

**Lesson 2 – The Roman Catholic Church**  
**A Study of Religious Beliefs**  
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**Introduction:** The Roman Catholic Church is the oldest and largest denomination.

- A. When most people in the world think of Christianity they think of the teaching and example of the Catholic church.
- B. The Catholic Church is reported to have 1,050,000,000 members world wide and 50,000,000 members in the United States. How often do you hear of that church or its representatives in the news?
- C. Remember that as we study the history and doctrinal systems of a given group it will be unlikely that the average member of these groups would know any of the things that we will cover!

***I. A brief history of Catholicism.***

- A. “The Roman Catholic Church dates its beginning from the moment of Christ's selection of the apostle Peter as guardian of the keys of heaven and earth and chief of the apostles, and it claims the fisherman as its first pope.” (Handbook of Denominations, Frank S. Mead, 1990)
  - 1. The Roman Catholic organization gradually developed until in 606 AD the first Pope was appointed.
  - 2. The scriptures warned of departures and over time they came. **(Acts 20:29-30; 2 Thess. 2:3-12; 1 Tim. 4:1-4)**
  - 3. Many of the departures came out of practical need but without consulting scriptures. Many of the church councils came as a result of doctrinal problems.
- B. If we took the Bible alone, then how would we view these questions?
  - 1. Church organization – **(Acts 14:23; 1 Pt 5:1-2)**
  - 2. How to solve doctrinal differences? **(2 Tim 3:16-17; Acts 15:6, 22; 1 John 4:1-6)**

***II. How does the Catholic Church view the Bible?***

- A. The Catholic Church would view the Bible as being from God but incomplete.
  - 1. They do believe that Jesus revealed all truth to the Apostles through the Holy Spirit. **(Jn 16:12-15)**
  - 2. They also believe that all that Christ delivered was first delivered by spoken word alone and then later began to be written down. **(Jn 20:30-31, 21:24-25)**
  - 3. They claim that it was never all written down but passed on from generation to generation through “oral tradition.”
  - 4. They believe that only the Roman Catholic Church has this oral tradition and thus has a much greater truth than the Bible alone. They often say that the Catholic Church gave the world the Bible.
  - 5. They also believe that you must have an approved clergy give the proper meaning of the Bible. It requires the Holy Spirit to give the meaning to the approved clergy.
- B. How did God reveal His truths?

1. God gave an independent, verifiable source of truth by giving us a written record. **(Eph 3:3-5; 1 Cor 11:2; 2 Tim 2:15, 3:6)**
2. God promised to deliver this message “once for all” in that it would never be added to or need to be delivered again. **(Heb 9:26-28; Jude 3)**
3. How can we know that an oral tradition today had in fact been given by the apostles and accurately delivered through this means?
4. Any approach other than a written, verifiable revelation from God places you in the hands of untrustworthy men.
5. Does this oral tradition contradict itself? Does it contradict scripture?

### ***III. How does the Catholic Church view the Lord’s Supper?***

#### **A. Consider this Catholic Tract:**

Since the doctrine of the Real Presence (that Jesus is literally and wholly present--body and blood, soul and divinity--under the appearances of bread and wine) is frequently attacked by Evangelicals and Fundamentalists as "unbiblical," it's crucial that we examine the writings of the Church Fathers to discover what the earliest Christians, the people to and about whom the New Testament was written, believed about it.

But first let's look briefly at the scriptural basis for the doctrine of the Eucharist.

The Bible teaches that Jesus is really, not just symbolically, present in the Eucharist **(Matt. 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 10:16-17; 1 Cor. 11:23-29; and, most forcefully, John 6:32-71).**

<http://www.catholic.com/thisrock/1990/9002frs.asp>

#### **B. Does the scripture demand a literal presence of the body and blood of Jesus?**

1. Jesus called what they drank “fruit of the vine.” **(Mt 26:29)**
2. Paul called the “loaf” bread. **(1 Cor 11:26-27)**
3. Obviously Jesus words, "this is my body" should be taken symbolically because it falls within a long list of symbolic statements Christ said: "I am the bread," **(John 6:41)**, "I am the vine," **(John 15:5)**, "I am the door," **(John 10:7,9)**, "I am the good shepherd," **(John 10:11,12)**, "You are the world the salt, **(Matthew 5:13)**, "You are the light of the world the salt, **(Matthew 5:14)**  
<http://www.bible.ca/ntx-communion-transubstantiation.htm>
4. Every Christian drinks of the communion cup. **(Mt 26:26-28; 1 Cor 11:23-28)**
5. Is a literal offering of the blood and body of the Lord accomplished in a Mass? **(Heb 9:26-28)**

***Conclusion:*** Roman Catholicism is an evolving human movement that is in opposition to the plain teachings of the Bible

- A. There are Catholic apologetic groups that actively seek to defend Catholicism.
- B. Are you ready to loving help your friend and neighbors that are in this system of belief? **(2 Tim 2:24-26)**

## Additional Resources:

### Top ten list of why the Roman Catholic and Orthodox take the wrong view of tradition

1. Scripture itself is called "apostolic tradition" both in the Bible and the Church Fathers. It is wrong to assume every time the fathers used the word "tradition", that they are referring exclusively to "oral tradition" and not scripture.
2. The Church Fathers continued to quote scripture to refute the Gnostics and the Arians even after they misquoted scriptures of their own. The idea that the early church gave up on "proof-texting" to fight heresy and began to rely upon tradition is utterly false.
3. The "Rule of Faith" creeds drafted by the post apostolic church were 100% based upon scripture phrase by phrase. The idea that they had their origin in extra-biblical oral tradition is utterly false.
4. It is wrong to view creeds, like the Nicene creed, as proof that oral tradition continues today, since these creeds were in fact written down and being written, were no longer "oral" traditions!
5. When the Church Fathers made reference to a "oral apostolic tradition" separate from scripture, they always viewed such tradition as duplicating what the apostles later revealed in scripture as a parallel witness. In other words, all doctrines that originated from apostolic oral traditions were finally recorded in the text of scripture. The substance of Oral tradition doctrines is identical with scripture.
6. When the Church Fathers made reference to liturgical "traditions" that were not taught in scripture, they were optional and unnecessary things like drinking milk mixed with honey after being baptized, making the sign of the cross on the forehead, and never kneeling in worship. Although sola Scriptura advocates can confidently say the fathers mistakenly viewed such "traditions" as binding, Roman Catholic and Orthodox "tradition advocates" have no choice but to also take them as binding. Yet in theological schizophrenia, they claim the "tradition of the Church Fathers" must be followed, but then refuse to follow the specific traditions that the Church Fathers recorded.
7. Virtually all the apostolic fathers viewed a progressive sequence of revelation passing through three stages: 1. Oral teachings of Christ to his apostles. 2. Oral teachings of the apostles based upon Christ's oral tradition and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for new information Christ never discussed. 3. All of Christ's and the apostles teachings were recorded in scripture. The early post-apostolic church viewed scripture as the final process of complete revelation.
8. The Church Fathers viewed the scriptures as all sufficient and complete.
9. The Church Fathers believed what Paul said in Eph 3:3-5, that the scripture could be understood by merely reading it. They indicated that the scriptures themselves were clear, so clear, they even criticized the heretics for getting it wrong. If those outside the church and common pew dwellers are unable to understand the Bible themselves as the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches teach, then why did the church expect the heretics to understand the Bible with their own human skills? (Tertullian, The Flesh of Christ, ch 20), (Athanasius, On the Incarnation of the Word, 56), (Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity, Book 1, 35), (Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity, Book 7, 16)
10. When Basil and the Arians both claimed their tradition was correct, Basil said, "**let God-inspired Scripture decide between us; and on whichever side be found doctrines in harmony with the word of God, in favour of that side will be cast the vote of truth.**" (Basil, Letter 189, 3) This proves that scripture was viewed by the Church Fathers as the supreme court of determining truth, when traditions contradict each other. Today, the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches each claim their tradition is the "true apostolic tradition". They would do well to follow the advice of Basil and let scripture decide!

From: <http://www.bible.ca/sola-scriptura.htm>