

Q: YB Catholic?

By Graham Osborne

This is the question of all questions! Here are some good responses:

1) The Church Jesus built was the Catholic Church!

Whether you agree or not, this is just an unarguable fact of history. The church Jesus founded almost 2000 years ago is unquestionably the Catholic Church. Now some may suggest that this church apostacized in the early 300's with Constantine, or at some other point in history. But I definitely wouldn't want to make this argument -because you might find yourself arguing against Jesus Himself!

In **Mat 7**, Jesus tells the parable of the wise builder, who builds his house on rock –a house that will never fall. A few chapters later in **Matthew 16**, Jesus, the wisest of all builders will build his church, His “house” [St. Paul calls the church “*the household*” of God” in **1 Tim 3:15**], on rock: “*you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church*”. Even Peter’s name means “rock” in Greek [Petros]! Then Jesus carries on and promises that “*the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against*” His Church. His Church will never fall!

2] The early church had an authoritative leader and successor of St Peter –the office of the Papacy

In Matthew 16, where Jesus is building His Church on Peter, He gives Peter, and only Peter, something remarkable: “*the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.*” And in **John 21:15-17**, the Good Shepherd will appoint Peter as His shepherd on earth. Three times Jesus will tell Peter to “*Feed my lambs... Tend my sheep... Feed my sheep.*”

Scripture further shows Peter unquestionably being the leader of the early church, leading all the great apostolic firsts of the church [admits the gentiles (**Acts 10**), leads the first doctrinal council of the Church (**Acts 15**), the first raising from the dead (**Acts 9**)] and being mentioned some 191 times in the New testament, with St John a distant second at 39.

But the real question here is, did Jesus intend Peter’s office as a perpetual office to be filled at Peter’s death or not. I would answer that if Judas had an office that needed to be filled [see **Acts 1:16-26**], how much more Peter! But perhaps the most conclusive answer comes from the first centuries of the

Church. Do we see an authoritative, apostolic office of St Peter -a single man leading the Christian Church in an office that is identified as a perpetual succession of Peter's own office? And the answer is a resounding yes!

Around 80AD, the Church at Corinth wrote to Clement of Rome [the 4th Pope] to decide a doctrinal issue for them, even though St. John the Apostle was still alive -and living much closer by in Ephesus! They wrote to Clement because he was the Pope! And St. Clement wrote a strongly authoritative letter back to them, clearly telling them what they were to do, and reminiscent of St Peter's doctrinal pronouncement in **Acts 15** at the first Church Council of Jerusalem: *"If anyone disobey the things which have been said by Him through us, let them know that they will involve themselves in transgressions and in no small danger... being obedient to the things we have written through the Holy Spirit"*.

Around 250AD, **St Cyprian** would write: *"It is on him [Peter] that He [Jesus] builds the church, and to him that He entrusts the sheep to feed. And although He assigns power to all the apostles, yet he founded a single chair, thus establishing by His own authority the source and hallmark of the churches' oneness... a primacy is given to Peter and it is thus made clear that there is but one church and one chair. ...If a man does not hold fast to this oneness of Peter, does he imagine that he still holds the faith? If he deserts the Chair of Peter upon whom the church was built, has he still confidence that he is in the Church?"* Wow! If you desert the Chair of Peter, the Catholic Church, St Cyprian is saying how can you be sure you are even in the Church anymore – i.e. are you still Christian?!

3] The Sacraments

These are the main ways that Jesus left us to confer His grace to us, and they are critical to our growing in faith, hope and love –in holiness! And they come to us in their entirety, all seven of them, through the Catholic Church.

Consider just the Eucharist alone. In **John 6**, Jesus says an incredible thirteen times in 9 verses that unless we eat His Body and drink His Blood, we cannot have eternal life. A few verses later, Peter repeats this, saying that these words Jesus has just spoken are the *"words of eternal life"*. Could we not then say quite safely that this is the heart of Christianity: eternal life?

Now if you felt that perhaps Jesus was speaking symbolically here, you would be disagreeing with Jesus literal words, both here in **John 6** [where the Jews clearly understand Jesus to be speaking literally and leave him because of it – and He let's them go because He IS speaking literally], and in the various accounts of the last supper, including St Paul's. There is not a hint of inferred

symbolism in ANY of them. And you would be disagreeing with essentially every Church Father in the history of Christianity.

The constant teaching of the Christian Church, right from the time of the Apostles to the Protestant Reformation, is that Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist. Even Martin Luther believed this, going so far as to summarize the history of all the writings of the Early Church on the matter: *“Not one of the Fathers, though so numerous... ever said, “It is only bread and wine”; or, “the body and blood of Christ is not there present... Certainly in so many Fathers, and in so many writings, the negative might at least be found in one of them had they thought the body and blood of Christ were not really present: but they are all of them unanimous.”* The founder of the Protestant Reformation defending the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist -stunning!

4] The early Church was Catholic!

So often, we hear people say, “let’s go back and be like the Early Church”. Yes, lets do that, because it was absolutely, stunningly Catholic. Everything is there, the Eucharist, confession, infant baptism, teachings on the Blessed Mother, the papacy –and much more! For the first thousand years of the Church or so, virtually everyone who was Christian was Catholic. There really were no other options!

5] The Catholic Church is Apostolic

Every bishop, priest and deacon in the Catholic Church can trace his ordination back in an unbroken line to one of the Apostles. Every one! When small schismatic groups would separate themselves from the early Church, one of the first things a Bishop would do would be to ask them to roll out their list of bishops and trace them back to the Apostles. In this way, he would point out to them that they were not “Apostolic” in origin, because invariably, they would not be able to do this.

In 110AD, **St Ignatius of Antioch** [martyred for the faith and taught by St John himself!!!] would confirm that: *“In the same way all should...respect the bishop as representing the Father and the priests as the council of God and the college of the Apostles. Apart from these there is nothing that can be called a Church.”* If someone was in a denomination that didn’t have validly ordained bishops and priests, that couldn’t trace their ordination back to the Apostles, St Ignatius wouldn’t even consider it part of the Church.

Similarly, **St. Irenaeus** [≈ 190 AD] would write: *“...we shall confound all those... by pointing out here the successions of the bishops of the greatest*

*and most ancient Church known to all, founded and organized at Rome... that Church which has the tradition and the faith which comes down to us after having been announced to men by the Apostles. For with this Church, because of its superior origin, **all the Churches must agree, that is, all the faithful in the whole world; and it is in her that the faithful everywhere have maintained the Apostolic tradition.***"

6] In 2000 years, the Church has NEVER contradicted itself in teaching faith and morals. NEVER!!!

This is truly incredible when you think about it. And the Catholic Church is the only Christian Church today that has remained constant and unchanging on all the great moral truths of Christianity. How could this happen in a human institution? But my point is just that: the Catholic Church is a *divine* institution, guided and protected from error by the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised to it [see places like **John 14:26, John 16:13, 2 Tim 1:13-14, 2 Tim 2:2**].

Yes, it is full of weak sinful human beings, but that should not shake our faith in God's ability to work through the Church He founded, sent the Holy Spirit to, promised the gates of Hell would not prevail against, and promised to be with always.

If scandals have troubled you, yes, these are deeply saddening –discouraging to some. But not excusing or diminishing the damage done, we must still remember that personal sin is involved here, and not the infallibility of the Church – its ability to teach “officially” on matters of faith and morals without error. Jesus picks 12 and one is Judas. We should expect weeds and wheat. When the Scribes and Pharisees failed to live up to their calling, Jesus replied that they “*have taken their seat on the chair of Moses. Therefore, **do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow their example. For they preach but they do not practice***” [Mat 23: 1-3].

We can answer similarly today. A person does not have to be perfect to teach morality. If that were so, most parents could probably teach very little at all to their children. And similarly with the Church. Jesus can still guide the Church into teaching all truth, despite the unworthiness of some of Her members.