

# **SOME THOUGHTS ON ROMAN CATHOLICISM**

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The Roman Catholic Church shares some important beliefs with the Church of Christ. These include belief in the Trinity, the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, the creation and the fall of Adam, Christ's unique atonement for our sins, the physical resurrection of Christ, the necessity of God's grace for salvation, the necessity of baptism, the existence of heaven and hell, the second coming of Christ, and the verbal inspiration and infallibility of Scripture. There are, however, significant areas of disagreement that cannot be ignored.

The purpose of this paper is to set forth some of the Roman Catholic doctrines with which I disagree and to state briefly the basis of that disagreement. I do this out of a commitment to the truth not out of a desire to attack those with whom I disagree. Each person must decide for himself where the truth lies and have the courage to live consistently with his convictions. I hope my Catholic friends find that I have expressed my disagreement with the kind of courtesy and respect they regularly have shown to me.

## **The Papacy**

According to Roman Catholic doctrine, the Pope is the supreme earthly head of the universal Christian church and all faithful Christians are required to accept him as such. Pope Boniface made this quite clear in the papal bull, *Unam Sanctam*, promulgated November 18, 1302:

Consequently, we declare, state, define, and pronounce that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff. (Quoted in James R. White, *The Roman Catholic Controversy* [Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1996], 107.)

The authority of the Pope was pronounced a dogma in A.D. 1870 at the First Vatican Council and was confirmed in 1965 at the Second Vatican Council. Vatican I declared that all the faithful of Christ must believe

that the Apostolic See and the Roman Pontiff hold primacy over the whole world, and that the Pontiff of Rome himself is the successor of the blessed Peter, the chief of the apostles, and is the true vicar of Christ and head of the whole church and faith, and teacher of all Christians; and that to him was handed down in blessed Peter, by our Lord Jesus Christ, full power to feed, rule, and guide the universal Church, just as is also contained in the records of the ecumenical Councils and in the sacred canons. (Quoted in Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E.

MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995], 203.)

As stated in Peter M. Stravinsky, ed., *Catholic Encyclopedia* (Huntingdon, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1991), 761:

The Bishop of Rome . . . exercises universal jurisdiction over the whole Church as the Vicar of Christ and the Successor of St. Peter. The term "pope" derives from the Latin for "father." . . . In Western Christianity, this term refers to the Roman Pontiff, called his holiness the Pope, who governs the universal Church as the successor to St. Peter . . . who possesses, "by virtue of his office, . . . supreme, full, immediate, and universal ordinary jurisdiction power in the Church (Canon 331)." (Quoted in John H. Armstrong, *A View of Rome*, [Chicago: Moody Press, 1995], 75.)

Roman Catholic John Cardinal Gibbons wrote in *The Faith of Our Fathers* (Rockford, IL: TAN Books and Publishers, 1980), 78:

The Catholic Church teaches that our Lord conferred on St. Peter the first place of honor and jurisdiction in the government of his whole church, and that same spiritual authority has always resided in the popes, or bishops of Rome, as being the successors of St. Peter. Consequently, to be true followers of Christ all Christians, both among the clergy and laity, must be in communion with the See of Rome, where Peter rules in the person of his successor. (Quoted in White, 105.)

As stated in John Cardinal Ratzinger, ed., *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Company, 1994), 233-34:

The Pope, Bishop of Rome and Peter's successor, "is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful." "For the Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, and as pastor for the entire Church, has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered." (Quoted in Armstrong, 77.)

I cannot accept the Roman Catholic claim of the supremacy of the Pope. In refusing to do so, I align myself not only with Protestant churches but also with Anglican and Eastern Orthodox churches. See, Geisler & MacKenzie, 206; Barbara L. Faulkner, "Eastern Orthodox Church," in J. D. Douglas, ed., *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 324, and John A. Simpson, "England, Church of" in *ibid.*, 342-43. In other words, Roman Catholics stand alone on this issue. My reasons for denying the claim are as follows:

1. Peter did not possess any authority superior to that of the other apostles, so he was not the supreme earthly head of the universal church, as the Pope claims to be. This is clear from:

a. Eph. 2:20 speaks of the church as "having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, the keystone being Christ Jesus himself." Peter is in no way distinguished from the other apostles in terms of the founding of the church.

b. 1 Cor. 12:28 says that God placed in the church, "first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, . . ." Peter again is in no way distinguished from the other apostles.

c. Lk. 22:24-30 involves a dispute among the apostles as to which of them was considered to be the greatest. Rather than informing the group that he had chosen Peter as the preeminent one, Jesus treats all the disciples alike and speaks of conferring on them all, not Peter alone, a kingdom in which they would judge the twelve tribes of Israel.

d. 1 Pet. 5:1-2 is Peter's own admission that he was not *the* elder of the church but a *fellow* elder with the others. (The terms presbyter/elder, bishop/overseer, and pastor/shepherd all refer to the same office; see the section on church government below.)

e. Paul received his revelation independently of the other apostles (Gal. 1:12, 2:2) and used it to rebuke Peter for his error of separating from the Gentile converts (Gal. 2:11-14).

f. In Gal. 2:7 Paul equated his ministry to the Gentiles with Peter's ministry to the Jews. This parallel would be inappropriate if Peter were the earthly ruler of the entire church.

g. Peter exercised no primacy in the Council at Jerusalem reported in Acts 15. Indeed, James gave the final words (15:13-21) and the decision came from "the apostles and elders, with the whole church" (15:22-23).

h. The fact both Peter and John were sent by the apostles on a mission to Samaria (Acts 8:4-13) indicates Peter was not *the* superior apostle (or he would have been responsible for the sending).

i. In Acts 11:1-18 Peter is called to answer for his actions in entering the home of an uncircumcised man (Cornelius) and eating with him. In explaining himself, Peter makes no appeal to his prerogatives as the earthly head of the church.

j. Acts gives more attention to Paul's ministry than to Peter's, and Paul wrote much more of the New Testament than did Peter. This seems strange if Peter was the God-ordained superior apostle.

2. Even if Peter had possessed unique authority as the earthly ruler of the entire church, there is no reason to believe his authority was transferred to a chain of successors upon his death.

a. A requirement for being an apostle (in the sense of the Twelve and Paul) was being an eyewitness to the resurrected Christ (Lk. 24:48; Acts 1:8, 1:21-22; 1 Cor. 9:1, 15:5-8). So, if apostolic succession occurred at all, it could only continue until the last witness of the resurrected Christ had died.

b. Judas, the betrayer, was replaced as an apostle by Matthias (Acts 1:15-26), but after that no effort was made to select men to succeed apostles who died (Acts 12:2). Judas was presumably replaced to maintain the Jewish symbolism inherent in the number twelve (see, Robert H. Stein, *Jesus the Messiah* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997], 114-15).

c. A hallmark of the apostles was the ability to perform signs, wonders, and miracles (2 Cor. 12:12). Since 2 Corinthians was written decades after Matthias had replaced Judas, it includes successor apostles. Popes do not possess these apostle-confirming powers.

d. The fact the church was built on the "foundation of the apostles" (Eph. 2:20) suggests that apostolic ministry was limited to the initial stage of the church's history (the "ground floor").

e. 2 Timothy was written by Paul at the end of his life (2 Tim. 4:6), but it makes no mention of a successor. Rather, Paul instructs Timothy to entrust to others the message Timothy had heard Paul preach (2 Tim. 2:2).

f. 2 Peter was written by Peter at the end of his life (2 Pet. 1:13-14), but it makes no mention of a successor. This is particularly telling in light of the fact Peter spends much of the letter warning his readers about the false teachers that will arise among them. Given that future threat to their faith, why does he not point them to his successor as the one to keep them on the straight and narrow?

g. The claim that Peter passed his apostolic authority specifically to the bishop of Rome is based on the claim that Peter was the first bishop in Rome. There is, however, no credible evidence that Peter ever was a bishop in Rome. As stated flatly in Donald P. Senior (a Catholic scholar) and Frederick W. Norris, "Peter," in Everett Ferguson, ed., *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 905, "No early evidence exists to support that claim." See also, J. G. G. Norman, "Peter the Apostle," in Douglas, 770. In fact, Paul's letter to the church in Rome, dated around A.D. 57, suggests quite the contrary. It is hard to imagine Paul writing that letter to a church under the oversight of the Apostle Peter and even harder to imagine he would do so without even mentioning Peter, despite mentioning twenty-seven different people in the letter.

h. Claims of apostolic succession in the church did not arise before A.D. 170-200 and then only in response to claims by Gnostics to possess a secret tradition handed down to them by the apostles. See, R. E. Higginson, "Apostolic Succession," in Walter Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 89.

3. The spiritual exaltation of the Pope inherent in the titles "Holy Father," "Vicar of Christ," and "Supreme Pontiff" and in the acts of kneeling before him and kissing his hand and foot (see, Loraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism* [Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1962], 113) are contrary to the Lord's instruction in Mat. 23:8-12. Peter himself refused such expressions of reverence (Acts 10:25-26).

### **Papal Infallibility**

According to Roman Catholic doctrine, when the Pope speaks *ex cathedra* (as the official interpreter of faith and morals) he is infallible, meaning incapable of error. The First Vatican Council (1870) declared:

the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when carrying out the duty of the pastor and teacher of all Christians in accord with his supreme apostolic authority he explains a doctrine of faith or morals to be held by the Universal Church, through the divine assistance promised him in blessed Peter, operates with that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer wished that His church be instructed in defining doctrine on faith and morals; and so such definitions of the Roman Pontiff from himself, but not from the consensus of the Church, are unalterable. (Quoted in Geisler & MacKenzie, 204.)

The declaration is followed by the traditional condemnation of any who reject papal infallibility: "But if anyone presumes to contradict this definition of Ours, which may God forbid: let him be anathema" [i.e., excommunicated]. Ibid.

The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) stated that the college of bishops assists the Pope, but this shared authority still is to be interpreted in light of papal supremacy. *De Ecclesia*, a Vatican II reformist document, makes this clear:

The college of bishops has no authority unless it is simultaneously conceived of in terms of its head, the Roman Pontiff, Peter's successor, and without any lessening of his power of primacy over all, pastors as well as the general faithful. For in virtue of his office, that is, as Vicar of Christ and pastor of the whole Church, the Roman Pontiff has full, supreme, and universal power over the Church. And he can always exercise this power freely. (Quoted in Armstrong, 79.)

I cannot accept the Roman Catholic claim of the infallibility of the Pope. This is another doctrine on which the Catholic Church stands alone. Hans Kung, a Catholic scholar, wrote a pointed critique of the doctrine in *Infallible? An Inquiry*, trans. by Edward Quinn (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), for which he was censured and forbidden to teach under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church. Geisler & MacKenzie, 207. My reasons for denying the claim are as follows:

1. The infallibility of the Pope was first proposed around A.D. 1300 and was not officially sanctioned until Vatican I in 1870. W. C. G. Proctor and J. Van Engen, "Infallibility," in Elwell, 605-606; see also, Boettner, 240-43. If Christ or the apostles taught this doctrine, it would have been acknowledged prior to the passing of eighteen centuries.

2. Popes have taught heretical doctrines. For example, Pope Honorius I (A.D. 625-638) was formally condemned by the Council of Constantinople (A.D. 681) for teaching the monothelite heresy (the denial that Christ possessed both a human and a divine will), which condemnation was confirmed by Pope Leo II (A.D. 682-83). Geisler & MacKenzie, 213; J. W. Charley, "Papacy," in Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright, eds., *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 490. If Popes were infallible teachers, they could not be on two different sides of a theological issue, especially one so fundamental as the nature of Christ.

Many other examples of doctrinal errors taught by Popes could be given. As James R. White notes, "Almost any unbiased historical work on the history of the Church will provide the reader with more than sufficient data illustrating the errors of Popes of the past." White, 250, n. 28. See Boettner, 248-53 for a convenient summary of some of these errors. In fact, Roman Catholic delegates at Vatican I used these very examples to oppose adoption of the doctrine of infallibility, but it was promulgated despite their protests. White, 250, n. 28.

3. The reluctance of Popes to use their alleged gift of infallible teaching casts serious doubt on its existence. The only time this century in which the Pope has admittedly spoken *ex cathedra* is in claiming the bodily assumption of Mary into heaven (in 1950). Geisler & MacKenzie, 214. If this gift exists, why is it so rarely exercised? Why has no Pope published an infallible exposition of any part of Scripture? Why has no infallible proclamation been issued defining which papal proclamations are infallible?

### **The Perpetual Virginity of Mary**

According to Roman Catholic doctrine, Jesus not only was miraculously conceived, a matter on which all believers in Christ agree, but also was miraculously delivered so as to preserve Mary's virginity. In the words of Roman Catholic scholar Ludwig Ott, "Mary bore her son without any violation of her virginal integrity." (Quoted in Geisler & MacKenzie, 300.) This is an official doctrine of Catholicism on the grounds of general proclamation. Catholic scholars have traditionally explained it by saying "Mary gave birth in a miraculous fashion without opening of the womb and injury to the hymen, and consequently without pains." Ibid. Catholic dogma also states that "*after* the birth of Jesus Mary remained a Virgin." Ibid.

I cannot accept the Roman Catholic claim of the perpetual virginity of Mary. My reasons for denying the claim are as follows:

1. All of the descriptions of Christ's birth indicate a normal birth (see, Mat. 1:25, 2:2; Lk. 2:6-7; Gal. 4:4). The Bible does not use any words for a miracle (such as sign, wonder, power) when speaking of Jesus' birth, only of his conception. Ibid., 301.

2. Mat. 1:25 says Joseph "had no union with [Mary] *until* she gave birth to a son." This implies that he did have union with her after Jesus was born.

3. This implication is confirmed by clear references in the New Testament to Jesus' natural siblings. For example, in Mat. 13:55 the people of Nazareth declare, "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us?" (See also, Mk. 6:3; Jn. 2:12, 7:5; Acts 1:14; Gal. 1:19). The Catholic contention that "brothers" and "sisters" in this verse really means "cousins" fails for several reasons. First, the terms are mentioned in the context of the family with the "carpenter's son" and "mother," which clearly indicates an immediate kinship. Second, the term "brother" is the normal Greek word for "blood brother." Third, there is a word for "cousin," as in Col. 4:10, but it is never used in reference to Jesus' brothers and sisters. Ibid., 302-303.

### **The Sinlessness of Mary**

According to Roman Catholic doctrine, Mary "was free from every personal sin during her whole life." Ibid., 309 (quoting Catholic scholar Ludwig Ott). This is reflected in the declaration of the Council of Trent (A.D. 1545-63) that "no justified person can for his whole life avoid all sins, even venial sins, except on the ground of special privilege from God such as the Church holds was given to the Blessed Virgin." Ibid.

I cannot accept the Roman Catholic claim of the sinlessness of Mary. My reasons for denying the claim are as follows:

1. The Scriptures are clear that sin is the universal condition of humanity (Rom. 3:10, 3:23, 5:12; 1 Jn. 1:8, 10). Only Jesus is said to have been exempt (Heb. 4:15).

2. In Lk. 1:47 Mary says "my spirit rejoices in God *my Savior*." In acknowledging her need for a savior, Mary acknowledged her own sinfulness.

3. Lk. 2:22-24 reports that after Jesus was born Mary brought to Jerusalem the two offerings prescribed by the law. These offerings, as set forth in Lev. 12:6-8, were a burnt offering (symbolizing surrender to the will of God) and a sin offering (a sacrifice acknowledging sin).

4. Mat. 12:46-50 reports that when Jesus was told that Mary and his brothers were standing outside wanting to speak to him, he replied, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" He then pointed to his *disciples* and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." In so doing, he implicitly denied that Mary was morally unique.

## **The Bodily Assumption of Mary**

According to Roman Catholic doctrine, Mary ascended to heaven bodily, in the manner of the Lord Jesus. In 1950 Pope Pius XII "infallibly" proclaimed that "just as the glorious resurrection of Christ was an essential part, and final evidence of the victory, so the Blessed Virgin's common struggle with her son was to be concluded with the 'glorification' of her virginal body." (Quoted in Geisler & Mackenzie, 311; see also, Boettner, 162.) Further, the pronouncement warned that "anyone who may henceforth doubt or deny this doctrine is utterly fallen away from the divine and Catholic faith." Boettner, 162. In other words, it is a "mortal sin" for any Roman Catholic to refuse to believe this doctrine.

I cannot accept the Roman Catholic claim of the bodily assumption of Mary. My reasons for denying the claim are as follows:

1. There is no basis for it. Absolutely nothing is said of it in the Scriptures. The texts cited in support of the doctrine (Mat. 27:52-53; Lk. 1:28; Rev. 12:1-6; Ps. 132:8) are irrelevant.

2. Catholic authorities admit that this idea was first expressed in apocryphal (i.e., nonhistorical) writings from the fifth and sixth centuries. Geisler & MacKenzie, 316. According to Ludwig Ott, belief in this dogma did not appear until nearly the seventh century. Ibid.

## **The Mediatorship of Mary**

According to Catholic doctrine, Mary is a mediator (secondary to Christ) between God and mankind. She was called "mediatrix" in the 1854 bull *Ineffabilis* of Pope Pius IX, and this claim has been echoed and elaborated upon by subsequent Popes (Leo XIII, Benedict XIV, Pius X, Benedict XV, Pius XII, and John Paul II; see, White, 213-15, 263). Catholic scholars define Mary's role as mediatrix in two ways: (1) she was a channel for the Incarnation and redemptive suffering of Christ, and (2) she is now a heavenly intercessor through whom the gracious blessings of God are distributed to mankind. See, Geisler & MacKenzie, 317-18.

"Saints," in the Catholic sense of those Christians who have been officially recognized by the Church as being in the presence of God, are also believed to serve as heavenly intercessors. Believers are urged to ask the "saints" to intercede for them with God. Regina Coll, "saints," in Richard P. McBrien, ed., *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism* (San Francisco: Harper, 1995), 1155-56. The following objections to Mary's alleged intercessory role also apply to intercession by the "saints." ("Saints" is placed in quotes because "saint" in the New Testament refers to all the Christian faithful [e.g., 2 Cor. 13:12; Eph. 1:1], a fact Catholics acknowledge [ibid., 1155].)

This first definition of Mary's role as mediatrix is not objectionable as long as it is made clear that her own work and suffering as the mother of Christ is in no way the basis of human redemption. Nothing can be allowed to detract from the all-sufficiency of Christ's atoning death



(1 Tim. 2:5; 2 Cor. 5:18-19; Col 1:19-20). Unfortunately, Catholics have not always been careful in teaching on this subject. For example, in encyclical *De Corredemptione*, Pope Benedict XV stated:

Thus, she (Mary) suffered and all but died along with her Son suffering and dying; thus, for the salvation of men she abdicated the rights of a mother toward her Son, and insofar as was hers to do, she immolated the Son to placate God's justice, so that she herself may justly be said to have redeemed together with Christ the human race. (Quoted in White, 263, n. 27.)

Much has been written on the second definition of Mary's role as mediatrix, her role as heavenly intercessor. Catholic writer St. Alphonsus de Ligouri's *The Glories of Mary* (A.D. 1750) includes the following summary of papal endorsements of the doctrine:

We know that Benedict XIV has left these words on record: "Mary is like a celestial river by which the water of all graces and gifts are conveyed to poor mortals." Pius IX, in speaking to the bishops of the whole world made use of the words of St. Bernard: "God wills that every grace should come through her." . . . Pius X declares: "She is the dispensatrix of the graces that Jesus Christ has merited for us by His blood and death." The following are the words of Benedict XV: "It has pleased God to grant us all graces through the intercession of Mary." Again: "All the graces which the Giver of all good deigns to grant to the descendants of Adam, are dispensed to us, in the disposition of a loving Providence, through the hands of the Blessed Virgin." And finally: "The graces of all kinds that we receive from the treasury of the Redemption are dispensed by the hands of the Sorrowful Virgin." (Quoted in White, 263, n. 28.)

More recently, Leo XIII in an encyclical (September 22, 1891) said of Mary's mediation:

With equal truth may it be affirmed that, by the will of God, Mary is the intermediary through whom is distributed unto us this immense treasure of mercies gathered by God, for mercy and truth were created by Jesus Christ. Thus as no man goeth to the Father but by the Son, so no man goeth to Christ but by His Mother. (Quoted in White, 213.)

Pope Pius X stated in his encyclical dated February 2, 1904:

[Mary] is the supreme Minister of the distribution of graces. Jesus "sitteth on the right hand of the majesty on high" (Hebrews i. b.). Mary sitteth at the right hand of her Son -- a refuge so secure and a help so trusty against all dangers that we have nothing to fear or to despair of under her guidance, her patronage, her protection. (Quoted in White, 215.)

And Pope Pius XII stated in his encyclical of October 11, 1954:

For from her union with Christ [Mary] attains a radiant eminence transcending that of any other creature; from her union with Christ she receives the royal right to dispose of the treasures of the Divine Redeemer's Kingdom; from her union with Christ finally is derived the inexhaustible efficacy of her maternal intercession before the Son and His Father. (Quoted in White, 215.)

As Catholic defender Karl Keating explained the teaching in his 1988 book:

Mary is the Mediatrix of all graces because of her intercession for us in heaven. What this means is that no grace accrues to us without her intercession. We are not to suppose that we are obliged to ask for all graces through her or that her intercession is intrinsically necessary for the application of graces. Instead, through God's will, grace is not conferred on anyone without Mary's cooperation. (Quoted in White, 217.)

I cannot accept the Roman Catholic claim that Mary is a heavenly intercessor, let alone that her intercession is essential for the bestowal of God's blessings. My reasons for denying the claim are as follows:

1. There is absolutely nothing in Scripture to indicate Mary has such a role. Little is said about her life, nothing is said about her death, nothing is said about her ascending to heaven, and nothing is said about her having any role as an intercessor. Even Roman Catholic authority Ludwig Ott confesses: "Express scriptural proofs are lacking." (Quoted in Geisler and MacKenzie, 319.) Catholic apologist Karl Keating likewise admits "scriptural proofs for this are lacking." (Quoted in White, 217.)

2. Mat. 12:46-50 reports that when Jesus was told that Mary and his brothers were standing outside wanting to speak to him, he replied, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" He then pointed to his *disciples* and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." In so doing, he denied that Mary's unique physical relationship with him equates to a unique spiritual relationship.

3. Other humans (e.g., 1 Tim. 2:1-2) and even the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:26-27) are said to intercede or make petitions for Christians from earth, but the only heavenly intercessor mentioned in Scripture is Jesus (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25, 9:24; 1 Jn. 2:1-2). With the promise that the sinless and perfect Son of God continuously intercedes for us before the Father, what place is there for Mary's intercession in heaven? To claim that Mary intercedes with Jesus rather than with the Father suggests that she, more than Jesus, is open and accessible to sinners. Such a suggestion cannot stand in light of Scripture.

Charles Chinquy, a former Catholic priest who became a Presbyterian minister, provides the following account of an illuminating discussion of this subject he had with his bishop:

"My lord, who has saved you and me upon the cross?"

He answered, "Jesus Christ."

"And who paid your debt and mine by shedding his blood; was it Mary or Jesus?"

He said, Jesus Christ."

"Now, my lord, when Jesus and Mary were on earth, who loved the sinner more; was it Mary or Jesus?"

And again he answered that it was Jesus.

"Did any sinner come to Mary on earth to be saved?"

"No."

"Do you remember that any sinner has gone to Jesus to be saved?"

"Yes, many."

"Have they been rebuked?"

"Never."

"Do you remember that Jesus ever said to sinners, 'Come to me'?"

"Yes, He has said it."

"Has he ever retracted those words?"

"No."

"And who was, then, more powerful to save sinners?" I asked.

"O, it was Jesus!"

"Now, my lord, since Jesus and Mary are in heaven, can you show me in the Scriptures that Jesus has lost anything of His desire and power to save sinners, or that He has delegated this power to Mary?"

And the bishop answered, "No."

"Then, my lord," I asked, "why do we not go to Him, and to Him alone? Why do we invite poor sinners to come to Mary, when, by your own confession she is nothing compared with Jesus, in power, in mercy, in love, and in compassion for the sinner?"

To that the bishop could give no answer. (Quoted in Boettner, 143-44.)

4. There is not the slightest suggestion in Scripture that prayers should be offered to anyone other than God. The Jews never prayed to Abraham, or Jacob, or Moses, or David, or to any of the prophets (Lk. 16:23-31 is a parable, and even then, the rich man who calls to Abraham is already dead), and the apostles never asked the early Christians to pray to any human being.

5. To fulfill the role assigned to her by Roman Catholics, Mary (and the "saints") would need the divine attribute of omniscience. Otherwise, how could she simultaneously be aware of the needs of millions of people in different places and with different languages? Yet, Scripture portrays her as a mere (albeit blessed) creature, a fellow human being.

## The Mass

The word "Mass" refers to the Eucharist or Lord's Supper and derives from the Latin *missio*, a term used in churches to dismiss the people. According to Roman Catholic doctrine, when the priest consecrates the bread and wine of the Eucharist, they are transformed entirely into the literal body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. (This is the doctrine of transubstantiation.) In this way, Christ is believed to continually offer himself on the priest's altar, in a bloodless sacrifice, and this continual offering is a means by which the benefits of his atoning death on the cross are offered to his people. Since the consecrated elements of the Eucharist are the actual body and blood of Jesus, it is considered appropriate to worship them as God.

Catholic teaching on this issue was clearly laid down at the Council of Trent (A.D. 1545-1563). The thirteenth session of the Council in October 1551 promulgated the following decree:

(Canon 1) If anyone denies that in the sacrament of the most Holy Eucharist are contained truly, really, and substantially the body and blood together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and consequently the whole Christ, but says that he is in it only as in a sign, or figure or force, let him be anathema. (Quoted in White, 162.)

Eleven years later, the twenty-second session of the Council issued a decree entitled "Doctrine Concerning the Sacrifice of the Mass." The second chapter of the decree states:

And inasmuch as in this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the mass is contained and immolated [sacrificed] in an unbloody manner the same Christ who once offered Himself in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross, the holy council teaches that this is truly propitiatory and has this effect, that if we, contrite and penitent, with sincere heart and upright faith, with fear and reverence, draw nigh to God, we obtain mercy and find grace in seasonable aid. For, appeased by this sacrifice, the Lord grants the grace and gift of penitence and pardons even the gravest crimes and sins. (Quoted in White, 162-63.)

On the matter of worshiping the "host" (from Latin for "victim"), Trent declared: "If anyone says that in the holy sacrament of the Eucharist the only-begotten Son of God is not to be adored even outwardly with the worship of latria (the act of adoration) . . . and is not to be set before the people publicly to be adored, and that the adorers are idolaters: let him be anathema." (Quoted in Geisler & MacKenzie, 257.)

This is still the official doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. The matter is expressed this way in the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice: "The victim is one and the same: the same now offers through the ministry of the

priests, who then offered himself on the cross; only the manner of offering is different." "In this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner." (Quoted in White, 164-65.)

I cannot accept the Roman Catholic claim of that the elements of the Lord's Supper become, through priestly consecration, the literal body and blood of Christ and thus constitute a literal sacrifice of Christ. My reasons for denying this claim are as follows:

1. When Jesus said, in reference to the bread and wine, "This is my body" and "this is my blood" (see, Mat. 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Lk. 22:14-20, and 1 Cor. 11:23-26), he clearly was speaking metaphorically. In Mat. 26:28 the wine is said to be the "blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." This is universally understood to be a reference to the blood that Christ shed on the cross (see, Heb. 9:11-28). Since the crucifixion had not yet happened, the "blood of the covenant" did not yet exist, so it could not literally be present in the cup to which Christ referred. This is confirmed by the fact Mat. 26:29 speaks of the wine as "fruit of the vine" *after* its "consecration" and 1 Cor. 11:26-28 refers to the elements as "bread" and "the cup" *after* their "consecration." Elsewhere Jesus spoke of himself as a vine, a door, and the good shepherd, and no one contends these metaphors must be taken literally.

Moreover, if the wine of the Lord's Supper actually was changed into blood, there undoubtedly would have been some controversy or discussion about the propriety of drinking it. As Robert Stein points out:

We must remember the context of the Last Supper. It involved Jews who were well acquainted with the Old Testament prohibition against drinking blood (for example, Lev. 3:17; 7:26-27; 17:14). If the disciples literally believed that they were being told to drink blood, one would have expected them to protest strongly. One need only recall Peter's protest in Acts 10:9-16 when he was commanded to eat nonkosher meat to see how difficult it would have been for the disciples to drink real blood. Yet they exhibited no qualms in drinking the cup Jesus gave them. The early church also encountered no problems from its Jewish members in this respect. Stein, 210-11.

Given that Jesus' intact body was in the presence of the disciples when he instituted the Lord's Supper, they never would have thought the bread and wine were Christ's literal body and blood. Jesus was hosting the symbolic meal known as the Passover, and his remarks would have been understood within that context.

2. Without going into detail, Jn. 6:53-57 has nothing to do with the institution of the Lord's Supper. Jesus did not institute that rite until shortly before his crucifixion. His comments about the need to "eat his flesh" and "drink his blood" are a metaphorical reference to the need to appropriate (through faith) his life-sustaining (as are food and drink) sacrifice (the giving of his body and blood). In other words, one must by faith partake of the benefits of his sacrifice to live.

3. One's senses detect no literal transformation of the bread and wine into flesh and blood. They still look, feel, smell, and taste like bread and wine. If the senses cannot be trusted to identify the body of Christ, it is hard to understand Jesus' appeal to the senses as proof of his resurrection (e.g., Lk. 24:39; Jn. 20:27).

4. Even if the bread and wine became the literal body and blood of Christ, there is absolutely nothing in Scripture to indicate that a special class of Christians called "priests" has anything to do with effecting the transformation. In fact, it seems contrary to the known ways of God in Scripture to grant any creature (priest) the power to transform other created things (bread and wine) into the actual body of the Creator (Christ).

5. The idea that Christ's sacrifice on the cross literally is continued or re-presented in the Eucharist is contrary to the Scriptures. Christ's death is repeatedly spoken of as a past act, not an ongoing event. He *died* for our sins, an atoning act that has perpetual consequences, but he does not continue dying for them. See, Rom. 5:6, 5:8, 6:10, 8:34, 14:9, 14:15; 1 Cor. 8:11, 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:15; Gal. 2:21; 1 Thess. 4:14; Heb. 7:27, 9:12, 9:15, 9:20, 9:22-29, 10:10-18; 1 Pet. 3:18. On the contrary, his resurrection was a conquest of death (Acts 2:24; Rom. 6:9; 2 Tim. 1:10), a fact put in question by the notion of an ongoing literal sacrifice.

6. Given my understanding of these matters, the worship of the bread and wine is idolatry, the worshipping of God in the form of an image. See, Ex. 20:4-6.

### **Penance**

According to Roman Catholic doctrine, to obtain God's forgiveness for any "mortal sins" committed after baptism, the believer must receive absolution of the sins from a properly ordained priest. (The classification of sins as "mortal" and "venial" is a Catholic creation. There is no definitive list of what they consider to be mortal sins, but they include breaking the Ten Commandments, pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, sloth, practically all sex offenses, and skipping mass on Sunday morning. Boettner, 200.) Absolution is received through what is commonly called "Confession." Catholic scholar Ludwig Ott describes the practice as follows:

The Sacrament of Penance . . . is that Sacrament by which the sinner, who repents of his sins, acknowledges them sincerely and has the will to render atonement, has his sins, committed after his Baptism, remitted in the absolution pronounced by the priest. The word penance is also used to designate a particular part of the Sacrament of Penance, i.e., the satisfaction. (Quoted in White, 129-30.)

As James R. White explains:

The Sacrament is made up of three parts: contrition, confession, and satisfaction. Contrition is the sorrow for sin; confession the action of confessing those sins to

the priest to receive absolution for them (an action that is absolutely necessary for salvation for anyone who would commit a mortal sin after their baptism); satisfaction is undergoing some kind of penance, normally assigned by the priest, to expiate the temporal punishment for the sin(s). White, 130.

Though the priest is able to forgive the eternal guilt of mortal sins, which saves the one confessing from going to hell, he cannot remit the temporal penalty of those sins. The one confessing must satisfy that penalty by the performance of certain prescribed works ("penances"), thus mitigating the final expiation demanded in purgatory. (Purgatory is discussed below.) Boettner, 197; W. G. Bromiley, "Penance," in Elwell, 898.

The Fourth Lateran Council in A.D. 1215 decreed that every adult must confess all his or her sins to a priest at least once a year. The Council of Trent (A.D. 1551) officially accepted the practice as a sacrament and declared it to be absolutely necessary for the forgiveness of postbaptismal sin. Boettner, 198; J. G. G. Norman, "Penance; Penitence," in Douglas, 762. Trent also made it clear that in granting absolution the priest does not merely announce the forgiveness of sins but actually grants it: "Whosoever shall affirm that the priest's sacramental absolution is not a *judicial act*, but only a ministry to pronounce and declare that sins of the party confessing are forgiven, let him be anathema." Boettner, 202.

I cannot accept the Roman Catholic claim that absolution by an ordained priest is necessary to receive forgiveness of postbaptismal sins. My reasons for denying the claim are as follows:

1. Jesus instructed his disciples to pray *to God* for forgiveness and promised that such forgiveness would be granted to the faithful (Mat. 6:12, 14; Lk. 11:4).

2. When Simon sinned after his baptism, Peter told him to "Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord" (Acts 8:18-22). Peter said nothing about needing to obtain absolution of his sin from a fellow sinner. (In v. 24 Simon asked Peter and John to pray for him, *not* to forgive him.)

3. Heb. 4:16 exhorts *Christians* to approach confidently the throne of grace to receive *mercy* in their time of need. The access is through our great and perfect high priest, Jesus Christ, not through any earthly priest (4:14-15; see also, Heb. 2:17, 3:2, 4:14-15, 5:10, 7:16-17, 7:21, 7:23 - 8:1, 9:11-12).

4. 1 Tim. 2:5 says that Jesus is the only mediator between God and mankind. If the priest has the power to grant or withhold forgiveness, he is essential to one's relationship with God. That makes him a mediator.

5. Isa. 43:25 says it is *God* who forgives sins, meaning *God alone*. That is why Jesus was accused of blaspheming in granting forgiveness of people's sins. See, Mat. 9:2-3; Mk. 2:5-7; Lk. 5:20-21, 7:48-49.

6. 1 Jn. 1:9 says that if Christians confess their sins, God will forgive those sins and purify the Christian from all unrighteousness. There is no hint of involvement by a "priest" (an office, which as conceived by Catholics, does not exist in the New Testament). Even if one were to read into this text the idea of confessing sins to a "priest," the fact God promises forgiveness means it is not for the priest to decide (not a *judicial act* of the priest). At most, the priest could declare that the confessing person's sins were forgiven, but that is precisely the limitation Trent rejected (see above).

7. When God forgives sin, he does so completely (Micah 7:19; Ps. 103:12; Isa. 43:25; Heb. 10:17), so the idea that some kind of penalty ("penances") remains to be paid after God has forgiven sin is unscriptural. In fact, it denigrates the all-sufficiency of Christ's atoning sacrifice. He paid the full penalty for all sin (see, e.g., Rom. 3:25-26, 8:1; 1 Cor. 1:30; Gal. 3:13; Heb. 2:17, 10:14-15; 1 Pet. 2:24, 3:18; 1 Jn. 1:7, 2:2, 4:10).

8. There is no scriptural basis for claiming that Jesus conferred the judicial power to forgive sins on a special class of Christians. Jn. 20:21-23 and Mat. 16:19 mean that the disciples "controlled" forgiveness in the sense they were entrusted with the gospel of forgiveness (Lk. 24:45-47). As Marsh writes regarding Jn. 20:22-23:

There is no doubt from the context that the reference is to forgiving sins, or withholding forgiveness. But though this sounds stern and harsh, it is simply the result of the preaching of the gospel, which either brings men to repent as they hear of the ready and costly forgiveness of God, or leaves them unresponsive to the offer of forgiveness which is the gospel, and so they are left in their sins. (Quoted in D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* [Grand Rapids: InterVarsity, 1991], 655-56.)

The context of Mat. 18:18 is church discipline (disfellowship). In that light, it means that when the church, acting in conformity with the will of Christ (as expressed in vv. 15-17), excludes impenitent sinners from its fellowship, that exclusion has the authority of God and thus has reality in heaven. Jas. 5:16 speaks of mutual confession of sins for the purpose of prayer; it says nothing about absolution by a fellow sinner.

### **Purgatory**

According to Roman Catholic doctrine, all Christians who die with unforgiven "venial sins" or without having paid the temporal penalty due for any forgiven sins ("mortal" or "venial") must, before entering heaven, undergo a period of purifying suffering in an intermediate realm known as "purgatory." As put by Ludwig Ott, "The souls of the just which, in the moment of death, are burdened with venial sins or temporal punishment due to sins, enter Purgatory." (Quoted in Geisler & MacKenzie, 332.) According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:



(1030) 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. (Quoted in White, 182-83.)

*Indulgentiarum Doctrina*, a product of the Apostolic Constitution on the Revision of Indulgences, dated January 1, 1967, has this to say:

The doctrine of purgatory clearly demonstrates that even when the guilt of sin has been taken away, punishment for it or the consequences of it may remain to be expiated or cleansed. They often are. In fact, in purgatory the souls of those "who died in the charity of God and truly repentant, but who had not made satisfaction with adequate penance for their sins and omissions" are cleansed after death with punishments to purge away their debt. (Quoted in White, 187.)

John Hardon summarizes the doctrine this way in *The Catholic Catechism* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1975), 273-74:

The reason of faith is that nothing defiled can enter into heaven, and therefore anyone less than perfect must first be purified before he can be admitted to the vision of God. In more concrete terms, which have been carved out of centuries of the Church's reflection on revelation, there exists purgatory, in which the souls of the just who die with the stains of sins are cleansed by expiation before they are admitted to heaven. They can be helped, however, by the intercession of the faithful on earth.

Who are the souls of the just? They are those that leave the body in the state of sanctifying grace and are therefore destined by right to enter heavenly glory. Their particular judgment was favorable, although conditional. They must first be cleansed before they can see the face of God. The condition is always fulfilled.

When we speak of "stains of sins," the expression is consciously ambivalent. It first means the temporal punishment due to venial or mortal sins already forgiven as to guilt but not fully remitted as to penalty when a person dies. It may also mean the venial sins themselves, not forgiven as to guilt or punishment before death. (Quoted in White, 184.)

I cannot accept the Roman Catholic claim that Christians must first suffer in purgatory to purify them for entrance into heaven. My reasons for denying that claim are as follows:

1. When God forgives sin, he does so completely (Micah 7:19; Ps. 103:12; Isa. 43:25; Heb. 10:17), so the idea that some kind of penalty remains to be paid after God has forgiven sin is unscriptural. In fact, it denigrates the all-sufficiency of Christ's atoning sacrifice. He paid the full penalty for all sin (see, e.g., Rom. 3:25-26, 8:1; 1 Cor. 1:30; Heb. 2:17, 10:14-15; 1 Pet. 2:24, 3:18; 1 Jn. 1:7, 2:2, 4:10). As Heb. 10:14 states, "For by one offering he has made *perfect*

*forever* those who are being consecrated." It is Christ who suffered to bring us to God (1 Pet. 3:18); our own suffering does not atone for our sin.

2. The idea that humans can in any way atone for their sin is contrary to the truth that salvation is solely a matter of divine grace (see, e.g., Rom. 4:4-8, 9:30-32, 11:6; Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5).

3. Though Christians continue to succumb to sin in this life, and thus are not perfect in their own righteousness (as opposed to that imputed to them by Christ's work), all Christians alive at the Second Coming will become like Christ without having to endure a period of purifying suffering (1 Jn. 3:2; see, Phil. 3:20-21). The process of glorification, which has already begun in the lives of believers (2 Cor. 3:18), will instantly be brought to completion. If those alive at the Second Coming need not expiate their venial sins or pay off some temporal penalty, why think it is necessary for those who die before that time (especially given the Scriptures attesting to the all-sufficiency of Christ's atoning death)?

4. The concept of purgatory appears nowhere in Scripture. Catholics admit it is not taught "explicitly" in Scripture (see, Geisler & MacKenzie, 334) but claim it is implicit in 2 Maccabees 12:42-46, Mat. 12:32, 1 Cor. 3:15, and Mat. 5:26. None of these texts justify the doctrine.

2 Maccabees is not part of the inspired canon of Scripture (see section on Apocrypha below). It was not accepted as inspired by the Jewish community that wrote it, was not accepted by Jesus and the apostles as Scripture, and was not "infallibly" added to the Roman Catholic Bible until after the Protestant Reformation (A.D. 1546) in an attempt to support purgatory and prayers for the dead, two doctrines Luther attacked. In any event, it simply says Jews prayed that the sins of their fallen dead might be forgiven; it says nothing about expiatory suffering. Geisler & MacKenzie, 333-35.

Mat. 12:32 is not speaking about forgiveness in the next life after suffering for sins but the fact there will be *no* forgiveness for blasphemy of the Holy Spirit in the world to come. Absolutely nothing is said about expiatory suffering by the sinner.

1 Cor. 3:10-15 means that the bad fruit of a minister's labor, things which are inconsistent with God's eternal vision for the redeemed and thus not suited for the eternal kingdom, will not carry over into the consummated kingdom (when Christ returns). Such misdirected effort will be of no lasting value. The minister will still be saved, but only empty handed, only as one who has escaped from a fire that consumed all things. This text has nothing to do with sinners suffering to atone for sins after death.

Mat. 5:26 simply teaches that reconciliation is urgent because failure to do so will result in the full measure of justice being meted out. Spiritually, we must act immediately (do all we can -- Eph. 4:26-27) to reconcile human relationships marred by anger or we may face the full

measure of God's judgment. Again, this has nothing to do with sinners suffering to atone for their sins after death.

### **Treasury of Merit and Indulgences**

According to Roman Catholic doctrine, there is a vast storehouse of unused merit, accumulated through the deeds of Christ (primarily), Mary, and the saints, which authorized priests can apply to other Christians to satisfy some or all of the remaining temporal penalty owed for their sin. In this way, the priest is able to reduce the extent of temporal punishment that must be endured in purgatory before the deceased Christian can enter heaven. The remission of all or part of the temporal punishment due to sin is called an "indulgence." In the words of Robert G. Clouse:

In the Roman Catholic Church [an indulgence] is the remission of all or part of the debt of temporal punishment owed to God due to sin after the guilt has been forgiven. This grant is based on the principle of vicarious satisfaction, which means that since the sinner is unable to do sufficient penance to expiate all his sins, he is able to draw on the spiritual treasury formed by the surplus merits of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the saints. The authority for granting indulgences rests with the pope, although he may designate others (e.g., cardinals, bishops) to have this power, with the exception of indulgences for the dead. Robert G. Clouse, "Indulgences," in Douglas, 508.

The 1967 Catholic document *Indulgentiarum Doctrina* explains the "treasury of merit" this way:

On the contrary the "treasury of the Church" is the infinite value, which can never be exhausted, which Christ's merits have before God. . . . The treasury includes as well the prayers and good works of the Blessed Virgin Mary. They are truly immense, unfathomable, and even pristine in their value before God. In the treasury, too, are the prayers and good works of all the saints, all those who have followed the footsteps of Christ the Lord and by his grace have made their lives holy and carried out the mission the Father entrusted to them. In this way they attained their own salvation and at the same time cooperated in saving their brothers in the unity of the Mystical Body. (Quoted in White, 187.)

As for the priests' power (via the Pope) to apply this merit to individuals (grant an "indulgence"), the document states:

For "God's only-begotten Son . . . has won a treasure for the militant Church . . . he has entrusted it to blessed Peter, the keybearer of heaven, and to his successors who are Christ's vicars on earth, so that they may distribute it to the faithful for their salvation. (Quoted in White, 188.)

I cannot accept the Roman Catholic claim that a priest can apply to Christians the merit of others' good deeds to satisfy the temporal penalty that allegedly remains due after the Christian's sin has been forgiven. My reasons for denying this claim are as follows:

1. The notion that forgiven sins carry an unsatisfied temporal penalty is unscriptural and denies the all-sufficiency of Christ's atoning sacrifice (see reasons 1 and 3 under Purgatory).

2. The idea that the righteous deeds of humans can in any way atone for sins is contrary to the truth that salvation is solely a matter of divine grace (see reason 2 under Purgatory). Human works achieve nothing in that regard.

3. There is absolutely nothing in Scripture to suggest there is a pool of sin-atoning merit that may be dispensed to individuals at the discretion of sinful human beings (which, of course, includes "priests"), let alone dispensed to people who already have died. The gross abuses to which this doctrine led (the selling of indulgences) are a matter of historical record. None of the texts cited in support of this doctrine (Ex. 32:32, Job 1:5, Isaiah 53, 2 Cor. 12:15, Gal. 6:2, Col. 1:24, 2 Tim. 4:6) justify it.

### **Intercession for the Dead**

According to Roman Catholic doctrine, living Christians can aid those suffering in purgatory by prayers, indulgences, and other good works. As Catholic scholar Ludwig Ott states it, "The living Faithful on earth can come to the assistance of the souls in Purgatory by their intercessions (suffrages)." He explains that "suffrages are understood not only as intercessory prayers, but also indulgences, alms and other pious works, above all the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass." (Quoted in Geisler & MacKenzie, 347.)

I cannot accept the Roman Catholic claim that the condition of deceased Christians is affected by good works performed by others. My reasons for denying this claim are as follows:

1. I do not accept the concept of purgatory for the reasons given above, so there is no need to work for deceased Christians to be released from there.

2. The idea that the prayers and good works of a sinful human being can help satisfy the penalty of sin which those in purgatory allegedly still owe is contrary to the truth that salvation is solely a matter of divine grace, not human works.

3. Praying for the dead contradicts the example of David in 2 Sam. 12:22-23. Though he prayed fervently for his ill baby, as soon as the baby died he ceased praying. When asked why, he replied, "While the child was living, I fasted and wept, thinking, 'Perhaps the LORD will grant me the child's life.' But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to be with him, but he will not return to me."

4. There is nothing in Scripture to support the doctrine of praying for the dead. 2 Maccabees 12:42-46, which supports the claim, is not properly included in the inspired body of writings known as Scripture (see comments above and section on Apocrypha below). 2 Timothy 1:18, 1 Tim. 2:1, and Mat. 17:3 clearly are irrelevant to the issue.

### **Infant Baptism and Limbo**

According to Roman Catholic doctrine, infants are proper candidates for Christian baptism. (The act of baptizing an infant, including giving a name to the infant at that time, is sometimes called "christening.") Though infants cannot exercise faith themselves, the Catholic Church teaches that faith need not be present for baptism (or any sacrament) to be effective. Catholic authority Ludwig Ott says, "Faith, as it is not the effective cause of justification . . . need not be present. The faith which infants lack is . . . replaced by the faith of the Church." (Quoted in Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 972.) In fact, the Council of Trent (A.D. 1545-63) declared that "If anyone shall say that infants, because they have not actual faith, after having received baptism are not to be numbered among the faithful, and therefore, when they have reached the years of discretion, are to be rebaptized . . . let them be anathema."

Infants (or mental incompetents) who die without having been baptized are said to enter "limbo" (*Limbus Infantum*) rather than heaven because the stain of original sin had not been removed in baptism. In "limbo" they do not suffer the pains and deprivations of hell, but neither do they enjoy the benefits and blessedness of heaven. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 1091-92. According to Pope Innocent III (A.D. 1160-1216), the punishment of original sin is deprivation of the beatific vision of God. M. J. Harris, "Limbus," in Ferguson, 391-92. The Councils of Lyons (A.D. 1274) and Florence (A.D. 1438-45) and the canons of the Council of Trent declare positively that unbaptized infants are confined to this realm. Boettner, 190.

I cannot accept the Roman Catholic claim that infants are appropriate candidates for Christian baptism or that infants who die without having been baptized are excluded from heaven. My reasons for denying these claims are as follows:

1. The New Testament indicates that baptism always follows upon faith. See, e.g., Acts 2:41, 8:12, 10:47-48, 16:14-15, 16:32-33, 1 Cor. 1:16.

2. Col. 2:12 and 1 Pet. 3:21 indicate the need for the cognitive involvement of the one being baptized ("faith" and "pledge" or "appeal").

3. Given that baptism is accompanied by salvation/forgiveness (Acts 2:38, 22:16, 1 Pet. 3:21) and that repentance and faith are necessary for salvation/forgiveness (e.g., Jn. 3:16; Acts 2:28, 3:19, 20:21; Rom. 1:16, 10:13-15), it is inescapable that scriptural baptism requires faith on the part of the one being baptized.

4. Jesus' instruction in Mat. 28:19-20 was to make disciples by teaching and baptizing them. Infants obviously cannot be taught.

5. Ezekiel 18 makes clear that God's eternal judgment of individuals is not based on the guilt of others, so I do not accept that infants are excluded from heaven because of Adam's sin. Rather, I understand Roman 5 (the basis of the doctrine of "original sin") in terms of our inheriting a corrupted nature which inevitably leads us to actual sin (for which we are eternally condemned unless we are forgiven). Until there is a conscious and voluntary decision to sin, which can only occur after a certain age (appropriately called "an age of accountability"), there is no condemnation.

6. After David's infant son died, David, who was a prophet, proclaimed in 2 Sam. 12:23 that he would go to him. Since David is in the presence of God (see, Psalm 23; Heb. 11:32, 39-40), his dead son must have gone there also.

7. However one understands the guilt or innocence of infants, there is no scriptural basis for suggesting the existence of a realm between heaven and hell. Scripture consistently speaks of eternal judgment as having only two sides (e.g., Mat. 13:47-50).

### **Old Testament Apocrypha as Scripture**

According to Roman Catholic doctrine, Scripture, the body of divinely inspired writings, includes eleven pieces of literature (seven books and four parts of books) collectively known as the Apocrypha (or deuterocanonical books). These eleven writings, which predate the New Testament, are: Book of Wisdom (a.k.a. The Wisdom of Solomon), Sirach (a.k.a. Ecclesiasticus), Tobit, Judith, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, Baruch chaps. 1-5 (a.k.a. Baruch), Baruch chap. 6 (a.k.a. Letter of Jeremiah), Esther 10:4-16:24 (a.k.a. Additions to Esther), Daniel 3:24-90 (a.k.a. Prayer of Azariah), Daniel 13 (a.k.a. Susanna), Daniel 14 (a.k.a. Bel and the Dragon). Geisler & MacKenzie, 158-59.

The Council of Trent afforded these books full canonical status and pronounced an anathema (excommunication) on any who reject them. After enumerating the books of Scripture, including the eleven books of the Apocrypha, Trent stated: "If anyone, however, should not accept the said books as sacred and canonical, entire with all their parts . . . and if both knowingly and deliberately he should condemn the aforesaid tradition let him be anathema." (Quoted in Geisler & MacKenzie, 157-58.) The same language affirming the Apocrypha is repeated by Vatican II. *Ibid.*, 158.

I cannot accept the Roman Catholic claim that the books of the Apocrypha are properly included as part of Scripture. My reasons for denying that claim are as follows:

1. The books recognized as Scripture by the Jews at the time of Christ (and today) were the 39 books of the Protestant Old Testament, variously grouped as 22 or 24 books. This is clear from citations to writings as scripture from the second century B.C. through the writing of the

New Testament; the writings of first-century Jewish historian Josephus; Jerome's prefaces to his Vulgate translation; an ancient tradition from the Babylonian Talmud (*Baba Bathra* 14b); Jesus' comments in Mat. 23:35, Lk 11:51 (implying the same beginning and ending of the canon as in the Talmud), and Lk. 24:44 (showing the three traditional divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures); and the Prologue to Ecclesiasticus. See, Roger Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985).

In fact, the notes in the current Roman Catholic Bible (NAB) admit that the Apocrypha "are religious books used by both Jews and Christians which were not included in the collection of inspired writings." Instead, they "were introduced rather late into the collection of the Bible." (Quoted in Geisler & MacKenzie, 161.)

2. The New Testament contains no quotations from any books of the Apocrypha, despite an abundance of quotations of the Old Testament (both the Hebrew original and the Greek translation).

3. No council of the entire church during the first four centuries A.D. favored the Apocrypha, and many individuals strongly opposed these books (e.g., Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Origen, Jerome). The Council of Trent was the first official proclamation of the Roman Catholic Church on the Apocrypha, and it came more than 1500 years after the books were written, in an obvious polemical response to Protestantism. Norman Geisler & William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 268-69.

4. At Qumran (site of the "Dead Sea Scrolls"), no commentaries were found on any books of the Apocrypha and only the books of the Protestant-Jewish Old Testament were found in the special parchment and script. *Ibid.*, 270.

5. With the possible exception of 2 Esdras, all of the books of the Apocrypha were written in the intertestamental period, after the Jews believed the prophetic spirit had departed from Israel and before Spirit-filled John the Baptist appeared "to make ready the way for the Lord." *Ibid.*, 271-72.

6. The appearance of some books of the Apocrypha in ancient Greek manuscripts (oldest being from the 4th century) is readily explained by the fact these books were a respected part of Jewish religious literature. The breach with Jewish oral tradition, the alienation between Jews and Christians, and the general ignorance of Semitic languages outside of Palestine and Syria eventually led to uncertainty about the O.T. canon among Christians, primarily in the Western church. In this regard, it is important to note that none of the great Greek manuscripts contain all of the Apocryphal books. In fact, only four are found in all of them (Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, and Ecclesiasticus), and the oldest Greek manuscript excludes 1 and 2 Maccabees. No Greek manuscript has the exact list of Apocryphal books accepted by the Council of Trent. *Ibid.*, 268.

## Veneration of Relics

According to Roman Catholic doctrine, it is permissible and profitable to venerate (pay honor to) the bodily remains of deceased "saints" as well as objects that contacted a "saint" during his lifetime or contacted his bodily remains after his death. Ludwig Ott states, "It is permissible and profitable to venerate the relics of saints." (Quoted in Geisler and MacKenzie, 324-25.) Another Catholic authority defines "relics" as follows:

in the strict sense, material remains of the bodies of canonized and beatified saints; in a wider sense, those things used by canonized saints or beatified persons during their lifetime or objects that have touched their material remains [citing canons 1186-90]. Catherine Murphy, "relics," in McBrien, 1095-96.

I cannot accept the Roman Catholic claim that it is appropriate and profitable to venerate relics. My reasons for denying this claim are as follows:

1. Even if acts such as bowing and kneeling are characterized as mere "veneration" rather than "worship," a dubious distinction in the context of religious devotion, Christians are forbidden to grant or receive this kind of spiritual exaltation (see, Mat. 23:8-12). It is one thing to bow before another as a matter of social courtesy; it is quite another to do so out of reverence for the person's piety or closeness with God. Christians are all brothers. Since it is inappropriate to bestow such "veneration" on a living Christian, it also is inappropriate to bestow it on a Christian's bodily remains.

2. When Cornelius fell at Peter's feet in reverence, Peter made him get up, saying, "I am only a man myself" (Acts 10:25). Can the one who refused this display seriously be thought to accept the same kind of *action* (bowing, kneeling) if only it be characterized as veneration rather than worship?

3. There is complete absence in Scripture of veneration of any creature or physical object. Catholic scholar Ludwig Ott concedes the fact: "Holy Writ does not mention the veneration of relics." (Quoted in Geisler & MacKenzie, 325.) The apostles met multitudes of Christians in their travels, and there is absolutely no hint that any Christian ever bowed or kneeled before any of them.

## Church Government

According to Roman Catholic doctrine, the Pope has authority over all the archbishops, each of the archbishops has authority over a group of bishops, and each bishop has authority over a group of local churches (or "parishes") called a "diocese." The officer in charge of a local parish is a rector or sometimes a vicar (an assistant to or substitute for the rector). All of these officials have been ordained into the Roman Catholic "priesthood." See, Grudem, 923-25.



I cannot accept the Roman Catholic claim that the church is to be governed by a hierarchical form of government. My reasons for denying that claim are as follows (omitting my objections to the Pope's alleged universal supremacy, a subject already addressed):

1. The New Testament teaches that the office of presbyter/elder (different translations of the Greek word *presbuteros*), the office of bishop/overseer (different translations of the Greek word *episkopos*), and the office of pastor/shepherd (different translations of the Greek word *poimen*) are all the same office. This is apparent from the following:

a. In Acts 20:17 Paul sends for the "elders" of the church in Ephesus. In Acts 20:28 he reminds them they are "overseers" and commands them "to shepherd" (verb *poimaino*) the church of God.

b. In Tit. 1:5 Paul tells Titus to appoint "elders" in every city, and in Tit. 1:7 these elders are called "overseers."

c. In 1 Pet. 5:1 Peter addresses the "elders," and in 1 Pet. 5:2 he tells them "to shepherd" (verb *poimaino*) and "to oversee" (verb *episkopeo*) God's flock.

2. Those occupying this one leadership office are responsible only for the congregation of which they are a part. This is clear from the following:

a. The command to elders in 1 Pet. 5:2 is "shepherd God's flock that is *with you* [or *among you*; see, KJV, ASV, NASB]. [Watch over it], not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do."

b. The requirements for being an elder (see, 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9) and the fact elders are to be "examples" to the flock (1 Pet. 5:3) make clear that an elder must be well known by those he oversees. This suggests an intimate involvement with the group.

c. The fact each congregation is to have its own elders (see, Acts 14:23, Tit. 1:5, Jas. 1:1 with Jas. 5:14, Phil. 1:1, Acts 15:2, and Acts 20:17) suggests that their responsibility is limited to one congregation. If they could share elders, then each congregation would not need its own.

d. Nowhere in the New Testament do we see elders of one local church governing another.

3. Given that God has addressed church organization in Scripture and mentioned only a plurality of elders governing a local congregation (aided by deacons), on what basis does anyone alter that by adding their own governing structures and offices?