



**You have talked about the Catholic Doctrine of the Church. What is it, and how does it differ from what Protestants believe?**

The Catholic Doctrine of the Church – taught by Our Lord Himself and held from the beginning by the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, Old Catholic, and Oriental branches of the Church – is the belief that the Church on earth is a divine institution established and structured by Jesus Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It is the Body of Christ on earth today which continues the Incarnation in its fullness until Jesus returns at the end of time.

In other words, the Catholic Church does all of the things Jesus did: makes disciples, makes Christ and His Atonement actually present, heals the sick, forgives sins, blesses marriages, makes Apostles, authoritatively proclaims the Gospel and interprets God’s revelation.

As a result of the severe abuses in the Western Church in the late Middle Ages, the Protestant reformers and/or their successors rejected the belief that the Church was a “visible” [physical] divine institution and taught that the visible Church on earth is solely a human organization whose primary purpose is to provide inspiration, fellowship, and education. (They taught that it is only the person’s own individual spiritual relationship with Christ that mediates God’s grace to him/her.)

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The Church, as Catholics understand it, is dogmatically defined in the Nicene Creed as One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic.

**One**

– Jesus Christ was the one full revelation of God and His Will which we will receive until Christ comes to earth again at the end of time. There is objective truth; God is Absolute Truth.

(All differing theologies are not equally valid. All differing views of the Church are not equally authentic. It is not true that “it doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you are sincere.”)

– There is one true Church. (Much important work and significant ministry is done by many Christian religious bodies, groups, organizations, sodalities, guilds, and societies which themselves do not have the elements necessary to be true branches of the one Church.)

– Every branch of the Catholic Church (including the Roman Catholic since the Second Vatican Council, 1962-1965) teaches that all persons who have validly received the Sacrament of Holy Baptism – regardless of the ecclesial body in which it was administered – are members of the one true Catholic Church. Those Baptised persons who are members of ecclesial bodies which are not authentic branches of the one Church, however, are not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church.

- Since 1870 Roman Catholicism has dogmatically taught that in order to be a true branch of the one Catholic Church an ecclesial body must be in full communion with and under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome and must accept the whole Christian Faith as defined by the Roman Church.
- Since 1888 Anglicanism has officially taught that in order to be a true branch of the one Catholic Church an ecclesial body must at least:
  - validly administer three of the seven Sacraments: Holy Baptism, Holy Eucharist, and Holy Orders (the Ordination of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons in the Apostolic Succession)
  - accept the Old and New Testaments as the revealed Word of God which contain all things necessary to salvation
  - accept the Apostles and Nicene Creeds as the fundamental dogmatic statement of the Christian Faith

## Holy

- The Church is a divine, not human, institution, established and structured by Jesus Christ who continues as its active head and is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The Church mediates saving grace to God’s people.
- The Church on earth is a continuation of the Incarnation which maintains Christ’s earthly ministry in its fullness. Therefore the Church and the seven Sacraments it administers are the principal means by which God conveys grace to His people today.
- Since the Second Vatican Council many theologians have talked about the Church as not only sacramental but as the fundamental Sacrament itself. It is, they point out, “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given by Christ as sure and certain means by which we receive that grace.” The outward and visible [physical] sign is the institution Christ Himself established and structured. The inward and spiritual grace is the Kingdom of Heaven (or of God) which the Church makes objectively present. (Like all the Sacraments, if the Church is to be real or authentic, we are not free to alter the structure which Christ established.) It is an historic fact that Jesus never wrote a word of Scripture. Christ established a sacramental Church which He empowered to continue His ministry until He returns to earth, and He had a great deal to say about that Church.

## Catholic

Catholic literally means “universal.” The Catholic Church is:

- universal in the world
- The Church is for all people everywhere. It is the revealed Will of God that all persons be members of the Catholic Church, and all persons have the right to access, membership, and participation.
- Active participation in the Church is a central and indispensable part of the Christian Life. The institutional Church is not an optional element of Christianity which one need use only when fellowship, inspiration, and education are wanted. Authentic Christianity is corporate [communal]; the Church is the family of God. While true Christianity is personal, it is not individualistic.
- The one Church is world-wide. A true branch of the Church is not a free-standing local body; it is always organically joined to the Universal Church.
- universal in time
- The Catholic Church maintains unaltered throughout history “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” by Jesus Christ, neither added to nor subtracted from.
- The Church on earth will, by Christ’s promise, continue until He comes again.
- universal in creation

- The Church is not limited by time and space. Death cannot separate Christians from the Church.
- The Church has three parts:
  - "The Church Militant:" the Church on earth
  - "The Church Expectant:" the Church in Paradise (or "the Nearer Presence of God"), the members of which are called the Faithful Departed
  - "The Church Triumphant:" the Church in Heaven, the members of which are called the Saints

## Apostolic

- The Catholic Church has and maintains the full Apostolic authority which Christ gave His disciples and which was conferred on them by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The Apostolic Succession is continued by the valid administration of the Sacrament of Holy Orders: the Ordination of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons.
- The Church's Apostolic authority is:
  - Auctoritas: expertise and theological competence
  - Imperium: institutional jurisdiction
  - Magisterium: teaching authority; the authoritative interpretation of God's revelation – including Holy Scripture – and its application to new situations as they develop through history
- The Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, Old Catholic, and Oriental branches of the Catholic Church teach that:
  - Christ gave this authority and power to His Apostles as a body
  - it is exercised by a General [world-wide] Council of all the Bishops in the Apostolic Succession
  - it is indefectible: i.e. while a Council can err, the Catholic Church cannot remain in error; in the fullness of time the Holy Spirit will lead the Church into all truth
- The First Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church in 1870 dogmatically taught that Christ conferred the Magisterium on St Peter alone and that it is continued by his successors the Bishops of Rome. Furthermore, the Petrine Magisterium when exercised ex cathedra is infallible in matters of faith and morals. Since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) many Roman Catholic Bishops and theologians – including John Paul II and Benedict XVI – have called for a "re-reception" (i.e. re-definition) of the Vatican I understanding of the role of the Bishop of Rome in the Magisterium and a renewed emphasis on the role of the Bishops as a body.

## Catholic

Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, Old Catholic, Churches of the East (Armenian Apostolic, Coptic, etc.)

– Apostolic Foundation

– **Catholic Doctrine of the Church**

*The Church on earth is the divine Body of Christ: the continuation of the Incarnation, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to continue Christ's ministry in its fullness. The Church on earth is itself sacramental, "the fundamental Sacrament."*

The Catholic Church is one with three parts: Militant (on earth), Expectant (in Paradise), Triumphant (in Heaven).

– **Catholic Doctrine of Salvation**

*Salvation is a life-long process or journey of Justification + Sanctification, not a predestined state nor a transaction or single event.*

– **Seven Sacraments**

*Physical channels of grace; ex opere operato (objective reality)*

including the Sacrament of Holy Orders: Ordination of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons in the Apostolic Succession

– Historic liturgy (sacrament centered)

– Roman Catholic: Papal dogmas

– Dominically-instituted absolute Universal Primacy

– Infallibility in matters of faith and morals

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## Protestant

Descendants of Luther\* (Lutheran, European Evangelical); Calvin (Reformed, Presbyterian, Congregational); Zwingli ("Free Churches")

– **Reformation Foundation**

– **Protestant Doctrine of the Church**

*The Church is a human institution primarily for fellowship, education, and inspiration. Each person's relationship with God is solely individual; saving grace is not mediated by the Church.*

The Church Expectant is rejected.

– **Protestant Doctrines of Salvation**

– *Predestination and Election* (Calvin)

– *Individual acceptance of Jesus Christ as one's personal Lord and Savior*

– **Two Sacraments/Ordinances**

*Sacraments/ordinances are symbols (subjective reminders)*

Ordination is not a sacrament;

"Priesthood of All Believers"

– **Generally non-liturgical (sermon centered)**

\* Although predominantly Protestant, world-wide Lutheranism has a spectrum of faith and practice. A few national Lutheran churches have preserved or restored the Apostolic Succession and a more "high church" culture.