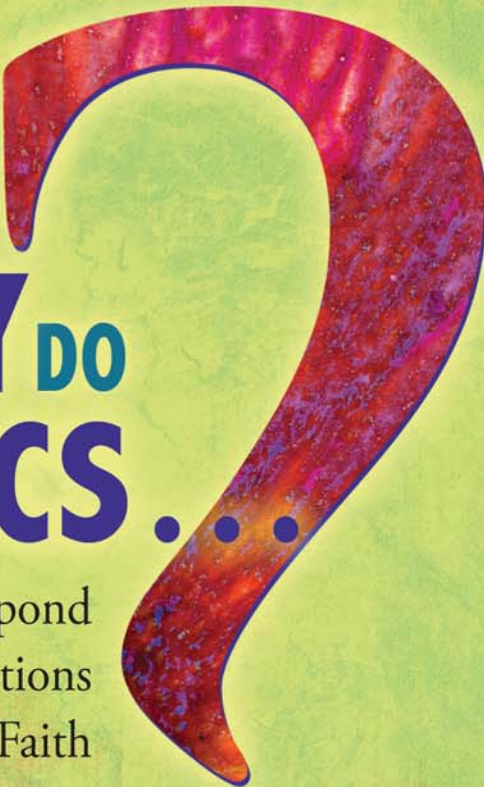

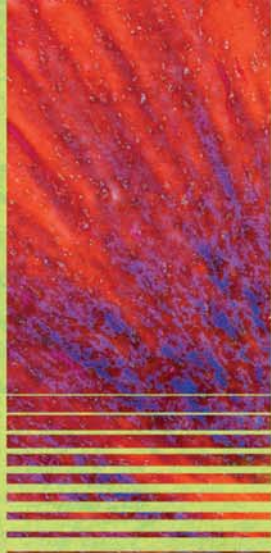


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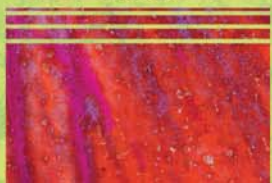


**WHY DO
CATHOLICS...**

Teens Respond
to Questions
about The Faith



Michael J. Daley,
editor



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SCITUARY'S VOICE

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Dedication

I dedicate this book to all my students—past, present, and future.

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Introduction

It All Begins with a Question

In light of perennial natural disasters, a question is raised: If God is all powerful and all loving, why would God allow such seemingly innocent suffering? For several years now, many have asked if the present form of priestly ministry can be changed and opened to married men, even women. Recent presidential elections have brought up the confusing question of whether Catholics should base their votes on a single issue or consider a spectrum of life issues. The war, new technologies in medicine, continued environmental degradation, ever-present issues of sexuality. . . . It can all be overwhelming.

As a teacher, I experience firsthand the struggles young people have with integrating their understanding of faith and Tradition with all that happens around them. You'd think that just as a coping mechanism, teenagers would stop asking questions. Nope. Young people continue to question, wanting all the more to see a connection with what they believe and what is going on in the real world.

When I was asked by Saint Mary's Press to consider writing a book for young people on questions and answers of faith, I was both intrigued and excited about the idea. But the more I considered it, the more I found myself asking, "If I were a young person, would I want to hear answers about questions of faith from yet another adult?" Then it struck me—why not let young people ask and answer their own questions of faith? So that is exactly what I did. Rather than offer my own responses to such questions, I extended an invitation to young people to serve as the authors of this book.

This book offers personal answers written by teens to the many questions, wonderings, and challenges they and many of their peers face regarding the practices and beliefs of the Catholic Church. In these pages, teenage authors share their own understanding of the Catholic Tradition, and their personal experiences (and challenges) of integrating faith with the real world.

Though this book does not answer every question you have about Catholicism, it will offer you some clear guidance and direction as you continue to navigate through the joys and challenges we all face as Catholic Christians.

Keep questioning, keep developing, and keep expanding your faith.

Mike Daley

1

Teens Share Their Understanding of Catholic Beliefs and Practices

How Does Catholicism Differ from Other Christian Traditions?

Mike Wren

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The authority of the Catholic Church was established at the moment Jesus said, “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18). Other churches—Episcopal, Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, Quaker, Pentecostal, and so on—were established by men who chose to separate themselves from full communion with the Catholic Church.

All Christian traditions share the common belief that salvation comes only through Christ. However, there are many areas in which other Christian traditions and Catholicism differ.

All Christians believe that God’s complete revelation is expressed in Jesus Christ. All Christians believe that the Bible is a primary way of communicating God’s revelation, but Catholics believe that God’s revelation is also communicated through sacred Tradition.

All Christians believe the Bible is true and without error when it teaches the things God wishes to reveal to us for the sake of our salvation. Some Christians also believe the Bible is without error in every aspect, including references to scientific and historical facts. But Catholics, along with other Christians, are cautious about making this claim. The Catholic Church teaches that in order to interpret

the Bible correctly, we must understand what the human authors intended to communicate at the time of their writings.

In the area of morality, the Catholic Church believes in absolute, objective truth, meaning there is good and evil. The Catholic Church proclaims the person of Jesus and promotes a culture of life.

Another way the Catholic Church is set apart from some other denominations is through the celebration of the seven sacraments. Some Christian traditions question whether the sacraments are a necessary part of Church life. But Catholics believe that Jesus gave the sacraments, his very presence, to the Church to help his people obtain God's sanctifying grace and truly experience union with Christ. Some Protestant traditions also do not believe in the centrality of the Eucharist, and some do not celebrate the Eucharist or do so only occasionally.

Catholics also believe in the role of the Pope as the head of the Church. Many Protestant traditions do not believe in any kind of centralized leadership.

Unlike some denominations, the Catholic Church also believes in the communion of saints. Just as our friends on earth care about us and pray for us, the saints also intercede for us with God. They are, in a way, a sort of lifeline. We pray through them and with them and ask them to pray for us. The lives of the saints inspire us to be better members of the Body of Christ.

What Are the Marks of the Church?

Ryan D'sa

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There are actually four specific marks that distinguish the Catholic Christian Church: *one, holy, catholic, and apostolic*. As Catholics we proclaim these marks every Sunday when we recite the Nicene Creed. The creed is one of the most powerful prayers of our faith,

and it reminds us of the beliefs of all Catholics. However, it is important to note that the Nicene Creed belongs to all Christians, not just Catholics. Other Christians understand or stress different marks of the Church than Catholics do.

The first mark of the Church is *one*. This means that the Church is one in Christ, faith, and prayer. The Church being one is a sign of unity. This gift comes from the Spirit and helps us to live like Jesus. The Church is one in faith, worship, government, and charity. One in faith means that we believe in the same things. One in worship means that we share in the same Eucharist. We are one in government through our Church leaders. We are one in charity because we give of our time, talent, and treasure to those in need, both inside and outside our faith community.

The second mark of the Church is *holy*. The Church is holy because Christ founded her and the Holy Spirit guides her. The Catholic Church is holy through the seven sacraments. Through the sacraments, our relationship with God is strengthened, and we grow in our faith.

The third mark of the Church is *catholic*. The word *catholic* means “universal” or “worldwide.” The Church is catholic because it preaches the Good News to all people. It teaches the message of Christ and offers all that is needed for salvation. The Church is called catholic because it adapts to all ages and generations. All the people of the Church help strengthen this mark when they preach the word of God and when they do good deeds for others.

The last mark of the Church is *apostolic*. This means that the Church is rooted in the beliefs of the Apostles and continues their mission. The Church is apostolic through its whole governance hierarchy and the body of believers. We are all called to be apostolic and help the Church follow in the footsteps of the Apostles.

As much as the Church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, it is also sometimes marked by division, sin, sectarianism, and confusion.

The marks, then, have been achieved but can also be more fully realized.

Why Does the Catholic Church Have a Pope? Is He Infallible?

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The Pope is the leader of the Catholic Church. He is Saint Peter's successor. This is demonstrated in the Scriptures when Jesus changes Simon's name to Peter and says, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). In the Gospel of John, the resurrected Jesus instructs Peter, "Tend my sheep" (21:17). From this scriptural testimony evolved the ministry of the bishop of Rome to shepherd the Church.

The succession of the papacy offers a faithful line to Jesus and his teachings for members of the Catholic Church. Today—as seen especially through the ministry of the last Pope, Pope John Paul II, and now Pope Benedict XVI—the Pope serves as a visible symbol of Church unity.

An often disputed and misunderstood teaching associated with the Pope is that of infallibility. Infallibility is a great gift God has given the Church; it means that we can rely on the Church's teachings as being true. The Pope is "empowered with the infallibility that Christ conferred on his Church." (*Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, page 664). The ability to speak infallibly is the Pope's highest authority, but not all popes choose to exercise such authority.

However, only the Church can define teachings in the areas of faith and moral issues as infallible or free from error. To be clear, not every statement of every pope is an infallible statement. The Pope must declare that he is speaking infallibly in order for his words to be documented as free from error.

There are other conditions to the Pope's authority to speak infallibly, including (1) that others can speak infallibly along with the Pope (usually bishops in a Church council), (2) that his speaking as infallible is not his alone but represents the beliefs of all Christians, (3) that the matters of which he speaks must be linked to revelation, and (4) that the Pope is not speaking from his own capacity but from a "divine assistance" (*Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, page 664).

Why Are There So Many Christian Denominations?

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A great philosopher once said: "There was nothing funny about what Christ said; what was funny really is that Christ said all these really good things about 'love thy neighbor' and everything, and then for the next 2,000 years, people are killing each other, and torturing each other because they can't quite decide how he said it" (*Monty Python's Flying Circus: Live at Aspen*, 1998).

Divisions in the Church go back to the first century. In his First Letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul lamented that strife and divisions had resulted in some saying, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos" (1 Corinthians 3:4). A separation occurred within the Church in 1054 when the Greek-speaking Church of the East separated from the Latin-based Church in the West over a number of political and cultural differences, along with some relatively minor doctrinal disputes. The Church in the East became known as the Eastern Orthodox Church, and the Church in the West was called the Roman Catholic Church. These main divisions continue today.

Later, reformers among the Roman Catholics felt a need for spiritual renewal and correction within the Church. They especially protested the addition of nonbiblical tradition to the Bible as essential to the faith and practice of Christianity. These protesting reformers

eventually brought about a second major separation. From the Protestant Reformation came the Lutheran, Calvinist, Baptist, and other denominations. There were then splits from the splits, and faith communities like Puritans and Calvinists formed. Now there are countless different Christian communities all over the world.

Though there are differences between denominations, most of the basic doctrines agreed on by the early Catholic Church are still accepted by all. For example, Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox religions, most Protestants, and most Evangelical religions believe in the Trinity and in the divinity of Christ, and all Christian denominations agree that Jesus Christ died to atone for the sins of the world and was raised from the grave to break the power of Satan and death.

It is important not to become so preoccupied with the minor differences between the denominations that we overlook their broad areas of agreement. Much has been done to bring the churches closer together, but much more needs to take place.

What Was Vatican II?

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Vatican II, also known as the Second Vatican Council, was an ecumenical council—a gathering of all the world’s bishops. It took place over forty years ago and seems like ancient history to most young people. However, to our grandparents (and maybe even some of our parents), it was one of the most important religious occurrences of their lives. Vatican II has had a major effect on the lives of many Catholics.

The council was started by Pope John XXIII on October 11, 1962, and was concluded by Pope Paul VI on December 8, 1965. During the council, close to three thousand bishops discussed major reforms of the Catholic Church. The four sessions were held at Saint Peter’s

Basilica in Rome. As a result of Vatican II, many changes were made to the Catholic faith.

The first, and perhaps most tangible, effect of the council was the transforming changes made to the liturgy. Prior to Vatican II, Mass was prayed in Latin, which many people did not understand. The priest even stood with his back to the gathered assembly. As a result, the congregation did not actively participate much in the liturgy.

Now the Mass is said in the vernacular, or local, language. Now people understand more fully what is happening at Mass. As an assembly, we are encouraged to actively participate in the liturgy, and the priest now faces the congregation. All these changes are the result of Vatican II.

The council also encouraged and gave Catholics the tools to read the Bible. Vatican II redefined the Church's relationship with Judaism and spoke of the importance of dialogue with other world religions. It also sought to overcome deep division among the various Christian traditions.

The council called for greater collegiality among the bishops and the Pope. The council reaffirmed the Pope's role as the sole successor of Peter and upheld the importance of Mary.

Finally, especially as it concerns young Catholics, Vatican II stressed and called for the active involvement of the laity, the people in the pews.

Does (Has) the Church Ever Change(d)?

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The Church has to be willing to adapt because the world changes and each generation is different from the one before it. Because the Church is the community charged with continuing Jesus's mission on

earth, it has to be able to respond to new and different questions and circumstances.

It is important to emphasize that God's revelation does not change. What evolves is the Church's understanding of God's word. Another way of saying this is that our fundamental beliefs don't change, but sometimes the way we understand and explain our beliefs and the way we apply them to what is happening in the world changes. For example, there was a time when the Church did not recognize that slavery was unjust, but now it does.

Our practices can change too. Some of the most noticeable during the last half century are changes in our liturgical practices. The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) ushered in quite a few, including a change in the language used at Mass. Before Vatican II, the Mass was prayed in Latin. Since the council, Catholics around the world have celebrated Mass using the vernacular, their common, everyday language.

So some things about the Church change, but its most important aspects stay the same.

Can Jews, Muslims, and Other Non-Christians Be Saved?

Dylan Perry

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Of course those who are not Catholic can be saved. The Catholic Church would not be so presumptuous as to assume that it holds the corner market on salvation. Catholics do not claim that those who do not believe in Jesus are going to hell. What the Church does teach is that Jesus is the fullest, clearest, and most complete way of salvation. It also admits and allows for Jesus's presence to be found and communicated beyond the visible bonds of the Church.

To take a rather extreme example, say that there is a remote tribe in the mountains of South America. The members of the tribe have never had the opportunity to learn about Jesus Christ or to be baptized into Christianity. Catholics believe that it would hardly be fair to condemn the most morally upstanding of these people to an eternity of torment simply because they do not have access to the Bible or to missionaries to teach them the Gospel. Doing so would essentially be damning a person for being born in the wrong place, to the wrong group, at the wrong time.

To take this example a little further, say that a man from this village found out about Jesus but saw no reason to change his beliefs. It would not be fair to say that because he didn't convert to Christianity, he should go to hell. If his religious tradition works for him and teaches the same core values as Christianity, it doesn't matter if he calls his God Jesus, Vishnu, Yahweh, or Allah.

I have a Hindu friend who is a good person and follows his religion. I also have a friend who is a very devout Muslim. It would be very hard for me to believe that God would persecute them simply because they believe or worship in a different way.

How Does Someone Join the Catholic Church?

Heather DeLucenay

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People who are interested in joining the Catholic Church typically participate in a program called the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, or RCIA for short.

There are four stages in the RCIA program. The first stage is known as the period of inquiry. This is a time where program participants (known as inquirers) explore the Catholic faith and share their own faith experiences with others who are not Catholics as well

as with those who make up the RCIA leadership team. This period is intended to help the inquirers decide if they really want to join the Catholic Church.

If an inquirer decides to continue the process, he or she then enters into a period called the *catechumenate* and become what is known as a *catechumen* (one who is preparing for full initiation into the Church) or a *candidate* (one who is preparing for the sacraments of Holy Communion and Confirmation).

During this time, the catechumens and candidates, with the support and assistance of sponsors, examine the Catholic faith more deeply. Each Sunday the catechumens and candidates are invited to participate in the liturgy of the word and are dismissed after the proclamation of the Gospel to examine more fully God's word and its application to their lives. This is all done to better prepare the catechumens and candidates to become fully initiated members of the community.

The third period of the process, known as the period of *illumination*, coincides with the forty days of Lent. During this time, there is a process of taking a deeper look into the catechumens' and candidates' lives. It is often considered the most intense part of the RCIA process.

On Holy Saturday (the night before Easter) during the Vigil Mass, the catechumens are baptized, receive first Communion, and are confirmed. Candidates (who have already been baptized in another Christian faith) receive first Communion and are confirmed. At this time, they are finally considered fully initiated members of the Catholic community.

Mystagogia is the final stage of the RCIA process, but it is in turn the beginning of a pilgrimage of lifelong, continuous conversion in full communion with the Roman Catholic community of Christians.

Where Does the Church Stand in the Debate Between Evolution and Creationism?

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Since the publication of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* in 1859, the theory of evolution has been a fierce debate in religious circles. The theory of creationism (based on a literal reading of the Book of Genesis) had always been the accepted theory, and many were slow (and some still haven't) to accept Darwin's revolutionary idea. Both theories have countless supporters with legitimate arguments and concerns.

The theory of evolution claims that life on earth was originally made up of only one-celled organisms. These organisms evolved over billions of years into the many species known today. Humans, of course, are no exception. Many people are against this theory because humans are believed to be God's chosen people, created in God's image.

The theory of creationism states that God created everything on earth as it says in Genesis, chapters 1 and 2 (there are two Creation stories). The theory of evolution does not seem to agree with the story of Creation found in the Book of Genesis when the Creation story is taken literally. Without the literal interpretations, Catholics can believe, for example, that the animals created could have evolved into humans during that same "day." Of course, "one day" here would not mean one twenty-four-hour period of time. One day could equal billions of years. For Catholics, the Creation story in Genesis is understood as a story expressing religious truth, not scientific fact.

In an address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences (October 3, 1981), Pope John Paul II said:

The Bible itself speaks to us of the origin of the universe and its makeup, not in order to provide us with a scientific treatise