

(Acts 3:16; 4:29-31; 5:12, 16; 9:32-42). All other teaching is false and blasphemous, even if it were to come from an angel of God (Acts 13:18; Gal. 1:8-9).

The Catholic Church, with St. Paul says to her children: "For our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction" (1 Thes. 1:5). The Church is "the pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15).

If you study the writings of the early Fathers of the Church, the various creeds, and the Councils of the Church from Jerusalem to Vatican Council II, you must admit that the Church has always considered herself infallible, condemning as a heretic anyone who denied even one dogma of the Faith. As St Irenaeus said in the second century: "Where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God, and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and all grace, For the Spirit is the Truth" (*Adv. Haer.*, 3:24).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ." This means that the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome" (§85).

"Yet this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devotedly, guards it with dedication, and expounds it faithfully. All that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed is drawn from this single deposit of faith" (§86).

"The Church's Magisterium exercises the authority it holds from Christ to the fullest

extent when it defines dogmas, that is, when it proposes, in a form obliging the Christian people to an irrevocable adherence of faith, truths contained in divine Revelation or also when it proposes, in a definitive way, truths having a necessary connection with these" (§88).

The authority required by the moral order derives from God: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment" (Rom 13: 1-2; 1 Pet. 2:13-17) (§1899).

To reject the legitimate authority of the Church is to fundamentally reject Christ. Rejection of Christ may ultimately lead to loss of salvation.

(1) The Church teaches infallibly when she speaks through the Pope and bishops united in general council, or through the Pope alone when he proclaims to all the faithful a doctrine of faith or morals. All Catholics are required to give assent.

(2) Ignorance is invincible (from the Latin meaning "unconquerable") when it is present indeed but there is no reasonable way, here and now, of correcting it so that the person cannot be held responsible for doing what he does not know is wrong.

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Pamphlet 395

Clarifying, "There is no salvation outside the Church"

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Question: There is a small, but very vocal group in our parish that is creating much confusion about the Catholic Church's position that "There is no salvation outside the Church." They claim that a person must be baptized by water or will not be saved. Further, they claim that the Church's teaching on the baptism by desire or martyrdom is incorrect. Would you please shed some light on this topic?

Answer: "Basing itself on Scripture and Tradition, the Second Vatican Council teaches that the Church is necessary for salvation. Christ is the mediator and way of salvation. He is present to us in His body, which is the Church. He explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and baptism. By doing so, He affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church, which people enter through baptism. Because of that, there are people who 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 remain in it" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §846).

The Catholic Church has also, always and everywhere, taught that baptism is necessary for salvation. Still, that necessity is not strictly absolute, as we learn from the Council of Trent, which declared that "since the promulgation of the Gospel there is no translation from the state of Old Adam to the state of grace... without the laver of regeneration, *or the desire of it...*" (Sixth Session, *Decree concerning Justification*,

Ch. 4, January 13, 1547). (1) So Baptism of water is not, the only Baptism.

This brings us to the important point of Baptism of desire. In case of necessity this baptism will suffice for salvation. (But only Baptism by water can confer the baptismal character and render a person capable of receiving the other sacraments.) St. Augustine and St. Ambrose taught that perfect love of God and sorrow for sin surely includes the desire to fulfill Christ's every command. This is Baptism of desire. Baptism of blood or martyrdom is also equivalent to Baptism of water.

The Catholic Church *is* the one society for man's salvation instituted by Jesus and therefore a person must be affiliated with the Church in some way to be saved. That is what St. Cyprian meant when he said: "No one can have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his Mother" (*On the Unity of the Church*, 6). But many souls, apparently outside the Church are really within her fold in the sight of God. While not united with her *in fact*, they are in communion with her *in desire*.

The Catholic Churches teaches that God gives sufficient grace to all men to be saved; that unbelief is never sinful unless it is voluntary. Intelligent people often recognize the boundless charity of the Catholic Church, which condemns only those who freely and deliberately sin against God.

The Church has always taught that no person is lost except through his own fault; that God holds no one responsible for an obligation that he cannot fulfill because of his invincible ignorance.(2) How could God condemn a person for not entering a Church of whose very existence he is unaware? Pope Pius IX stated the Catholic Doctrine clearly when he said, "Far be it from us to dare set bounds to the boundless mercy of God; far be it from us to desire to search the depths of the hidden counsels and

judgments of God, an abyss that the mind of man cannot explore... We must hold as of faith, that out of the Apostolic Roman Church there is no salvation; that she is the only ark of safety, and whosoever is not in her perishes in the deluge; we must also, on the other hand, recognize with certainty that those who are in invincible ignorance of the true religion are not guilty for this in the eye of the Lord. And who will presume to mark out the limits of this ignorance, according to the character and diversity of peoples, countries, minds and the rest" (*Allocution*, Dec. 9, 1854).

In his Encyclical to the Italian Bishops, August 10, 1863, he wrote: "It is known to us and to you that those who are in invincible ignorance or our most holy religion, but who observe carefully the natural law, and the precepts graven by God upon the hearts of all men, and who being disposed to obey God lead an honest and upright life, may, aided by the light of divine grace, attain to eternal life; for God who sees clearly, searches and knows the heart, the disposition, the thoughts and intentions of each, in His supreme mercy and goodness by no means permits that anyone suffer eternal punishment, who has not of his own free will fallen into sin."

This is a hot-button issue for many, who are quick to criticize the Church, but there is a more fundamental issue involved in this debate, and that is the issue of authority.

Would a Good God, "who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4), fail to provide His revelation with a living infallible witness? Would a just God command us to believe under penalty of hell (Mk. 16:6), and at the same time leave us to the mercy of every false prophet (Matt. 13:21) and lying teacher (2 Peter 2:1), preaching a Gospel opposed to His (Gal. 1:8)?

No, the Catholic Church is spoken of in the New Testament as a divine, infallible teaching authority. Jesus said that His Church is like a city built firmly upon a foundation of rock, which can never be destroyed by Satan and the power of evil (Matt. 7:24; 16:18).

Throughout the Gospels the mission of the Apostles and their successors is said to be identical to the mission of Jesus and His heavenly Father. "As the Father sends me (to bear witness to the truth (Jn 18:37) I send you" (Jn 20:21). "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives any one whom I send receives me; and he who receives me receives him who sent me" (Jn 13:20). "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me" (Matt. 10:40).

When Jesus gave to the Apostles the divine commission for all nations until the end of the world (Matt. 27:20), He promised: "I am with you always." This phrase is used at least 90 times in the Bible, and usually signifies that God will ensure the success of the person's undertaking. If the Apostles are to be successful in their divine mission of teaching for all time, they and their successors must have divine infallibility.

In His last discourse to the Apostles, Jesus promised to send them the Holy Spirit, who would live with them forever, and teach them all things that He had taught them (Jn. 14:26). He is the Spirit of Truth, whom the world of unbelievers (Jn. 15:19; 17:9, 25) cannot receive, (Jn 14:13-17, 25-26; 15:26; 16:13). The Church that witnesses to Jesus (Lk. 24:28; Acts 1:9) must be infallible.

The Apostles always declare that their teaching is the Word of God (Acts 4:31; 8:14; 12:24; 13:44; 15:35; 1 Cor. 14:35; 2 Tim. 2:9), which they voice infallibly by the assistance of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4; 4:31; 15:25-28; 1 Cor. 2:4-16), who confirms their witness by miracles