



One of the major stumbling blocks between Catholics and Protestants is the meaning of “The Church”. For Protestants, the most common definition is a spiritual body of all believers throughout the world and in that sense the Church is “invisible” however they also believe the Church is “visible” in the sense that all local churches have equal authority while there is no earthly authority with which all churches must agree.

For Catholics the Church is a visible body founded by Jesus Christ the Son of God with Peter and his successor, the Pope, as head of the earthly Church and the apostles and their successors, the Bishops, as the foundation. All who are baptized with water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit belong to the One Church and are united through the grace of baptism although many have separated themselves from the visible Church established by Jesus Christ.

The Catholic Church recognizes the Orthodox Church, who separated herself from the Catholic Church in 1084 as a “Church” because she has valid apostolic bishops and therefore a valid priesthood and valid sacraments. However the Catholic Church does not recognize Protestant denominations as “churches” but religious Communities. This is made clear in a document from the Second Vatican Council:

Decree on Ecumenism

1. The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council. Christ the Lord founded one Church and one Church only.....It follows that the separated Churches (**Orthodox**) and Communities (**Protestant**) as such, though we believe them to be deficient in some respects, have been by no means deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation. For the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Church.

Nevertheless, our separated brethren, whether considered as individuals or as Communities and Churches, are not blessed with that unity which Jesus Christ wished to bestow on all those who through Him were born again into one body, and with Him quickened to newness of life-that unity which the Holy Scriptures and the ancient Tradition of the Church proclaim.

For it is only through Christ's Catholic Church, which is "the all-embracing means of salvation," that they can benefit fully from the means of salvation. We believe that Our Lord entrusted all the blessings of the New Covenant to the apostolic college alone, of which Peter is the head, in order to establish the one Body of Christ on earth to which all should be fully incorporated who belong in any way to the people of God.....

In 2007 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith also addressed this issue:

FIFTH QUESTION

Why do the texts of the Council and those of the Magisterium since the Council not use the title of “Church” with regard to those Christian Communities born out of the Reformation of the sixteenth century?

RESPONSE

According to Catholic doctrine, these Communities do not enjoy apostolic succession in the sacrament of Orders, and are, therefore, deprived of a constitutive element of the Church. These ecclesial Communities which, specifically because of the absence of the sacramental priesthood, have not preserved the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic Mystery cannot, according to Catholic doctrine, be called “Churches” in the proper sense.

Read [HERE](#)

OUTSIDE THE CHURCH THERE IS NO SALVATION.

This has always been a teaching of the Catholic Church.

From the Catechism:

846 How are we to understand this affirmation often repeated by the Church Fathers? Re-formulated positively, it means that all salvation comes from Christ the head through the Church which is his body:

Basing itself on Scripture and Tradition, the Council teaches that the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation: the one Christ is the mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church. He himself explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and baptism, and thereby affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church which men enter through baptism as through a door. Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it.

847 This affirmation is not aimed at those who, through no fault of their own, do not know Christ and his Church: Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience -- those too may achieve eternal salvation.

848 Although in ways known to himself God can lead those who, through no fault of their own, are ignorant of the Gospel, to that faith without which it is impossible to please him, the Church still has the obligation and also the sacred right to evangelize all men.

As stated above those who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or do not know His Catholic Church yet they seek God and try to do His will with the grace given to them may attain salvation. However one’s best chance for salvation is in His One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church which has the fullness of Truth and full access to all the graces necessary for salvation.

776 As sacrament, the Church is Christ's instrument. "She is taken up by him also as the instrument for the salvation of all," "the universal sacrament of salvation," by which Christ is "at once manifesting and actualizing the mystery of God's love for men." The Church "is the visible plan of God's love for humanity," because God desires "that the whole human race may become one People of God, form one Body of Christ, and be built up into one temple of the Holy Spirit.

845 To reunite all his children, scattered and led astray by sin, the Father willed to call the whole of humanity together into his Son's Church. The Church is the place where humanity must rediscover its unity and salvation. The Church is "the world reconciled." She is that bark which "in the full sail of the Lord's cross, by the breath of the Holy Spirit, navigates safely in this world." According to another image dear to the Church Fathers, she is prefigured by Noah's ark, which alone saves from the flood.

The Church in Scripture

Jesus established THE CHURCH- Matthew 16:18

Nothing can destroy THE CHURCH-Matthew 16:18

Jesus Christ is head of THE CHURCH-Ephesians 5:23

The apostles are the foundation of THE CHURCH-Ephesians 3:20

God placed apostles first in THE CHURCH -1 Corinthians 12:28

All must obey THE CHURCH- Matthew 18:17

Christ loved and gave His life for THE CHURCH- Eph 5:25

The wisdom of God is made known through THE CHURCH- Eph. 3:10

Christ gave his blood for THE CHURCH- Acts 20:28

God judges those outside THE CHURCH- 1 Corinthians 5:12-13

His body is THE CHURCH- Colossians 1:24

Next Topic: Understanding Paul and his teaching on salvation