

COME and SEE

How the Teachings of the Catholic Church
Lead Us to Jesus Christ

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To JESUS CHRIST,
My Lord and My God.

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Chapter 1

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

Hearing the Shepherd's Voice

Jesus of Nazareth is the most influential man who ever lived. For two millennia people have worshiped Him as God and the Christ. Today His followers number in the billions and are to be found in every country on earth. His birth, death, and Resurrection are recorded in the New Testament; yet there are also a number of ancient historical writings outside of the Bible that give witness to Him. The Jewish-Roman historian Flavius Josephus, for instance, writing in 93 A.D., records the miraculous deeds of His earthly ministry, His trial and execution under Pontius Pilate, and His Resurrection from the dead. “Now there was about this time Jesus,” he writes,

a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day (*Antiquities of the Jews* 18:3:3).¹

While you have probably heard of Jesus Christ, do you really know Him? Many will enthusiastically answer, “Yes.” Yet, given the various conflicting opinions afloat in the world today about Jesus and His teachings, a degree of caution would seem to be in order. Clearly, many people have incomplete or false perceptions of Him.

¹ *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, William Whiston, translator (1737); available at sacred-texts.com.

It is the premise of this book that the original body of His followers from the New Testament era has survived to the present day; and that the Catholic Church is this body. As with Jesus, many will also unhesitatingly claim to know the Catholic Church, though in reality they hold a false view of her. Very often when people, outside of the Church as well as within, speak of Catholicism the image they project has little to do with the real faith.

The whole of Catholicism rests principally upon the Incarnation, the event by which God became man in the person of Jesus Christ. Saint John heralds this event in the opening lines of his *Gospel*, declaring,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father (1:1-3, 14).²

The Incarnation is a totally transcendent reality by which the unseen God reveals Himself to us in a material way. The One by whom “all things were made” enters into His creation, into history, taking on our human nature; and history and humanity are irrevocably changed. For example, God’s entry into history inspired the establishment of hospitals and universities. For it was by virtue of Christ’s coming that these concepts entered into the human heart and mind. The average person is unaware of the fact that the idea of the hospital developed out of the custom of Catholic monasteries to care for the sick. Likewise, the idea of the university originated from monasteries, which had become centers of learning in the Middle Ages. Opponents of the Catholic Church, raising the specter of wars waged in the name of religion, have argued that her absence from history would have rendered it less

bloody. To the contrary, her absence would have rendered it less humane. Just imagine a world without hospitals and universities.

But Christ's coming did not merely alter man's fortunes in an earthly sense. More significantly it altered his spiritual prospects. God's taking on human flesh forever elevated the flesh, reconciling it to the spirit. "Behold," says the Lord, "I make all things new" (*Rev.* 21:5). By His death on the Cross and Resurrection on the third day, Christ conquered sin and death, and filled the human heart with the hope of eternal life. "By his great mercy," says Saint Peter, "we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (*1 Pet.* 1:3).

Everything that the Catholic Church teaches and all of her liturgical practices declare the truth and beauty of God becoming man. Her liturgical calendar, for example, organizes the year into seasons and feast days based on the life of Christ, so that the passage of time becomes for us a series of lived faith lessons. The feast of Christ's Nativity, or Christmas, is preceded by Advent, a season of prayerful reflection designed to help prepare our hearts to receive the Christ Child. Christmas, moreover, corresponds to the winter solstice, at which time the days begin to grow longer and brighter, signifying the light of Christ coming into the world. Six months beforehand, the Church celebrates the nativity of Saint John the Baptist, the herald of Christ. This corresponds to the summer solstice, at which time the days begin to grow shorter and darker, in fulfillment of the Baptist's words, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (*John* 3:30).

² *The Holy Bible*: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition; jomom.honlam.org/rsvce/. All scriptural references in the text are to this edition unless otherwise noted.

The feast of the Resurrection, or Easter, is likewise preceded by a period of spiritual preparation called Lent. This concludes with the Easter Triduum, which runs from Holy Thursday evening to Easter Sunday and is the climax of the liturgical year. One of the most prominent symbols used at this time is the Paschal candle, an image of Christ “the light of the world” (*John* 9:5). This candle, ranging in height from three to four feet, is the tallest in the church. Its flame symbolizes Christ’s divinity, the pure beeswax His sacred flesh, and the wick His sacred soul.³ Five grains of incense, typically red, are stuck in the candle in the form of a cross to represent His wounds; the Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, are embossed above and below the cross to remind us that Christ is the beginning and end of all things (cf. *Rev.* 21:6); and around the cross appear the numbers of the current year to indicate He is the Lord of history.

The Paschal candle is lit at the Easter vigil to signify the Resurrection. Customarily, this is done outside, and in dramatic fashion the lit candle is processed into the church in complete darkness as the congregation sings praises to the Risen Christ. For Catholics, doctrine and practice are far more than rules and regulations; they are means of growing in holiness by incorporating the truth and love of Christ into our daily lives.

We come to know Jesus through the Church’s teachings. They define for us who He is, and who He is not. Non-Catholic Christians characteristically reject the Church’s teachings on Mary, for example, which they mistake as obstacles to knowing Christ. In reality, though, the exact opposite is true. Mary in her person, being at once Virgin and Mother, confirms who Jesus is. Her virginity verifies His divinity; her maternity verifies His humanity. Fundamentalists, who often berate Catholics for calling Mary the Mother of God,

³ Cf. Kevin Orlin Johnson, *Why do Catholics Do That?* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995), pp. 231-232.

fail to realize that this title by design says more to us about Jesus than about Mary. The Church officially sanctioned its use, in fact, at the Council of Ephesus in 431 as a means of defending the truth of the Incarnation against the false teaching of Nestorius, who denied the Babe born to Mary was truly God.

“In catechesis it is Christ, the Incarnate Word and Son of God, who is taught,” affirms Pope John Paul the Great, “—everything else is taught with reference to Him” (*Catechesi Tradendae* 6).⁴ Everything the Catholic Church teaches points to Christ: the Trinity, the sacraments, faith and works, the papacy, purgatory, the saints, the moral teachings. All Church doctrines center on Him and reveal to us something vital about Him. The one who would dispute this about a particular teaching either misunderstands the teaching or misunderstands Christ.

“And it is Christ alone who teaches,” the Pope continues, “—anyone else teaches to the extent that he is Christ’s spokesman, enabling Christ to teach with his lips” (ibid.). Many non-Catholics will find the assertion that Christ teaches *through* His Church hard to accept. Yet it is the realization of His promise to His Church in the Gospels: “He who hears you hears me” (*Luke* 10:16). The deeper reality here is that the Lord has so perfectly united Himself to the Church, His Bride, that He does not desire to act apart from her.

Appearing to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus to halt his persecution of the Church, the Lord says not, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute my Church?”, but “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (*Acts* 9:4). This same Saul, transformed by this encounter into the Apostle Paul, would come to regard the Church as the Body of Christ, writing, “For just

⁴ *Vatican: the Holy See*; vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae_en.html.

as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ” (*1 Cor. 12:12*). The Church’s ministry is a continuation of Christ’s ministry; she is an extension of the Incarnation in that she gives eyes, ears, mouth, hands, and feet to Him again on earth.

The purpose of this book is to reveal the Christ-centeredness of the Church’s teachings, the way in which her doctrine brings us closer to Him. It was written for anyone who is seeking Jesus, or seeking more of Him: the non-Catholic who wants to know if He may truly be found in the Catholic Church; the Catholic who desires to draw closer to Him through a better understanding of His teachings; and the one with no religious affiliation, who feels called in his heart to pursue Him.

Through the course of the book we will refer at times to the beliefs and practices of our non-Catholic brothers and sisters. It will be necessary to do this in order to point out key differences between Catholicism and the other branches of Christianity. At the same time, the love and respect we bear for our separated brethren needs to be acknowledged. They are sincere, dedicated followers of Jesus Christ, and we have much to learn from them in many ways. When John complained to Our Lord about a man, who “does not follow with us,” casting out demons in His name, Jesus responded, “Do not forbid him; for he that is not against you is for you” (*Luke 9:49-50*). Each of us is on a path and Jesus will meet us individually on that path wherever He find us. In many cases, non-Catholic Christians are separated from the Church through no fault of their own, and so are innocent in the Lord’s eyes. Because they are following their conscience and remain open to Him, furthermore, He can and does work miracles in their lives. This is not to deny He desires more for them: full communion with Him in His Church. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that in

criticizing non-Catholic doctrine and practice in this book, the intent is not to belittle the believers themselves, nor to call into question their sincerity in serving the Lord.

Unfortunately, for a growing number of Christians, Catholics and non-Catholics alike, doctrine has taken on a negative connotation. Scandalized by the crowd of competing denominations, they have come to view doctrine as something that breeds division. The Non-denominational movement, formed to circumvent the division among Christians, tends to downplay doctrinal differences, often to the point of discarding doctrine. We see the same trends in liberal Catholic circles, especially among the non-traditional religious orders. From this perspective, to speak too much or too fervently of doctrine smacks of intolerance. It is a view that sees truth and love as being in opposition to one another. To promote religious truth seems in this view antithetical to charity. It is perceived as slipping into legalism: acting like the scribes and Pharisees, whose hearts were far from Christ and who fell into the habit of “teaching as doctrines the precepts of men” (*Matt. 15:9*).

For Christians to attempt to separate truth and love is problematic to say the least, as Jesus is both Truth and Love Incarnate (cf. *John 14:6; 1 John 4:8*). Jesus tells us, furthermore, “The truth will make you free” (*John 8:32*). If the truth frees us, then error binds us. Thus, while one may sincerely love Jesus, if he believes something false about Him he is not yet as free as the Lord desires him to be. Christian doctrine, in safeguarding against error, gives us the freedom to know and love Jesus in the fullest sense.

In extolling the virtues of doctrine I am not ignorant of the comments of Pope Francis, stated in an interview in the first year of his pontificate:

The church’s pastoral ministry cannot be obsessed with the transmission of a disjointed multitude of doctrine to be imposed insistently.

Proclamation in a missionary style focuses on the essentials, on the necessary things: this is also what fascinates and attracts more, what makes the heart burn, as it did for the disciples at Emmaus (*An Interview with Antonio Spadaro*).⁵

These remarks by the Holy Father were frequently misused at the time of their release by sources seeking to tout the irrelevance of doctrine. But this was not in keeping with Francis' statement taken in its full context. His intent was not to decry the proclamation of doctrine *per se*, but doctrine without love. In evangelization, the proclamation of love must precede the proclamation of doctrine. For it is that personal encounter with Jesus that first attracts the soul and draws it to Him, just as it drew the disciples at Emmaus. Presented without love, doctrine will indeed seem irrelevant and "disjointed." For it can only be received once love has opened the heart. "Then [after the proclamation of love]," the Pontiff went on to say, "you have to do catechesis. Then you can draw even a moral consequence. But the proclamation of the saving love of God comes before moral and religious imperatives" (*Interview*).⁶

Doctrine, furthermore, does not bring division, but builds community, to the degree a community cannot remain united long-term without it. In the absence of doctrine, the community will invariably fragment. Explaining how the Church is built up through the proclamation of "the truth in love," Saint Paul writes,

And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; so that we may no longer be

⁵ Antonio Spadaro, S.J., "A Big Heart Open to God: The exclusive interview with Pope Francis," *America*, September 30, 2013; available at americamagazine.org/pope-interview.

⁶ *Ibid.*

children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love (*Eph. 4:11-16*).

To better illustrate the importance of doctrine in building community, and how it is not antithetical to love, but really an expression of it, let us imagine parents who for the sake of fostering peace and togetherness in the household choose to do away with rules, giving their children permission to do whatever they please: eat what they want, go to bed when they want, skip school, stay up late, and so on. How long will such a household stand, and what in the end will be the fate of those poor children?

A common misconception is that Jesus eliminated the need to follow doctrine. In reality, though, He says,

“Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men to do so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (*Matt. 5:17-20*).

Jesus affirms He has not come to do away with the Law, but to fulfill it. He does not render the Commandments obsolete, but reveals their true foundation is love (cf. *Rom.*

13:10). To keep the Law merely for legalistic reasons is really to fail to keep it. This is what Our Lord means about exceeding the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. Their reasons for keeping the Law were self-serving; whereas the true foundation of God's Law is to die to oneself and serve others.

Jesus did not advocate religion without rules. In His Sermon on the Mount, He called His followers to live lives of holiness, delineating a litany of sins that bore eternal punishment (cf. *Matt. 5:8, 21ff.*). Nor was His ministry devoid of doctrine, but included teachings on the Trinity (*John 14:26*), His divinity (*John 8:58*), the Atonement (*John 3:14-18*), grace (*John 15:5*), baptismal rebirth (*John 3:5*), good works (*Matt. 25:31ff.*), merit (*Matt. 6:4*), His Eucharistic presence (*John 6:35-58*), liturgical worship (*Luke 22:19*), standardized prayer (*Matt. 6:9-13*), guardian angels (*Matt. 18:10*), the forgiveness of sins through His representatives (*John 20:23*), the sanctity of marriage (*Matt. 5:31-32*), the anointing of the sick (*Mark 6:13*), Mary's unique role (*John 19:26-27*), the primacy of Peter (*Matt. 16:18-19*), the authority of His Church (*Matt. 18:17*), Judgment Day (*Matt. 16:27*), purgatory (*Matt. 5:26*), heaven (*Matt. 7:21*), and hell (*Matt. 18:8*).

The approach of many modern-day pastors is to preach a feel-good brand of Christianity with a reduced emphasis on doctrine. In fact, the developers of the "megachurch" phenomenon began by going door-to-door, not to proclaim religious truth, but to conduct surveys to find out what people really wanted in a church. Based on their findings they designed a worship experience featuring "sanctuaries" which, stripped almost entirely of religious symbols, resemble concert stage, replete with high-tech lighting and audio-visual equipment, cushioned, movie-theater style seating instead of pews, upbeat contemporary music, casual dress, and motivational talks in the place of sermons. Scripture is used

selectively, focusing almost exclusively on passages that affirm how much God cares for us and will bless our lives. The emphasis is on goal setting and self-improvement. One “improves” himself, moreover, not through daily self-denial and taking up his cross (cf. *Luke* 9:23), but by fixating on his personal desires, and striving to get all that he wants out of life.

This approach, which makes pursuing personal needs, be they material, social, emotional, or financial, more important than obedience to doctrine, has thus far worked fabulously well. Thousands upon thousands have flocked to the megachurches. The pastors of these congregations have ascended to rock-star status, gaining national and international celebrity, and profits have soared. This ministerial approach, though, is deceptively different from the ministry of Jesus found in the New Testament.

It is true that Jesus met the needs of the people who came to Him. In some of His most famous miracles He fed the crowds that had gathered to hear His preaching by multiplying fish and loaves. He also promised the material needs of His followers would be provided for by the Heavenly Father (cf. *Matt.* 6:25ff.). He was adamant, however, that seeking the kingdom of heaven and righteousness were to be one’s primary goals in life, “to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (*Matt.* 5:48, cf. 6:33). When those who had partaken of the fish and loaves returned the next day to be fed again, He rebuked them, saying, “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life” (*John* 6:27).

On one occasion a wealthy young man approached and asked Jesus, “Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?” (*Matt.* 19:16). The megachurch answer to this question would invariably be, “You don’t need to do anything, Brother. Just accept how

much God loves you and be happy.” Yet Jesus responded very differently. He first challenged the young man’s concept of goodness, saying, “Why do you ask me about what is good? One there is who is good.” He then said, “If you would enter life, keep the commandments. . . . If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me” (*Matt.* 19:17-21). Hearing this, we are told, the young man departed from Him; and the Lord let him leave.

So Jesus began by revealing to him the truth about God, salvation, and discipleship; then He invited the young man to follow Him. When this approach failed, Jesus did not change His teaching in order to keep him from leaving. Megachurch-goers may be tempted to think Jesus was treating the young man in an unloving way, when in reality He was treating him with perfect love by having the courage to tell him the truth instead of what He knew he wanted to hear. Certainly, as this episode proves, Jesus was not willing to water down the truth of the gospel for the sake of increasing His following. It also shows us that we must have the humility to come to God, not in the way that seems best to us, but in the way He has prescribed for us. The Scriptures implore us, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight” (*Prov.* 3:5). We may not understand all that He asks us to do, but that it is He who is asking ought to be enough. We must trust in Our Father’s perfect love and wisdom, which far surpass our own.

The crowds that followed Jesus were often fickle, hanging around for the sensational miracles, but unwilling to endure challenging teaching. Thus, those that came back after the multiplication of fish and loaves in *John* chapter 6 just as swiftly departed from Him when they became disillusioned over His teaching on the Holy Eucharist: “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (6:53). “This is a hard

saying,” they protested; “who can listen to it?” (6:60). *John* 6:66 tells us, “After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him.” In fact, it was at this point that Judas Iscariot, realizing his worldly aspirations would go unfulfilled in Jesus, decided in his heart to betray Him (6:71). The Lord’s response was not to change His teaching, making it more appealing and less challenging. To the contrary, He began to reiterate His teaching all the more fervently, repeating the offensive phrase concerning the eating and drinking of His Body and Blood three more times. And after the crowd abandoned Him, He turned to the Twelve Apostles and asked if they also wished to leave (6:67).

The first priority of Christian ministry is not to get folks in the door by whatever means necessary, and keep them happy. It is to disseminate divinely revealed truth—even if that truth may be difficult to hear at times. The megachurches have excelled in growth, but as Jesus’ experience with crowds proves, growth is not an infallible indicator of authentic Christian ministry. The growth of the congregation should never come at the expense of true teaching.

“For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments,” writes John.

And his commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith (*1 John* 5:3-5; cf. *John* 14:15, 21).

If observing doctrine seems burdensome it is because one is relying on his own strength instead of God’s grace. We need grace to understand and follow doctrine. Having heard Jesus’ teaching on the difficulty of entering heaven, His disciples asked with astonishment, “Who then can be saved?” Jesus, though, replied, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (*Matt.* 19:25-26).

The gospel will always present a challenge to our fallen world. The word *gospel* means “good news,” and the truth that Christ died to save us from our sins is good news indeed. But there are two parts to the message of the gospel: invitation and response. Hearing that Christ died to save us is the invitation. It is necessary for us to respond to this invitation. To respond to the message of the gospel by living out our earthly lives without a care would be an insufficient, and unloving, response. The acceptable response is the one to which Our Lord called the young man (and calls each of us): to leave worldly concerns behind and follow Him. “If any man would come after me,” says Jesus, “let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it” (*Luke 9:23-24*). Once again, to respond to Christ’s call, to pick up our cross and follow Him, requires grace. If we attempt it by our own strength, we will fail.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Lutheran pastor and theologian, is revered for his courageous stance against Nazism, a stance which cost him his life in 1945. Bonhoeffer was troubled by the lukewarmness he witnessed in his fellow Christians: their failure to give bold witness to their faith, and tendency towards secularization, the willingness to bend the teaching of the gospel to accommodate society. He called this deplorable condition “cheap grace”:

The preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate (*The Cost of Discipleship*).⁷

⁷ New York: Touchstone, 1995, pp. 44-45.

For the sincere Christian there is ever the call to grow in holiness—never to stagnate. Scripture implores us, “Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (*Heb.* 12:14; cf. *1 Thess.* 4:7). John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, sensed this call to holiness, making the pursuit of perfection by grace in one’s daily life a priority among his followers. We see this, too, in the Holiness movement within Evangelicalism today. It has been said that God loves us as we are, but that He loves us too much to leave us as we are. For Bonhoeffer, it is a misguided soul who longs to hear from the Lord, “Of course you have sinned, but now everything is forgiven, so you can stay as you are and enjoy the consolations of forgiveness” (*Cost of Discipleship*).⁸

Nonetheless, many Christians no longer see the importance of avoiding sin; and some, particularly those who follow the Eternal Security doctrine, or “once saved always saved,” even go to the extreme of saying once one is saved his personal sinfulness no longer matters. He may willfully continue in his sins, being ever confident of the Lord’s ongoing forgiveness. Paul, though, routinely cautioned Christians against remaining in their sins, saying, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” (*Rom.* 6:1-2). It really should not need to be said that to acknowledge redemption in Christ, and yet go on sinning deliberately, is nothing less than a mocking of the Lord’s death. Yet those who have departed from orthodox doctrine on sin and holiness have lost sight of this simple truth.

In contrast to the prevalent philosophy today that diminishes the role of doctrine, the Apostolic Church placed a great emphasis on the doctrinal unity of her members. Paul, for instance, wrote to the believers in Corinth, “I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment” (*1 Cor.* 1:10). Referring to “the elementary doctrine of Christ,” the *Letter to the Hebrews* lists six religious teachings that all newcomers to the faith are expected to know and accept, and distinguishes these from more advanced teachings (6:1-2).

If we were to charge today’s denominations with defining the teachings on this list, how diverse would the responses be? Taking just one of the doctrines from *Hebrews* 6, for instance, the doctrine on Baptism, we see that Christians today are sharply divided on its true meaning, how it is to be carried out, who may receive it, and so on. While denominations such as the Anglicans, Assemblies of God, Baptists, Churches of Christ, Lutherans, Methodists, and Presbyterians, for instance, baptize in the name of the Trinity; others such as the Oneness Pentecostals baptize in Jesus’ name only; and groups such as the Quakers forgo Baptism altogether. Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists, and Presbyterians allow either immersion or pouring; others including the Assemblies of God, Baptists, and Churches of Christ insist on immersion only. Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists, and Presbyterians baptize infants; Assemblies of God, Baptists, and Churches of Christ forbid it. Finally, Anglicans, Lutherans, and Methodists believe one is reborn through Baptism; Assemblies of God, Baptists, Churches of Christ, and Presbyterians do not, but see it merely as a symbolic ritual.

The Bible assures us there is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (*Eph.* 4:5), but can this honestly be said of today’s multitude of denominations? As the introductory rite to Christian life (cf. *Acts* 2:38), Baptism was intended to be a source of unity for believers, yet it has become a point of contention.

The doctrinal divide among Christians really comes down to a question of authority. Virtually all of the separated brethren adhere to Martin Luther's view that the Bible is the sole authority for believers. Catholicism, however, understands divine revelation as having been received through the twin channels of *Sacred Scripture*, God's word in written form, and *Apostolic Tradition*, His word in spoken form, the preaching and practice of the Apostles. This follows Paul's statement in *Second Thessalonians 2:15*: "Stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter."

In 1529, only a dozen years after his break with the Church of Rome, Luther met with Ulrich Zwingli and other Protestant leaders at the Colloquy of Marburg in an attempt to reach an accord on the meaning of Christ's words at the Last Supper: "This is my body" (*Matt. 26:26*). A fierce debate ensued with Luther at one point pounding his fist on the table in frustration. Yet he and his cohorts, all of whom professed belief in the Bible alone, were unable to come to an agreement, and departed from Marburg more divided than before.

There are two indisputable arguments against Luther's Bible Alone doctrine. First and most significant is the fact that the Bible itself does not teach it. To dispute this, proponents will cite passages that affirm the Bible's inspiration and authority, such as *Second Timothy 3:16-17*:

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

The inspiration and authority of the Bible, though, are not in question. The question is whether the Bible is the *only* authority; and in no way does *Second Timothy*, nor any verse of Scripture, claim it to be so.

As a matter of fact, there are various indications throughout the New Testament that a portion of the gospel was not committed to writing. Our Lord, for example, spent forty days after the Resurrection privately teaching the Apostles on matters pertaining to the Church or “speaking of the kingdom of God,” as Luke put it (*Acts* 1:3), yet what He said to them was not recorded. Paul told the Corinthians there were “other things” which he preferred to say in person rather than in writing (*1 Cor.* 11:34); and in another letter remarked, “You know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus” (*1 Thess.* 4:2). We do not know what precisely these instructions were, though, since he neglected to write them down. John as well remarked in a letter, “Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink, but I hope to come to see you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete” (*2 John* 12; cf. *3 John* 13-14).

The New Testament writers also commonly refer to extra-biblical traditions. The saying, “He shall be called a Nazarene,” for instance, which Matthew attributes to “the prophets” (*Matt.* 2:23), is nowhere written in the Old Testament. Paul refers to oral Jewish tradition in speaking of the rock that followed the Israelites in the wilderness, and Jannes and Jambres who opposed Moses (*1 Cor.* 10:4 and *2 Tim.* 3:8, respectively).

There are also many elements of the faith not fully addressed in Scripture. For example, nowhere in Scripture do we find the Blessed Trinity defined. Nor do we find details on how to conduct the worship service, nor the baptismal and marital rites. Nor are we given a list of the books of the Bible. For these things, we must fall back on Apostolic Tradition, “the tradition that you received from us,” as Paul described it (*2 Thess.* 3:6).

The second main argument against the Bible Alone approach is the lack of agreement among believers: the grim reality that Bible-only Christians interpret the teachings of the Bible differently. Current estimates put the total number of denominations worldwide in the tens of thousands.⁹ While some have maintained these denominations disagree only on insignificant teachings, the fact is there is disagreement on a host crucial issues. In addition to Baptism and the Eucharist, these include whether a Christian can lose his salvation, if hell is eternal, Sunday worship, the call to holiness, the necessity of speaking in tongues, and the End Times.

Jesus said, “There shall be one flock, one shepherd;” and He prayed for His followers, saying, “May [they] all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (*John* 10:16 and 17:21, respectively). Indeed the scandal of division within Christianity has been a stumbling block preventing many non-Christians from accepting the gospel.

Catholicism reveres the Bible as the inspired, written word of God, yet maintains it was meant to be interpreted not by the individual, but by the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Specifically here we are speaking of the Church’s teaching office, or in Latin *magisterium*, which consists of the Pope and bishops, the successors of Saint Peter and the Apostles. This does not mean the Church is *superior* to Scripture, but rather is its *servant*, as the Second Vatican Council affirmed, saying,

The teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and

⁹ The *World Christian Encyclopedia* identifies more than 33,000 distinct Christian denominations (David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson, eds. 2 vols. [New York: Oxford University Press, 2001]).

explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit (*Dei Verbum* 10).¹⁰

Scripture was not intended to be interpreted privately, but always in the context of the faith community. Finding the Ethiopian eunuch alone, reading a scroll of the prophet Isaiah, the deacon Philip asks if he understands what he is reading, and the eunuch replies, “How can I, unless some one guides me?” (*Acts* 8:31). Whenever individuals have sought to interpret Scripture on their own, apart from the Church, doctrinal confusion and division have followed. This is why the Bible calls “the church of the living God,” and not the individual believer, “the pillar and bulwark of the truth” (*1 Tim.* 3:15).

Jesus bestowed teaching authority on the Church before ascending to heaven, declaring:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (*Matt.* 28:18-20).

Here in the Great Commission, Jesus, affirming His ultimate authority as the Son of God to bless and to teach, gives the Church the authority to do so in His stead with the command: “Make disciples of all nations.” We notice, furthermore, that He instructs the Church to convey not *some* of what He has taught, but “*all*” of it. Many Christians today are quick to speak of the need for one to have a personal relationship with Jesus to be saved, yet seldom speak of the need to be baptized and accept the fullness of doctrine. The Great Commission makes it clear, however, that Baptism and the fullness of doctrine are essential

¹⁰ *Vatican: the Holy See*; vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-

to having a personal relationship with Jesus, becoming one of His disciples. To receive these things, moreover, it is necessary for one to go to His Church, for He has entrusted Baptism and His teaching to her. This is why a myriad of different denominations just will not cut it! This why to be a Christian in the fullest sense of the word it is necessary to find the one true Church that Jesus Christ Himself established on earth!

In the *Acts of the Apostles* we see the Church carrying out the Great Commission, preaching the gospel on the day of Pentecost and baptizing thousands of converts into the faith. These early Christians, we are told, “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (2:42). Clearly they saw their teaching as being synonymous with Christ’s teaching. Here we return to the point made earlier in the chapter, that when His Church teaches it is really Christ who is teaching through her (cf. *Luke* 10:16). “I am the good shepherd,” He says. “... My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (*John* 10:11, 27). It is through the Church that we hear the Shepherd’s voice.

Seeing how the people were without direction or guidance, “like sheep without a shepherd,” Jesus admonished His followers to pray for God “to send out laborers into his harvest” (*Matt.* 9:36, 38). Immediately afterward He called the Twelve Apostles (10:1). That He intended for them to serve as His special representatives, as *vicarious shepherds* over His flock, is clear from His three-fold command to Peter after the Resurrection: “Feed my lambs. ... Tend my sheep. ... Feed my sheep” (*John* 21:15-17).

Just as God mysteriously chose to give us the Sacred Scriptures through the Church, through human hands, so Christ chose to shepherd us through human representatives down

through the ages so that His flock would be led by a living voice. Through the Church's hierarchy, the spiritual descendants of the Apostles, Christ Our Shepherd continues to speak to us. He calls us and we follow Him.

That Christ speaks through His Church is evident in the biblical account of the Council of Jerusalem. When a dispute erupts among believers in Antioch over the necessity for Christians to obey the Mosaic Law to be saved, a delegation led by Paul and Barnabas is sent to the Apostles in Jerusalem to seek a ruling. It can hardly make sense from the Bible-only perspective that Christians, most especially Paul, who actually wrote books of the Bible, would need to consult the Church hierarchy for an answer to a religious question. Nonetheless, the question is submitted to the Apostles, who in turn convene a council to take up the matter under the Spirit's guidance. It is clear from the wording of the Council's subsequent letter announcing its decision—"It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (*Acts* 15:28)—that God has spoken through the Church's hierarchy to definitively guide the faithful on this question of doctrine.

Doctrinal confusion is not unique to the non-Catholic Christian assemblies. As recent polls have shown, Catholics, too, are divided on doctrine to an alarming degree.¹¹ However, there is a fundamental difference between the Catholic Church and the denominations on this point. For, in spite of the fact that some of her members, whether from poor catechesis or sheer dissent, are at odds with her teachings, the Catholic Church has retained an unified body of teachings, which she is able to trace back through time to the Apostles, as we shall

¹¹ A poll conducted in advance of the fiftieth Eucharistic Congress in Ireland, for instance, revealed, "When it comes to the church's teachings, many Catholics do not subscribe to key tenets such as transubstantiation. Almost two-thirds (62 per cent) believe the blessing of bread and wine during Mass only represents the body and blood of Christ" (Carl O'Brien, "Many Catholics 'Do Not Believe' Church Teachings," *The Irish Times*, July 28, 2012; irishtimes.com/newspaper/front page/2012/0605/1224317296492.html).

see over and again in the upcoming chapters. A believer may go to this unified body of teachings—the *deposit of faith*, as it is called—to determine whether his beliefs are in line with what the Apostles taught. The denominations, on the other hand, are beset by an array of contradictory teachings, as indicated above; and it is impossible to trace any distinctively non-Catholic doctrine back further than the end of the Middle Ages.

Unfortunately, doctrinal confusion among Catholics is not a new thing, but has occurred throughout the centuries. However, what has enabled the Church to keep her body of teachings intact, against tremendous odds, has been the unique ability of her leaders, under the Spirit’s guidance, to definitively settle disputes, just as the Apostles did at the Council of Jerusalem. This is in keeping with Christ’s promise that the Spirit would lead the Church “into all the truth” (*John* 16:13). The Catholic Church’s preservation of her doctrine through two millennia is the answer to Jesus’ prayer for unity among His followers (cf. *John* 10:16, 17:21).

When in the Gospels the disciples inquire as to where the Lord is staying, He replies simply, “Come and see” (*John* 1:39). This book extends the same invitation to all who wish to draw closer to Jesus and feel called to seriously investigate the teachings of Catholicism. Since it will not be possible here to examine “everything” the Church teaches, we will focus particularly on some of her more controversial teachings in the chapters ahead.

If Catholic doctrine comes from Jesus, then it will lead us to Him. And if this is so, then we are obliged as His disciples to fully embrace it, for to do so is to fully embrace Him. Let us not walk away, then, grumbling, “This is a hard saying!”, but respond with the faith of

the Apostle: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God” (*John* 6:68).