rom. 6). Justification removes the guilt of sin and restores the sinner to God’s household as a child of God. Sanctification removes sinful habits and makes the sinner more and more like Christ. Justification takes place outside of the sinner in the tribunal of God. Sanctification takes place in the inner life of man. Justification takes place once and for all. Sanctification is a continuous process which is never complete in this life.⁴⁸

Conclusion

After examining some of the key Roman Catholic doctrines, it is clear that all too often the traditions and teachings of men have been substituted for true biblical doctrine. Many Roman

⁴⁷ “*Justification* is a judicial act of God, in which He declares, on the basis of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, that all the claims of the law are satisfied with respect to the sinner.... *Sanctification* may be defined as that gracious and continuous operation of the Holy Spirit, by which He delivers the justified sinner from the pollution of sin, renews his whole nature in the image of God, and enables him to perform good works” (L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 513, 532.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 513-514.

Catholic leaders and laymen are doing charitable deeds for which they are to be commended. And not all Roman Catholic dogma is false; the divinity of Christ and the trinity are notable examples. Yet the Roman Catholic Church has departed from God's Word in so many crucial areas that to remain under such teaching is to gamble with one's own soul. There is no doubt that some Bible-reading, Bible-believing Roman Catholics are saved, but they are saved *in spite of* Romanism and not *because of* it.

You need to ask yourself seriously: Am I a Roman Catholic because I have studied the Bible and found that its doctrine is identical with that of the church? Or am I a Roman Catholic because I was raised in the church? Should I trust my soul to a church that practices idolatry? Should I trust the salvation of myself and my family to a church which changes its doctrine to cater to the surrounding culture (e.g., Vatican II), when biblical doctrine never has and never will change? Should I trust my place in eternity to a church which explicitly denies the biblical doctrine of salvation (e.g., Council of Trent)? Are you willing to read the Bible and obey what it says, even when it runs contrary to what your family and friends believe? Jesus said that you must love and serve Him more than your own family, even more than your own self (Lk. 14:26). You can leave behind the heavy yoke of doubt, fear and bondage to ritual and man-made regulations by trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for your salvation. Believe that Jesus Christ lived a perfect, sinless life in your place. Believe that He died a sacrificial, atoning death in order to cover your sins with His blood, thus satisfying God's wrath against your sin. Believe that He rose from the dead victorious over sin and death for you. Believe that He ascended to the right hand of God in order to intercede for you, send the Holy Spirit to regenerate you (make you born again) and help you follow Him. Repent of your past, sinful lifestyle. True faith in Christ *must* issue forth into a life of godliness and good works; otherwise you do not have true faith and are still in darkness (Jas. 1-2). Remember, holiness and good works do not contribute in any way to your salvation; they are evidence that salvation has already taken place.

Suggestions for further reading:

Loraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962).
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