

“How to Respond to...”

CATHOLICISM

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Introductory thought:

With over 1 billion members in the world today, the Roman Catholic Church is by far the largest Christian organization. Yet, when one asks the question, “What is the difference between a Catholic Church vs. a Lutheran Church?” the answer most often is:

1. The Catholic Church was founded by Jesus Christ 2000 years ago and has an unbroken line of apostolic succession. The Lutheran Church was founded by a man who had some crazy interpretations of scripture and put his own ideas over 1500 years of Catholic Authority.
2. There is little difference between Lutherans and Catholics Church. Attend the services of each to see for yourself. Just agree to disagree and rejoin! Arguing over little bits of teaching and theology is just ridiculous.

To either the casual or modern observer, looking at Catholicism and Lutheranism side by side one may only conclude that they are both ‘Christian’ and stop there. However, as we look at the teachings and practices of the Roman Catholics and true confessional Lutheranism (not ELCA), we see a much different picture!

“Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’” [John 8:31-32]

Brief Comparison:

+Roman Catholics, in general, agree with Biblical teachings that:

Scripture is God’s Word; God is Triune; God is our Creator (this has changed recently); and Jesus Christ is true God and man.

-Catholicism partially agrees with what the Bible says about:

The Means of Grace; Holy Baptism; and the Lord’s Supper.

-Catholicism is at complete odds with Bible teaching in adding:

Justification by Faith with works; Purgatory; Infallibility and authority of Pope; Teachings about Mary and saints; and others.

Important Points to Remember:

A. There are Differences within the Catholic church

About ¼ of Catholics are doctrinally conservative. Many priests and members tend to accept liberal, pluralist beliefs contrary to their own church teaching. [Rose Chart of Denominational Comparison]

B. Catholicism often defines terms differently than we do

Our common background with Catholics leads to the use of the same terms, but may not mean the same thing when we use them, e.g. *catholic, sacrament, confession, grace, justification, saint*, etc.

C. Authority of Scripture?

Catholicism sources of doctrine are Scripture, church tradition and the words of the church fathers, papal decrees. However, they teach Scripture must be interpreted within the Tradition of the Church (cf. our belief Scripture interprets Scripture). Catholicism also includes seven apocryphal books in the Old Testament.

D. Essential Doctrine – The Gospel/Justification of sins

On occasion, you may find a Catholic who believes that their works don't have anything to do with their salvation, and that Christ paid the whole debt of all people's sin when He said, "It is finished" on the cross. Lovingly show what their church says of that belief:

"If any one saith, that man is truly absolved from his sins and justified, because that he assuredly believed himself absolved and justified; or that no one is truly justified but he who believes himself justified; and that, by this faith alone, absolution and justification are effected; let him be anathema."

[Council of Trent, Session Six, Canon XIV]

"If any one saith, that justifying faith is nothing else but confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ's sake; or, that this confidence alone is that whereby we are justified; let him be anathema." [Council of Trent, Session Six, Canon XII]

Take the opportunity then to show them what the Bible teaches:

"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified."

[Galatians 2:16; also Romans 3:28; Ephesians 2:8-9]

E. Sacraments

According to Catholicism, Christ instituted the sacraments of the new law. There are seven: Baptism, Confirmation (or Chrismation), the Eucharist, Penance, the Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders and Matrimony. The seven sacraments touch all the stages and all the important moments of Christian life: they give birth and increase, healing and mission to the Christian's life of faith. [Catholic Catechism]

Following this analogy, the first chapter will expound the three sacraments of Christian initiation; the second, the sacraments of healing; and the third, the sacraments at the service of communion and the mission of the faithful. [Catholic Catechism]

Baptism = teaches infant baptism, but Baptism removes only original (inherited) sin, actual sins must be atoned for by works.

Lord's Supper = bread and wine are changed into Jesus body and blood (transubstantiation). Sometimes communicants now receive both bread and wine, historically only received bread.

F. Mary (*the Bible doesn't say a great deal about her*)

Catholicism teaches '*Immaculate conception*' = Mary is sinless. But this contradicts the universality of sin, [cf. **Genesis 5**; **Luke 1:47**; **Romans 3:23-24**]. Also taught is that she remained a virgin perpetually [contradicts **Matthew 1:25**] that she was assumed bodily into heaven (no suggestion of this in Scripture), and she is the Mother of the church and considered an object of devotion and veneration—does this stop short of worship? Read on.

G. Prayer to Mary and Other Saints

Catholicism claims...*"The first Commandment does not forbid us to pray to the saints... By praying to the saints we mean the asking of their help and prayers... We believe that the Holy Mother of God, the new Eve, Mother of the Church, continues in heaven to exercise her maternal role on behalf of the members of Christ... The Blessed Virgin Mary, through the merits of her Divine Son, was preserved free from the guilt of original sin, and this privilege is called her Immaculate Conception... The Church, by means of Indulgences, remits the temporal punishment due to sin by applying to us the merits of Jesus Christ, and the superabundant satisfactions of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the saints; which merits and satisfactions are its spiritual treasury... By the superabundant satisfaction of the Blessed Virgin and the saints, we mean all the satisfaction over and above what was necessary to satisfy for their own sins. As their good works were many and their sins few -- the Blessed Virgin being sinless -- the satisfaction not needed for themselves is kept by the Church in a spiritual treasury to be used for our benefit."* [Catholic Catechism]

Rather, study God's Word to see the truth of the matter.

[cf. **Psalm 51:5**, **115:6**; **Matthew 4:10**; **John 3:6**; **Romans 8:34**; **1 John 2:1**; and below...]

"For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus." [1 **Timothy 2:5**]

"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned." [**Romans 5:12**]

H. Purgatory

Roman Catholics teach that faithful souls go to heaven immediately, or to purgatory if imperfectly purified in this life. The

souls of the wicked are immediately sent to Hell. Purgatory is the state in which those suffer for a time without having satisfied for the punishment due to their sins. This state is called ‘*Purgatory*’ because there, souls are purged or purified from all their stains; and it is not, therefore, a permanent state for the soul.

“And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” [Matthew 25:46; and cf. 32-33]

*“Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place **once for all**, having obtained eternal redemption.”* [Hebrews 9:12]

I. Papacy

According to Catholic tradition, the apostle Peter is considered the first pope. Gregory the Great is a key figure in the papacy. At that time, the pope came to be viewed as ruling over the whole church. What Scripture says of ‘The Antichrist’ [cf. 2 Thessalonians 2] fits the papacy—not any one pope, but the institution of the papacy.

J. Marriage

Celibacy issues among non-married priests have been present historically as well as in modern times. [cf. 1 Corinthians 7:8-9; 1 Timothy 4:1-3] There are also conditions that go into great detail upon which Catholics will be permitted to marry one who is not a Catholic.

So where do we begin?

Start: The authority of Scripture (without it = ‘my opinion’)

Next: Sin & Grace / The Means of Grace (Gospel of Jesus)

Helpful questions: *Is salvation of us or God’s free gift? Are the sacraments obligations and works we fulfill or gifts that offer God’s grace and forgiveness?* The answer to these reveals the essential error of Catholicism (and many Reformed churches too).

Then: Other points of Doctrine

Finally, regarding the vast variety of beliefs out there that can be so widely conflicting, our “how to respond” needs to...

- **Be adaptable** = one Truth fits all, one approach does not fit all
- **Meet people where they are** = one Truth fits all, but one starting point of conversation and instruction does not fit all situations.
- **Be patient** = souls are not helped if we don’t correct/rebuke error, but neither are souls helped if we speak the truth without love. It takes the work of the Holy Spirit and often time to shift a heart from long cherished, but erroneous, beliefs...to the truth.
- **Redeem the time** = pray to the Spirit for occasions, & use them!
- **Listen carefully** = know their beliefs so you know where to help.