

## THE STUDY OF WORLD RELIGIONS

### Lesson 8

## ROMAN CATHOLICISM

### I. Historically

“The first two centuries of the Christian era was a period in which the churches remained true to the teaching of Christ and the apostles. Then there was a decline in Christianity when pagans were invited and accepted into the Christian Church, opening the way for the development of Roman Catholicism as we know it today.”<sup>1</sup>

A. “Roman Catholic Church is the largest body of Christians in the world. In fact, the church has more followers than all other Christian groups combined and more than any non-Christian religion.”<sup>2</sup>

### B. The early church

1. The first 300 years can be broken down into four major sections.

- a. The apostles
- b. The Ante-Nicene Fathers
- c. The Nicene Fathers
- d. The Post-Nicene Fathers

2. The recognition of Christianity

“Constantine the Great was the first Roman emperor to become a Christian. In 313, Constantine and Licinius, the emperor of Rome's eastern provinces, granted freedom of worship and equal rights to all religious groups in the empire. By the late 300's, Christianity had become a favored religion of the empire.”<sup>3</sup>

3. Conflict with the East

“Beginning in the 400's , the Eastern churches began to drift away from the authority of Rome and from the church in the West.”<sup>4</sup>

### C. The Middle Ages

“In AD 476, barbarian forces led by the Germanic general Odoacer deposed the last emperor of the West Roman Empire. Many historians use this date to mark the end of the Roman Empire in the West and the start of the Middle Ages.”<sup>5</sup>

“Amidst the confusion and change there remained one stable institution. It represented order and authority and was a means of preserving many elements of classical culture. This institution was the Roman Catholic church. It became the heart of medieval society, influencing almost every aspect of life.”<sup>6</sup>

“During the Middle Ages, the influence and power of the church reached their peak.”<sup>7</sup>

“The collapse of the West Roman Empire meant that no one power had political control in the West. Beginning with the reign of Pope Gregory the Great in 590, the church set out to create a Christian world in the West. Its chief instruments were the papacy and monasticism.”<sup>8</sup>

1. “The papacy gradually replaced the empire as the center of authority in Western Europe.”<sup>9</sup>
2. “Monasticism created centers of Christian society, renewed the spiritual life of religious communities, and helped transform a dying Western culture into a Christian civilization.”<sup>10</sup>

“In the early 700's, Muslims, who followed the religion of Islam, conquered Spain. Also in the 700's, Viking raiders from northern Europe began to attack England and other Christian countries. In the midst of these disruptions, the church stood out as the major force for unifying and civilizing the West.”<sup>11</sup>

“The darkest period in the history of the church was 870-1050 when bribery, corruption, immorality and bloodshed brought shame on the papacy.”<sup>12</sup>

3. “Charlemagne, the greatest king of the Franks, became one of the most important people in European as well as church history. During his reign, he laid a foundation for the organized, civilized society later built in Western Europe.”<sup>13</sup>
4. “Cluniac reform was the name given to a vast reform movement within the church. This movement began during the 900's and lasted about 200 years. It was centered in the Benedictine abbey of Cluny, France.”<sup>14</sup>
5. “Split with the East. Serious splits emerged from the disputes of the 800's and 1000's. The disputes led to a formal division between the Eastern churches that employed the Byzantine rite (Eastern Orthodox Church) and the Western church that followed the Latin rite and acknowledged the primacy of the bishop of Rome.”<sup>15</sup>
6. “Innocent III became pope in 1198. Under Innocent, papal influence over public life in Christian Europe reached its peak.”<sup>16</sup>

7. "The Great Schism. From 1378 to 1417, a controversy called the Great Schism deeply divided the church. During this period, two and later three churchmen claimed to be the rightful pope at the same time. Each man had his own following, his own College of Cardinals, and his own administrative organization. Each pope demanded obedience from the Christian faithful, which caused much confusion and doubt."<sup>17</sup>

"In 1417, bishops and other high-ranking clergymen meeting at the Council of Constance finally ended the Great Schism by electing Martin V as the single rightful pope."<sup>18</sup>

#### D. The Reformation and Counter Reformation

##### 1. The Reformation

"In 1517, the Augustinian monk Martin Luther issued his famous Ninety-Five Theses in Wittenberg, Germany."<sup>19</sup>

##### 2. The Counter Reformation

"The counter reformation was the Roman Catholic's self-reforming reaction to the Protestant Reformation. It is usually understood as extending from about the mid-1500's to the end of the Thirty Year's War (1618-1648)."<sup>20</sup>

- a. "A leading force in the Counter Reformation was the Jesuit Order or Society of Jesus. Saint Ignatius Loyola founded the Jesuits in 1534, and Paul III confirmed the order in 1540."<sup>21</sup>
- b. "Perhaps the greatest single force in renewing Catholic life and worship was the Council of Trent (1545-1563)."<sup>22</sup>

- E. "Vatican Council I. In 1846, Pius IX became pope. He ruled until 1878--the longest reign in papal history. Pius' reign reached a high point when he summoned Vatican Council I (1869-1870). The council defined as Catholic doctrine the pope's primacy over the whole church. It also declared him to be infallible--that is, incapable of error when, as supreme head of the church, he formally defines matters of faith and morals."<sup>23</sup>

- F. "Vatican Council II was the most influential event in the modern history of the Catholic Church. From 1962-1965, church leaders met in Rome, where they established far-reaching reforms in many areas of church life. The council also proclaimed the church's new, liberal position in its relations with non-Catholics."<sup>24</sup>

"Pope John XXIII led the council. The council issued 16 documents that tried to give a deeper understanding of the church and its doctrine and help the church serve the needs of the modern world. The council also involved the church more fully in the ecumenical movement to unite all Christians."<sup>25</sup>

Stilson concludes that “the papacy is an Italian institution as it was built on the ruins of the Roman Empire. There were three methods which were used to bring the papacy to power: (1) political alliances, (2) deception as the Forged Decretals, and (3) armed force. The papal state has amassed large revenues by selling church offices and has been able to maintain the most luxurious court in Europe.”<sup>26</sup>

## II. Theologically

### A. Roman Catholic Beliefs

“A Catholic's basic faith in God involves certain doctrines. Catholics believe that these doctrines are true because the Bible and the church's tradition are an assurance that God has revealed them. These teachings can be found in declarations by Church councils and popes, and in short statements called creeds.”<sup>27</sup>

“These creeds summarize Catholic doctrines on (1) the Trinity and creation; (2) sin and salvation; (3) the nature of the church; and (4) life after death. These doctrines, in turn, form the basis of Catholic morality.”<sup>28</sup>

#### 1. The Trinity and creation

The Catholic Church is orthodox in its position on the Trinity and creation. One God subsisting in three persons, each Person is distinct and is truly God. Yet there is only one God.

#### 2. Sin and salvation

##### a. Original Sin

“Man's [Adam] first sin fixed the fate of the human race. This sin, called original sin, is our bitter heritage, and the inevitable condition of man from the hour when he first sees the light.”<sup>29</sup>

##### b. Mortal Sin

“A mortal sin means exactly what the word implies: a sin which kills. To sin mortally is to die as a child of God, for love is extinguished. When by our action, or by some interior decision of our will, we virtually express a complete contempt for God and His laws, and therefore in reality are sacrificing Him to some creature, to some selfish desire, to some passing enjoyment, then indeed we are speaking of mortal sin.”<sup>30</sup>

##### c. Venial Sin

“We speak of venial sin when the following three conditions--or any one of them--are absent: when the actual matter of the transgression is not of sufficient gravity; when the person involved

is blamelessly unaware of the fact of the wrongdoing; when the choice of the will was in any way obstructed or impeded. One who has committed mortal sin is, as we said before, displeasing to God in himself. But in the case of venial sin, he himself is not displeasing to God but only what he has done. By committing venial sin we do not completely sever our ties with God."<sup>31</sup>

For a statement concerning salvation see II2a "baptism."

### 3. The nature of the church

"The chief cornerstone of Roman Catholicism is its teaching that it is the only true church as founded by Jesus Christ."<sup>32</sup>

"When someone asks where the Catholic finds the substance of his belief, the answer is: from the living teaching authority. This authority consists of the Pope and the bishops of the time, whose duty it is to promote the knowledge of revealed truth. The Catholic is thus freed from the necessity of personal investigation into doctrinal questions, and can live in a quiet certainty that the doctrine of the Church is the doctrine of Christ Himself."<sup>33</sup>

"The final pronouncement as to the actual fact of inspiration, and the preparation of the canon or list of the books composing the Bible, *belongs to the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.*"<sup>34</sup>

"Should, however, any serious difference of opinion arise [in the interpretation of Scripture], it is then left to the Church herself to solve the question by an infallible pronouncement."<sup>35</sup>

"We have seen that the Church as a whole cannot err."<sup>36</sup>

### 4. Life after death

"According to Catholic doctrine, life does not end with the death of the body. Instead, the soul leaves the body and goes to heaven, purgatory, or hell."<sup>37</sup>

"Purgatory is a temporary state for souls who die in God's love but must be purified of any remaining imperfections and/or make amends for sins already forgiven."<sup>38</sup>

"The Church teaches us that this is a place or condition of temporal punishment for those who, departing this life in God's grace, are yet not entirely free from venial faults, or have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgression."<sup>39</sup>

"They are assisted by our prayer, our almsgiving and indulgences, by the sacrifice of the Mass, and so are sooner able to behold the glory of God in Heaven."<sup>40</sup>

"The Church has always prayed for the dead for the remission of their sins."<sup>41</sup>

## B. Worship And Liturgy

“Catholics worship only God. But they also have deep respect for holy persons closely related to God, especially Mary, the mother of Jesus. Catholics also show respect for holy places and objects, such as Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus, and the cross on which Christ was crucified.”<sup>42</sup>

“The acts of worship that Catholics perform together are called the liturgy. The central act of liturgy is the Eucharist, also called the Mass. Other important liturgical acts include the seven sacraments and various sacramentals.”<sup>43</sup>

### 1. The Eucharist, or Mass

“The Eucharist is the celebration of the Lord's Supper. According to Catholic teaching, the priest, acting in Jesus' name and with His power, changes bread and wine into Christ's body and blood. Catholics also believe the Mass presents again the sacrifice Christ offered of Himself.”<sup>44</sup> (Cf Heb. 7:27; 9:12,26,28; 10:10)

“In the Mass, sins are forgiven, God's help is given, and the members of the congregation are closely united with their fellow human beings.”<sup>45</sup>

“The Mass is a sacrifice.”<sup>46</sup>

“The Mass is a sacramental sacrifice. That which happened on Calvary now happens by means of representative signification. A careful study of the Consecration prayers will make it clear that the signs themselves here indicate a sacrifice. If they do this, then there *is* a sacrifice.”<sup>47</sup>

“The Mass is not a repetition of the sacrifice of Calvary:.... Mass is only the means by which the fruits of Christ's suffering and death are applied to men in particular.”<sup>48</sup>

The Mass has two main divisions:

#### a. The Liturgy of the Word

“Proclaims the message of the Gospel.”<sup>49</sup>

#### b. The Eucharistic liturgy, has two parts.

1b. “In the first part, the gifts of bread and wine are offered to God and are changed into the body and blood of Christ.”<sup>50</sup>

2b. “In the second part of the Eucharistic liturgy, the congregation receives Christ in Holy Communion. In receiving Communion, Roman Catholics eat the body of Jesus Christ and drink His blood in the appearances of bread and wine.”<sup>51</sup>

## 2. The seven sacraments

"The seven sacraments are ceremonial signs of God's action in people's lives. These signs take the form of words and gestures that are symbols of an interior grace from God."<sup>52</sup>

### a. Baptism

"Baptism is a ceremony in which a child or adult is cleansed of sin to begin a new life with God. Water poured, in the name of the Trinity, over the head of the person being baptized is a sign of the person's cleansing from sin. Because water is necessary to life, the baptismal water also is a sign of new spiritual life. Baptism also marks the beginning of a Catholic's oneness with Christ and entry into the Church."<sup>53</sup>

"Through faith and through baptism--sealed by love--His death lives on in unsurpassed fruitfulness."<sup>54</sup>

"All share in this redemptive power of the suffering and death of Christ. No one is excluded. He brought eternal happiness to the souls of those who died before His coming. He still communicates His redemptive power by faith and the sacraments to those who live today."<sup>55</sup>

"A new birth, from which proceeds a new life, is the outcome of it."<sup>56</sup>

"The Church calls baptism the door or entrance to the spiritual life, through which we become members of Christ and of the body of the Church."<sup>57</sup>

"To all those who have the will to receive it, and a true sorrow for sin, baptism is the source of spiritual rebirth into supernatural life."<sup>58</sup>

"Baptism cannot be repeated; it binds man forever to Christ and to His Church."<sup>59</sup>

"The Church places this sacrament first and, ... designates it as *necessary* to salvation."<sup>60</sup>

### b. Confirmation

"Confirmation is a sign of a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It enables baptized people to grow to spiritual adulthood so that they can bear Christian witness with courage."<sup>61</sup>

### c. Eucharist, or Mass

"Mass is the central act of Catholic's worship of God."<sup>62</sup>

d. Penance

"Penance, also called confession, is a sacrament in which Roman Catholics confess their sins to a priest, express their sincere sorrow for having sinned, and promise to try not to sin in the future. The priest forgives the sinner in God's name. The effect of penance is to reconcile the Roman Catholic to God and to the Christian community."<sup>63</sup>

e. Holy orders

"Holy orders is the sacrament in which men chosen by the church are made deacons, priests, or bishops. They become special ministers of God's word and sacraments."<sup>64</sup>

f. Marriage

"Marriage is a sacrament in which a man and woman promise themselves to each other for life. This sacrament helps them be faithful to the duties of marriage and family life."<sup>65</sup>

g. Anointing of the sick

"Anointing of the sick is a sacrament given to people who are dangerously ill or very old. The priest anoints the person with oil, a sign of curing. The priest prays that the person will receive the grace of the Holy Spirit, so he or she may be freed from sin, comforted and strengthened in soul, and restored to health."<sup>66</sup>

"Extreme Unction. The Church, which by baptism brought into existence the child of God, and from then on has guided it through life, is also waiting to be present at the last hour of man."<sup>67</sup>

"The dying Catholic surrenders himself to the love and care of Mother Church."<sup>68</sup>

"It is at this moment that she offers him the sacrament which initiates him into everlasting life."<sup>69</sup>

C. Church Organization

1. The Pope

"The pope, who is the bishop of Rome, holds the church's highest office. Catholics believe that he is Jesus' representative on earth and a successor of St. Peter, the first pope. They regard him as the spiritual leader of the worldwide church."<sup>70</sup>

"The visible head of the Church, and the deputy of Jesus Christ, has had his residence in Rome ever since the time of St. Peter. He is called Papa (Pope) which means Father. The city which was once the heart of the Roman Empire has gradually become the heart of the world-empire of Christ, and 260 Popes have succeeded each other in a dynasty which is unequalled in history."<sup>71</sup>



"The Pope is a man and no more. Like all other men he has to acknowledge, 'I am a man and nothing human is alien to me.'"72

"The Pope holds the primacy, that is to say, the highest governing and teaching function in the Church."73

a. Papal Infallibility

"Is a charism, or free gift of the grace of the Holy Spirit, by which, under certain circumstances, he is prevented from all possibility of error."74

"Infallibility was always a point of faith, but, since it has been formally defined as a dogma of the Church [1870], it can no longer be denied without falling into actual heresy."75

"The Pope is only infallible on subjects of faith and morals. As soon as he is on ordinary ground, and dealing with such subjects as, for instance, art, science or politics, his judgment has only a relative value."76

"We must remember that the Pope is not only a spiritual but an earthly monarch. This territory [is] known as Vatican City. The Pope, therefore, is not a subject of any other power. He has his own postal and telegraph services, his own radio station, etc., and is thus assured of his essential rights."77

2. The College of Cardinals

"Cardinals are generally clergymen. They are appointed by the pope to be his main advisers. They have the responsibility of electing a new pope."78

3. "The Roman Curia serves as the pope's administrative arm. The Curia consists of the Secretariat of State and a number of other departments."79

4. Bishops

"Bishops are considered successors of the apostles. The pope appoints bishops, and they are responsible to him."80

5. Dioceses and parishes

a. "A diocese is a territorial district of the church."81

"By joining several dioceses together, a province or archdiocese is formed, of which one of the bishops becomes the archbishop or metropolitan."82

b. "A diocese is divided into parishes."

6. Religious institutes

"Religious institutes are societies of Catholic men or women who live together under a set of regulations called a rule. They take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Well-known Catholic institutes for men include the Jesuits, the Franciscans, and the Dominicans."<sup>83</sup>

D. Miscellaneous Issues

1. Prayer for the dead / c.f. IIA4

2. Mary, the earthly mother of Jesus

a. Mary is looked upon as the antitype of Eve.<sup>84</sup>

b. She is called the co-redemptrice.<sup>85</sup>

"Endowed as she is, however, with so many privileges, she can be the supreme mediator between men and Christ."<sup>86</sup>

c. Consistently identified as the mother of the Messiah / Mother of God.<sup>87</sup>

d. "Our Lady remained a virgin after the birth of Christ."<sup>88</sup>

e. "One of the privileges enjoyed by Our Lady is that of her *Immaculate Conception* or complete immunity from original sin."<sup>89</sup>

f. "Arising out of the teaching on the Immaculate Conception ... there also developed a belief in the assumption of Our Lady, soul and body, into heaven."<sup>90</sup>

g. "Mary is called by Catholic writers the mediatrix of all graces. [Mediatrix] means that her power of intercession is so great, that her Son has graciously included her in His plan of salvation as a dispenser of graces to her fellow men."<sup>91</sup>

3. "Good works"

"Good works are, therefore, the reason for which God gives the reward of eternal life."<sup>92</sup>

"The state of grace is not only a sanctifying state, but is also demands that we should earn the wages of supernatural life by our own labors."<sup>93</sup>

"He promised a reward for our good deeds. He promised Heaven as the inheritance of His obedient children."<sup>94</sup>

4. "The Kingdom / Dispensational thoughts"

See IIC1a. The Church operates as a theocracy combining both Church and State.

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<sup>1</sup> Stilson, Max. Leading Religions of the World. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1964), 87.

<sup>2</sup> The World Book Encyclopedia, (Vol. 16, c1988), 406.

<sup>3</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 410.

<sup>4</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 411.

<sup>5</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 411.

<sup>6</sup> Fisher, David A. World History for Christian Schools. (Greenville, South Carolina: Bob Jones University Press, 1984), 179.

<sup>7</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 411.

<sup>8</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 411.

<sup>9</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 411.

<sup>10</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 411.

<sup>11</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 411.

<sup>12</sup> Stilson, 88.

<sup>13</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 411.

<sup>14</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 411.

<sup>15</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 411.

<sup>16</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 412.

<sup>17</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 412.

<sup>18</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 412.

<sup>19</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 413.

<sup>20</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 413.

<sup>21</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 413.

<sup>22</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 413.

<sup>23</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 414.

<sup>24</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 416.

<sup>25</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 416.

<sup>26</sup> Stilson, 90.

<sup>27</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 407.

<sup>28</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 407.

<sup>29</sup> Doornik, N.G.M. A Handbook of the Catholic Faith. (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1956), 182.

<sup>30</sup> Doornik, 390.

<sup>31</sup> Doornik, 391.

<sup>32</sup> Stilson, 91.

<sup>33</sup> Doornik, 137.

<sup>34</sup> Doornik, 140 [italics his].

<sup>35</sup> Doornik, 144.

<sup>36</sup> Doornik, 149.

<sup>37</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 407.

<sup>38</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 407.

<sup>39</sup> Doornik, 460.

<sup>40</sup> Doornik, 461.

<sup>41</sup> Doornik, 461.

<sup>42</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 408.

<sup>43</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 408.

<sup>44</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 408.

- <sup>45</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 408.
- <sup>46</sup> Doornik, 303.
- <sup>47</sup> Doornik, 309 [emphasis his].
- <sup>48</sup> Doornik, 310.
- <sup>49</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 408.
- <sup>50</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 408.
- <sup>51</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 408.
- <sup>52</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 408.
- <sup>53</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 408.
- <sup>54</sup> Doornik, 195.
- <sup>55</sup> Doornik, 196.
- <sup>56</sup> Doornik, 257.
- <sup>57</sup> Doornik, 259.
- <sup>58</sup> Doornik, 259.
- <sup>59</sup> Doornik, 260.
- <sup>60</sup> Doornik, 261 [emphasis his].
- <sup>61</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 408.
- <sup>62</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 408.
- <sup>63</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 408.
- <sup>64</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 408.
- <sup>65</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 408.
- <sup>66</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 408.
- <sup>67</sup> Doornik, 343.
- <sup>68</sup> Doornik, 343.
- <sup>69</sup> Doornik, 343.
- <sup>70</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 409.
- <sup>71</sup> Doornik, 127.
- <sup>72</sup> Doornik, 127.
- <sup>73</sup> Doornik, 128.
- <sup>74</sup> Doornik, 129.
- <sup>75</sup> Doornik, 129.
- <sup>76</sup> Doornik, 129.
- <sup>77</sup> Doornik, 131.
- <sup>78</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 409.
- <sup>79</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 409.
- <sup>80</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 409.
- <sup>81</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 409.
- <sup>82</sup> Doornik, 134.
- <sup>83</sup> World Book Encyclopedia, 409.
- <sup>84</sup> Doornik, 235.
- <sup>85</sup> Doornik, 235.
- <sup>86</sup> Doornik, 235.
- <sup>87</sup> Doornik, 236,237,238.
- <sup>88</sup> Doornik, 237.
- <sup>89</sup> Doornik, 238.
- <sup>90</sup> Doornik, 241.
- <sup>91</sup> Doornik, 242.
- <sup>92</sup> Doornik, 217.
- <sup>93</sup> Doornik, 218.
- <sup>94</sup> Doornik, 219.