

Do Catholics Possess Life Eternal?

By Richard Bennett

In my 48 years as a Catholic and my 22 years as a Catholic priest I believed in the Catholic Church. Consequently I thought that as I had the Sacraments by means of which, when I died, I would have everlasting life. Like other priests, I taught the people that once they were faithful to the Church as Catholics and died in the state of “sanctifying grace,” they would go to heaven. With deep respect for these who have been so misled, I now write on the topic of Catholics and eternal life. As an Irish Catholic, I remember the grip that Catholicism had on my own soul; in a sense, it was second nature to me. So it is with sensitivity that I write on a Christian’s relationship with God the Father and a Catholic’s relationship with the Holy Father in Rome.

A Christian’s relationship with God the Father is a crucial topic. Jesus Christ declared, “*And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.*”¹ Not to know and believe in “*the only true God*” is to be deprived of “*life eternal.*” However, a Catholic is first required to believe and know that the “Church is the mother of all believers.” This is because, according to the Catholic Church’s official teaching,

“‘Believing’ is an ecclesial act. The Church’s faith precedes, engenders, supports and nourishes our faith. The Church is the mother of all believers. ‘No one can have God as Father who does not have the Church as Mother’”(Para 181).²

Consequently, a Catholic in daily life willingly has a relationship with “the Church as Mother” replacing what ought to be a relationship with God as his adoptive Father. The essence of this substitution is obvious when a devout Catholic refers to the Pope as “Holy Father.” In fact, the Catholic news agency, Zenit, normally calls the Pope the “Holy Father.”³ And for most Catholics, the term the “Holy Father” usually means the Pope.

The Concept of God as Father

It is noted that in Scripture the word “Father” was on the lips of the Lord Jesus no less than one hundred seventy times. Christ Jesus spoke of God distinctively as Abba Father.⁴ In Scripture the same concept, “Abba Father,” is explained to the believer in these words, “*for ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.*”⁵ Beholding the Father’s love by the intimate title of “Abba Father” gives the true believer the deep sense of being loved personally as a child of God.⁶ The Lord Jesus Christ offered the following prayer for all those who would genuinely believe in God as their Father, “*Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.*”⁷

In contrast, the official law of the Roman Catholic Church speaks of the necessity of submitting one’s highest faculties, that of mind and will, not to God the heavenly Father, but to the Supreme Pontiff in Rome. Thus, the official law of the Roman Catholic Church states,

¹ John 17:3

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church Catechism*, Second Ed., Para. 181. All quotations citing the *Catechism* are taken from this source.

³ For example, “The Holy Father received..” <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/all-this-must-not-be-taken-for-granted-says-holy-father> 8/9/2014

⁴ Mark 14:36

⁵ Romans 8:14-17

⁶ “*And I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.*” II Corinthians 6:18

⁷ John 17:11

“A religious respect of intellect and will, even if not the assent of faith, is to be paid to the teaching which the Supreme Pontiff or the college of bishops enunciate on faith or morals...”⁸

However, the Lord Jesus Christ has commanded, “*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*”⁹ One cannot serve two sovereigns, for the Lord’s command contradicts that of the Pontiff. A man cannot be impartial between two masters who are incompatible and demanding total allegiance. The necessity of a choice arises. So a Catholic ought to decide who indeed is his or her Lord!

Moreover, as the Lord Jesus Christ deeply treasured the word “Father,” He gave this commandment, “*call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.*”¹⁰ This is the essence of the message of the Lord concerning our Father in heaven. Thus, the Father in heaven is worthy of worship, and a true believer will speak the words, “The Holy Father” for God alone! Nonetheless, the Church of Rome teaches that her pope is called “Holy Father.” For example, the Vatican website announced regarding Francis I, “Address of the Holy Father” in the Vatican Gardens Sunday, 8 June 2014.¹¹

The Lord God is Sovereign

God is all-loving, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. The Lord God is sovereign with complete, supreme, and universal power of all things, in heaven and on earth. Even on the topic of the sovereignty of God, Papal Rome’s claim is stated in the following official words,

“For the Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, and as pastor of the entire Church has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered.”¹²

Thus, the Roman Pontiff attributes to himself the sovereign rule of the entire Church that belongs to the Lord God alone. Let us make no mistake, the Catholic Church throughout its history has persistently and arrogantly assumed and appropriated to itself the offices of the Heavenly Father. For example, Pope Boniface VIII in 1302, in the Papal Bull “Unam Sanctam” decreed, “Furthermore we declare, say, define, and proclaim to every human creature that they, by necessity for salvation, are entirely subject to the Roman Pontiff.”¹³ The papal arrogance is blasphemy of the highest order!

God the Father’s Love in Salvation

God the Father’s love always achieves its purposes, “*In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love ... that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*”¹⁴ The design and intention of God the Father was that salvation should come to sinful man in and through Christ Jesus. Emphatically, grace in its most proper sense is free as *given*, a gift from heaven. Thus, as Scripture says, sinners are saved by grace; it is “*the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.*”¹⁵ The reign of sin is overcome by the reign of God’s

⁸ Canon 752

⁹ Matthew 22:37

¹⁰ Matthew 23:9

¹¹ http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/june/documents/papa-francesco_20140608_invocazione-pace.html#Distinguished_Presidents

¹² *Catechism*, Para. 882

¹³ Henry Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum, The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, Tr. by Roy J. Deferrari, 30th Ed.(1984), #469.

¹⁴ I John 4:9-10

¹⁵ Ephesians 2:9

grace, as the Scripture says, “*even so might grace reign!*”¹⁶ The abundance of grace far surpasses the evils of sin. Once a believing sinner trusts upon Christ Jesus as his only surety and substitute, he discovers that not only is he freed from his sins, but also he is made to “*reign in life.*” As Scripture states, “*for if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.*”¹⁷

Attempting to imitate this, the Roman Catholic Church claims that its sacraments are necessary for salvation. Its official teaching states the following, “The Church affirms that for believers the sacraments of the New Covenant are *necessary for salvation.*”¹⁸ Thus, the Catholic Church presents her seven physical sacraments - mediated through her - as the means of obtaining the grace of the Holy Spirit.¹⁹ The Vatican’s pretense is to present her symbolic sacraments as the efficacious cause of salvation. These enticing ways to obtain salvation are but the age-old temptation of looking to physical performances and human works to gain favor with God. Such teachings as these come under the eternal curse of perverting the Gospel of Christ.²⁰ Nevertheless, to administer her seven sacraments, the Catholic Church ordains priests of whom she states, “Priests have received from God a power that he has given neither to angels nor to archangels...God above confirms what priests do here below.”²¹ In the New Testament, no sacrificial priests are mentioned, only elders and pastors.²²

Thus the Catholic Church’s man-made belief system is a catastrophic imposition on the souls of men and women. However, the true Gospel lays before each person the solution that is ample to face all evil. The power of it is strong enough to raise people up to life, peace, and heaven itself. The same Gospel causes the Lord’s redeemed people to rejoice in the glorious grace that flows through His own plan of eternal life. “*And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.*”²³ The eternal Son of the Father has life in His own essence and person as the Word of God.²⁴ From Him eternal life is given to each true believer, both here and in heaven.²⁵ However, the Catholic Church teaches that God’s grace comes through the Roman Catholic sacraments.²⁶ Anyone who believes in the Catholic sacramental system and places his or her soul’s trust on ceremonial proceedings is not trusting on Jesus Christ alone.

A Catholic Believes in the Mass i.e. the Eucharist

At the heart of Roman Catholicism is the Mass or Eucharist, described by the Second Vatican Council as “the fount and apex of the whole Christian life.” Rome claims that the Mass is a sacrifice and that the sacrifice of Calvary and the Mass are the same; namely, “one single sacrifice.” Thus she teaches,

¹⁶ Romans 5:21

¹⁷ Romans 5:17

¹⁸ *Catechism*, Para. 1129

¹⁹ “The sacraments impart grace, but, in addition, the very act of celebrating them disposes the faithful most effectively to receive this grace in a fruitful manner, to worship God rightly, and to practice charity.” See: <http://www.catholic.org/prayers/sacrament.php>

²⁰ “*If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.*”

Galatians 1:9

²¹ *Catechism*, Para. 983 Stated Sub-Para. 3

²² The terms overseer and elder/pastor are used interchangeably, Acts 20:17, 28; I Peter 5:1-4.

²³ I John 5:11

²⁴ John 1:1-4

²⁵ John 1:12-13

²⁶ <http://www.adelaide.catholic.org.au/our-faith/sacraments>

“The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are *one single sacrifice*: ‘The victim is one and the same: the same now offers through the ministry of priests, who then offered himself on the cross; only the manner of offering is different.’ ‘And since in this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and offered in an unbloody manner...this sacrifice is truly propitiatory.’”²⁷

To propose a bloodless sacrifice is a contradiction in terms.²⁸ A bloodless sacrifice is a senseless inconsistency that can have no purpose other than to deceive. The Lord’s Supper is not a sacrifice; it is a memorial. The bread and wine are tokens symbolizing the body and blood of the once and for all sacrifice of Calvary. A true believer eats the bread and drinks the wine to remember Him and His atonement with thanksgiving and praise until He returns. Again what a different relationship there is in the faith of a true believer regarding the Lord’s Supper and the belief of a Catholic regarding the Mass or Eucharist. There can be no more remembrance of sin against a true believer, either to shame him now or to condemn him hereafter. The sacrifice of Christ was once for all time. Its power is eternal. “*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.*”²⁹ Jesus Christ the Lord procured a perfect, eternal salvation for one who truly believes in His finished sacrifice. Not so for the poor Catholic who persists in depending on a so-called, “divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass.”

A Catholic Prays not to Christ Jesus Alone but also to Mary and the Saints

A true believer looks to Christ Jesus as the one mediator, “*for there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.*”³⁰ The splendor of the Gospel is that the believer’s heart is set on Jesus Christ, the fountain of life. A Catholic, however, will also pray to Mary and their declared Saints. This is because the Catholic Church officially teaches,

“*Communion with the dead.* In full consciousness of this communion of the whole Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, the Church in its pilgrim members, from the earliest days of the Christian religion, has honored with great respect the memory of the dead... Our prayer for them is capable not only of helping “them, but also of making their intercession for us effective.””³¹

The Bible teaches that God alone is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. Thus, He alone hears prayers, He is the all Holy One; in a word, He is God alone. Prayer directed to the dead, and not the Lord God alone, is consummate blasphemy! Calling up or invoking the dead; i.e., necromancy, is strictly forbidden in the Bible.³² As the One great true High Priest, Jesus Christ completely satisfies all the intercessory prayer service that a true believer needs; as Scripture states, “*It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.*”³³ Again, a poor deluded Catholic who persists in following the Roman Catholic tradition of prayers to, or invocations of the dead, has no biblical warrant for being heard by God the Father. Scripture asserts that in seeking other mediators, Catholics reject the unique redemptive office of the Lord Jesus Christ who is the sole mediator of the covenant of Grace appointed by the Holy Father.³⁴

²⁷ *Catechism*, Para. 1367 (underlining added in this paper)

²⁸ Hebrews 9:21 “*without shedding of blood is no remission.*”

²⁹ Romans 8:1

³⁰ I Timothy 2:5

³¹ *Catechism*, Para. 958

³² Deuteronomy 18:9-11

³³ Romans 8:34

³⁴ Hebrews 9:24

Conclusion

In Scripture, the believer looks to Christ Jesus as “*THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.*”³⁵ The splendor of the Gospel is that the believer’s heart is set on Christ, the Fountain of life, where the believer drinks more and more deeply of the rivers of pleasure that are at Christ’s right hand. Eternal life is to be found only in Christ Jesus, His perfect life, and Him being an all-sufficient sacrifice. “*But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*”³⁶ This is the true focus, because a believer learns more and more consistently to look always to the Lord Jesus Christ alone for life. How completely different this is from the goal and destiny that Papal Rome holds out to people. Rome directs her people, and mankind in general, to look to physical sacraments and her ruling hierarchy that uphold her sacraments. However, the biblical Gospel does not involve looking to physical signs; rather, believers are to follow the biblical injunction to look “*unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*”³⁷ He is the author and finisher of their faith: its beginning and end. “*Looking to Jesus*” is to trustfully keep one’s heart and mind stayed upon Him. In Him is grace. He is the Fountain of all grace and supplies all the needs of each believer. The believer’s life is drawn from Christ, and directed to Him; he is its initial principle and the final end of it. True life is that which is lived in personal, intimate communion with Christ, as the Apostle Paul so eloquently stated, “*For to me to live is Christ.*” It means that as a person is justified by the All-Holy God alone, he is to walk with the Lord Jesus Christ, taking Christ’s yoke upon him and learning of Christ, so that he drinks deeply from God’s Written Word and begins to follow what the Scripture says, rather than devising his own ways.

The Lord faced the sincere and devout Pharisees with a very strong word. They were looking to their leader and chief, Caiaphas, the High Priest. The Lord said to those Pharisees, “*if ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins.*”³⁸ Like the Pharisees, many present-day Catholics look to the Pope. And likewise today, as with the Pharisees, if any Catholic continues to recognize the Pope as “Holy Father,” he is, in fact, denying the true Father and Son.”³⁹ He who persists in his sins, will likewise die in his sins. The Lord Jesus Christ died in place of the true believer. His life and finished sacrifice alone are the ransom for the believer. “*The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*”⁴⁰ This was the price demanded by the All-Holy God in order that His justice might be satisfied in the forgiveness of sins. As a result of this payment, the true believer on Christ Jesus alone is freed forever from sin and Satan. “*For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*”⁴¹ Such a gift of God engages our hearts in deep gratitude as we proclaim, “*For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.*”⁴² ♦

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³⁵ Jeremiah 23:6

³⁶ II Corinthians 3:18

³⁷ Hebrews 12:2

³⁸ John 8:24

³⁹ “*He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.*” I John 2:22

⁴⁰ Mark 10:45

⁴¹ Romans 6:23

⁴² Romans 11:36