

***Comparative Christianity
by
Fr. William G. Brown
via
Zoom 5:30 – 6:30 pm***



Roman Catholicism

February 9, 2022

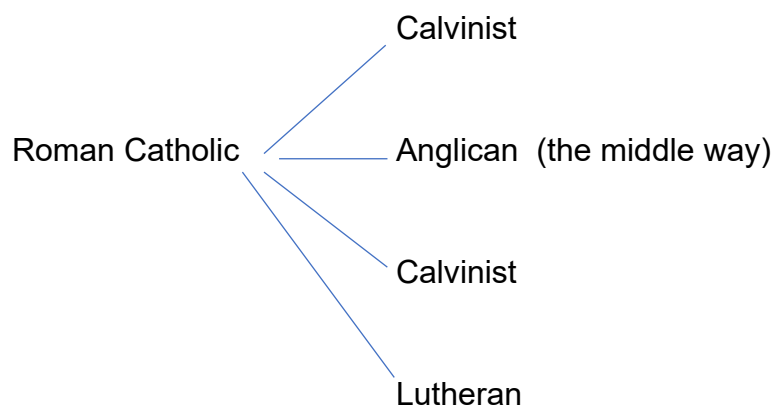
The Papal Seal on the front-page consists, first, of the crossed keys representing the words of Jesus to St. Peter "I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Mt. 16:19)

Secondly, it consists of the triple crown representing that the Pope is the head of the church militant (on earth) the church suffering (in purgatory) and the church heaven.

The Roman Church (RC) holds that it is the church founded by Christ and organization by Peter and the Apostles and passed down through the ages by their successors. It is, the **hierarchically structured** with supreme head of the church being the Pope (the successor of Peter) and presided over by the bishops (who are the successors of the apostles). (Refer back to **page 5** in the first week's notes to see once again the chart of churches)

How does the Roman Catholic Church differ from the Episcopal Church?

It should be noted that the Anglican church which began in England in 1531 and was one of the **four founding movements** of Protestantism (cf. original notes, pg. 9ss) has traditionally been referred to as "the middle way" because it kept much more the beliefs and ceremonies of the Roman Church than the Lutheran, Calvinist, and Anabaptist movements. The Episcopal Church, belongs to the Anglican family and, therefore, has many of the same resemblances.



In this comparison, I will try to point out the major differences between Episcopal and RC.

1 Structure

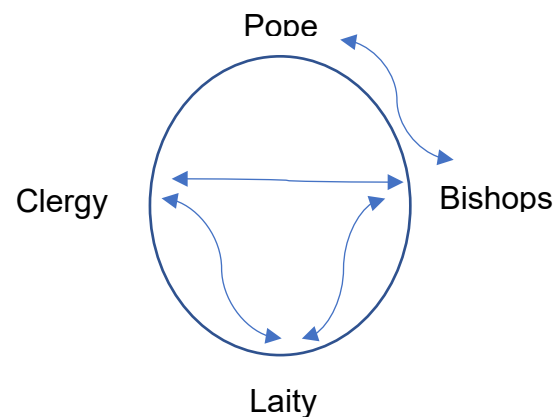
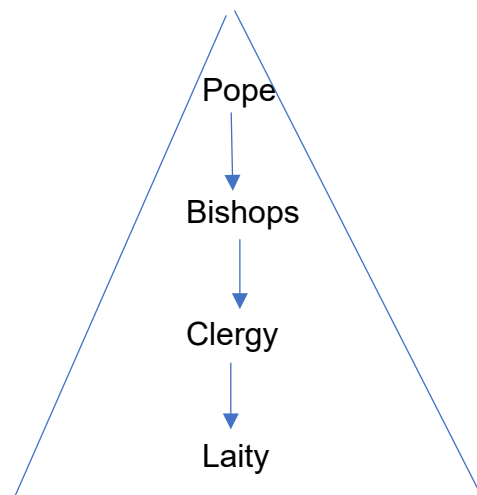
Both the RC and Episcopal churches are hierarchical in structure, without, of course, the inclusion of the Pope. In the RC, the Pope appoints all bishops. In the Episcopal Church each bishop is elected by the house of Clergy and Laity and approved by the House of Bishops. Such a thing as the election of a bishop is unheard of in the Roman church.

Furthermore, the very idea that the laity have anything to say about the ruling of the church is unheard of. It is the pope and bishops who are the official teachers in the church.

However there have been major changes in the Roman Church since the **Second Vatican Council** which was called in 1961 by Pope John XXIII. **One of the areas of meaningful change has been the role of the laity in the RC.**

Now, each diocese in the RC is required to have a Diocesan Council made up of clergy and laity to advise the Bishop. In addition, it is required that each diocese also has a Priest's Council made up of elected members of the clergy. Furthermore, each parish is required to have a Parish Council made up of elected members of parish laity to advise the pastor. This is much in the same fashion as the Vestry. The Pope, likewise, has a Council of Bishops (Bishops elected by each National Council of Bishops) which meets regularly with him.

The Second Vatican Council further taught that hierarchical structure instead of being conceived of as being a pyramid, should be conceived of as a circle



But, still, the Pope is the chief teacher and responsible for keeping the church teaching the truth as revealed to us by God. In this, that is **in matters of Faith (what must be believed) and morals (what must be done morally in accordance with God's will) the Pope is considered *Infallible***. Otherwise, there is no guarantee that the church will, in fact, teach the truth revealed by God. If there is no guarantee, the church would be unable to conduct the task given to it by Christ.

2 The Sources of Revelation

The RC believes that there are TWO sources of revelation. Protestant belief is that Sacred Scripture is the ONLY source of revelation.

The two sources of revelation for the Catholic church are

Sacred Scripture

and

Tradition

By Tradition is meant what the church has been teaching and believing through the centuries. If a doctrine can be traced back to the early church in a systematic manner, then it is said to be part of the revealed truth. Tradition is based upon the belief that it was the believing church which produced the Scriptures, and not the Scriptures that produced the Church. The same truth would hold for the Old Testament. For almost one thousand years the Jewish community had been passing down what it had received from God in spoken tradition. There were no written scriptures. Finally, during the reign of David (BCE 1000-962), the first Old Testament writings were begun. In fact, there are four distinct oral traditions which are contained in the Hebrew Scriptures which can be traced back to the times before any of the Old Testament had been written. *Both in the OT and the NT it was the believing community which eventually declared which books were to be included in the Canon of Scripture and which were to be discarded.*

The Catholic Bible has 46 books for the Old Testament (The Protestant Bible has 39 books for the Old Testament) The Catholic Bible has 27 books in the New Testament (The Protestant Bible has 27 books in the New Testament as well).

Total Bible: Catholic: 73 Protestant 66



The 7 books found in Catholic bibles but not Protestant —**Sirach, Wisdom, Tobit, 1 Maccabees, Judith, additions to Daniel, and Esther** were the books not accepted into the canon of the Old Testament by the Jewish Council of Jamnia (c. CE. 90). The Council of Jamnia only accepted those Old Testament books which were written in the Holy Land. Those composed outside the Holy Land in the diaspora were not accepted by the Jamnia Council.

3 Praying to the Saints

Catholics are often accused of “worshiping the saints” and thinking that saints have the power to answer prayer.

To understand the Catholic practice of “praying to” the saints, one has to understand the Catholic understanding of what it means to be a saint and what is meant by “praying to.” A saint is anyone who is in union with God. Recall how in his epistles (letters) St. Paul said to give his greetings to “all the saints” or “greet the saint with a holy kiss.”

Then there are also the saints who are in heaven. These are the ones usually written with a capital S. They certainly are in union with God but now they have finished the course and are in union with God for all eternity.

One cannot understand this properly without understanding another teaching which is a common background understanding of Catholics: **The Communion of Saints. The Communion of Saints is three-fold:** The church militant (those still on earth), the church suffering (those in purgatory), and the church triumphant (those in heaven). WE ARE ALL MEMBERS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST and as such we owe each other love and service.

On earth, it is the widespread practice of Christians to ask their fellow Christians to “pray for them.” We do it all the time and we tend to believe that those who are closer to Christ are “more powerful intercessors.” For example, would you rather have someone in the next pew pray for you or would you prefer someone like Mother Teresa of Calcutta pray for you?

It is the same concept at work when we ask the saints in heaven to intercede for us. I ask Linda all the time to pray for me. That is all that is meant by “praying to the saints.” We are only asking them to intercede for us.

Catholics are also thought to “pray to statues.” To understand this phenomenon you must understand the Catholic idea of **sacramentals**. A sacramental is anything that helps us turn our minds to God. It can be a medal, a statue, a picture, a cross in one’s pocket. These are called sacramentals because help us recall something of God or

something sacred. I often keep a small crucifix on my desk to remind me through the day of God's infinite love for me. When I see the cross or must move it to get to some papers which might be under it, I am reminded of God's love for me. That is a sacramental – something tangible which calls my mind to something sacred. Catholics have crucifixes on their walls at home, in every classroom, etc. Others might have a statue of Mary or of one of the saints to call their mind to the fact that we must give witness to Christ by our daily activities, or that we have an intercessor in heaven, etc. Catholics wear medals around their necks, carry rosaries in their pockets., all to help to remind them of God or of their responsibility to do good and give witness to God.

4 Purgatory and Indulgences (Cf. BCP pg. 872. Prop. XXII)

The doctrine of Purgatory and the practice of indulgences is one of the main problems which led to the Protestant reformation.

Background

First, one must look at the state of the Roman church in the century and decades leading up to the Reformation. The state of the hierarchy at the time of the Reformation was absolutely a scandal. The aristocracy had taken over the hierarchy from Pope to bishop to priest. The rich landowners and lords of the time saw these church positions as positions of wealth and influence. Therefore they began to take over the positions by having their first-born sons appointed for these positions. That way, the parents would have their first-born sons to support them in their old age. We have only to think of how the Medici and the Borgia took over the papacy.

This situation also benefited the church because to get their sons appointed to these high offices, they had to pay a significant sum of money. Only in a couple of cases did this pertain to the papacy, but in almost every case it was the situation with the appointment of bishops.

In addition to this sad situation, there was a more serious situation which added to the practice of buying ecclesial office, be that bishop or pastor. In those days there was no such thing as a seminary in which the clergy was trained and formed. The bishops were responsible for training all clergy. In most cases this meant that the candidate for ordination would live with and work in the office of the bishop. The bishop was responsible for teaching the candidate scripture and theology. The adage "No one can give what they do not have", is certainly applicable here. The bishop himself had no training in theology or scripture, how then could they teach others these things? The state of bishops and of the clergy, who themselves had no calling for the office, began to degenerate into debauchery and theological error.

Such was the state of the hierarchy in the Roman Church during the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries. Is it any wonder that there was a Reformation?

Purgatory (again refer to BCP. Pg 872, Prop. XXII)

“All traditional branches of Christianity teach that after death, the forgiven soul goes to be with God in heaven. The un-forgiven soul is eternally separated from God and goes to hell.

“Different than other branches, the Roman Church adds a third destination, *Purgatory*. Purgatory is not a place where the deceased have a second chance to accept

“God’s grace in Christ and then go to be with God instead of hell. This third location is not a permanent abode. The Church teaches that the soul bound for hell goes directly to hell. On the other hand, souls bound for heaven will end up there. Some go directly, while others go to purgatory to purge remaining sins from their lives.

“Two illustrations help to explain this concept to non-Roman Catholics. First, purgatory is like the experience of Dorothy, Toto, the Scarecrow, the Lion and the Tin Woodsman of the *Wizard of Oz*. The intrepid four, plus the dog could not meet with the wizard when they first arrived in the Emerald City because they were not prepared to do so. Each had to be ‘gussied-up.’ Dorothy, Toto, and the Lion had their hair done. The Scarecrow was given more straw and the Tin Woodsman had his dented tin pounded out and he was freshly oiled. All were cleared up and prepared to meet wizard.

“A second illustration goes as follows: Pretend that Mother Theresa and Adolph Hitler died at the same time and also pretended that both were devout people at the moment of death (easy to say for the former, but a deathbed confession for the latter is a stretch). If no purgatory exists, the two would walk hand-in-hand into God’s presence immediately. Instead, purgatory would be a necessary stop for Hitler.

“These examples demonstrate that a saved soul needs further cleansing before facing God. This is the reason for Purgatory.” (Comparative Christianity: A Student’s Guide to a Religion and its Diverse Traditions, Thomas A. Russell, Universal-Publishers c 2010, pp67-68.)

To put it differently, and more theologically: Grace never overrides or forces our free will. Grace urges us, “tempts” us, but we are free to cooperate with grace or not. Put this into the context of our spiritual journey

The evangelist John tells us that “God is love, and those who live in love, live in God, and God lives in them.” (1 Jn 4: 16).

God is love. The opposite of love is selfishness. Love and Selfishness cannot be joined together because they are opposites. They repel each other by what is called an “antithetical relationship” which means that the two are totally opposites of each other. They repel each other must as the poles of magnet repel each other. Another example of an antithetical relationship is Light and Darkness. It is obvious that in proportion we have the one, we do not have the other. It is the exact same with Love and Selfishness.

All sin is selfishness. “I know what God wants, but I want something else,” and that is why it separates us from God because God is Love. As Paul puts it, “By the disobedience of the one man, sin entered the world and death; through the obedience of another (Christ) life and how much more abundantly.” (Rom. 5:19) All four gospels have the story of the agony in the garden so that we do not miss the struggle that Jesus had between what his flesh wanted, and what God wanted: “Father if it be possible, please deliver me from this,” and what he chose: “Yet, not my will, but your will be done.”

Our spiritual journey is a journey of dying to self (selfishness) and living for Christ (in other words) Not my will but your will be done. We reproduce in ourselves the dying of Jesus (Phil.3:10).

If we die, therefore but have not yet overcome all the selfishness in our lives, we are not yet ready for full union with Jesus. Jesus cannot just wave his hand and give us grace to love him fully, remember, grace never overrides our free will. If we had not yet reached the point in our earthly life where we were willing to let go of absolutely everything for Jesus’ sake, then, after death, grace still cannot force us to do so. Purgatory is that place on the way to heaven where we wait until we are finally ready to give up absolutely everything for God.

Indulgence

In his letter to the Ephesians (1:30 St. Paul tell us that the Father “has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” According to Jesus, when Jesus founded the church, he gave St. Peter the keys to the kingdom. Using this thought, in the Middle Ages when the hierarchy was corrupt, the hierarchy produced the idea of granting from the “spiritual treasury” of the church absolution from the amount of penance which penitents were supposed to do in reparation for their sins. They began to grant these pardons in return for a financial gift to help build church, or to fund some other project needed by the church. Depending on the amount given, a certain portion of the penance due for sins was absolved.

Is there any surprise that a reformation was called for?

TWO reformations took place – one outside the church (The Protestant Reformation) and one inside the church (The Council of Trent – which address these internal disgraces, established seminaries, did away with any trading of spiritual blessings, established a Code of Church Law (the Code of Canon Law) governing all areas of church life)



5 Eucharist



The RC belief in the Eucharist (Holy Communion) is similar to the Episcopal belief in that both believe in the “real presence” of Christ in the elements of bread and wine. Both believe that the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ by the consecration of the priest or bishop during the Eucharistic Prayer (which the RC calls “the Mass”.)

However, the difference between the two is that the RC attaches a theological explanation to the change that takes place. The RC refers to this as ***transubstantiation***. An explanation which the Book of Common Prayer specifically notes that Anglican do not accept. (BCP. Pg. 873, Prop. XXVIII)

What is transubstantiation? By “substance” Catholic theology means “essence” or nature. It answers the question “What is it”? The substance of bread is bread. The substance of wine is wine. Now, in addition to the term “substance” RC theology uses another term “accidents” to refer to the qualities of a thing. The accidents of a thing can change without changing the substance of the thing. For example, a human being can have a lot of different accidents, such as height, size, color, male, female, weight. All these things can be different from other human beings, but both have the same nature, or substance: Human Nature. Bread can also have different accidents, it can be rye, black, stale, fresh, heavy, light, taste but it is still bread. The same goes for the wine, it can be white, red, sweet, dry, etc. but it is still wine, even through the accidents might differ. **Transubstantiation** maintains that the accidents of bread and wine remain the same, but after the consecration the substance (nature) of the bread and wine has changed to become the body of Christ, and the blood of Christ. The RC church decrees

that while the accidents of bread and wine remain the same, the thing itself (substance) is changed into Christ: “body blood, soul and divinity.”

For RC, the Eucharist is itself the *manifestation* of the Church. It is the font from which the church flows and the term to which the church returns. The act of people coming up to receive the Eucharist reflects what the church really is – one body with Christ in all of us.

For RC participation in the Eucharist is the renewal of what we submitted to Christ at our baptism: He is Lord, we once again submit ourselves to our Lord and once again reenact the pattern of His death: Father, not my will, but thine be done.

6 The Sacraments (cf. BCP pg. 872, Prop. XXV)

The traditional Protestant belief is that there two “sacraments”, “ordinances” rooted in Scripture: Baptism and Communion, or “The Lord’s Supper”. Whereas, in the RC there are seven sacraments: **Baptism, Confirmation, Penance, Eucharist, Marriage, Ordination, and Anointing of the Sick.**

The RC understanding of Sacrament: The Sacraments are Covenant Relationships which are, therefore, two-sided. In each sacrament the person receiving the sacrament must give something, and then on the part of God, God must give something. For example, in baptism, the person receiving the sacrament gives his/her life to Christ and accepts Jesus as Lord. On the part of God, God gives the recipient the forgiveness of all sins and adoption into His eternal life. If the person gives nothing, nothing is received. EACH sacrament is the same – the recipient gives, and God gives. Each enter a covenant with the other.

Baptism: Catholic children are baptized shortly after their birth. The baptism ceremony is almost identical to that used in the Episcopal church.

Confirmation: Like all Christian churches where infant baptism is performed, there is a follow-up with Confirmation when the child reaches the age of being able to make a choice for him/herself to choose to accept Christ as their Lord and Savior. This anointing in Confirmation is usually performed by the Bishop, however, in the case of baptism of adults, the confirmation ceremony is performed along with the baptism. In the early church, Baptism and Confirmation were all part of the same ceremony until infant baptism began. At that time, the two were performed separately, except in the case of adult baptism.

Penance: Penance (often referred to as “Confession”) is usually received just before a child makes her/his First Communion (usually, at the end of the first grade. Persons baptized as adults usually receive the sacrament of penance sometime within their first year as a Christian. Penance is administered by the priest. Auricular confession did not

begin until 1215 when it was introduced by the Celtic church (church in Ireland) as a means of and help in growing stronger in the practice of one's faith. For some time, auricular confession had been the widespread practice of monastic communities of men and women as a means of receiving spiritual direction and growing more deeply in love with Christ. The Celts thought that a good practice and therefore introduced it as a practice for the laity as well and it soon spread to the whole RC.

Eucharist: The practice of celebrating and receiving Eucharist is almost the same in the RC as it is in the Episcopal Church with the exception that in the Roman church it is celebrated daily. As mentioned above, children receive their first communion at the end of their first grade. Specifically, it is said that children may receive communion when they reach the "age of reason" which is likened to be around 7 years old. First Communion is a big family celebration. Up until 1955 persons receiving communion had to fast and abstain from food or drink from midnight until they received communion. In 1955 Pope Pius XII changed the communion fast to abstaining from food and drink for at least one hour prior to receiving Holy Communion.

Marriage: The ceremony and practice of Marriage is almost the same in the RC as it is in the Episcopal church with the following exception: A person who has been validly married before with his/her spouse still living is not allowed to enter a second marriage unless the first marriage is able to be annulled. Being annulled means that the first marriage can be proven to not have been a sacramental marriage.

In the Episcopal church a previously married person with the spouse still living must first receive a dispensation from the bishop prior to entering a second marriage. When the priest writes to request permission from the bishop his task is demonstrate to the bishop why the first marriage ended in divorce and to indicate that that there is a well-founded possibility that root cause of the divorce has been addressed or healed or does not exist as a problem in the proposed second marriage. Only after having received permission of the bishop can the priest perform the second marriage.

Ordination: The ceremony and practice of ordination is almost the same in the RC church as it is in the Episcopal church with the following exceptions: 1) The RC priest is required to celibacy; 2) In the RC ordination to the diaconate, priesthood and bishopric is limited to males. In both churches, ordination pertains to diaconate, priesthood and episcopacy – all are considered to be part of the same process. The difference in each depending upon how much power or authority has been conferred.

Anointing of the Sick (formerly referred to as "The Last Rites"): The RC practices anointing of the sick in much the same way that the Episcopal church does. The difference between this "regular" anointing and the Sacrament of Anointing is that the Sacrament of the Sick can only be administered to persons who are gravely ill or in danger of death. That is why it became known as "the Last Rites".

