

The Miracle Of The Catholic Church

By The Bellarmine Society.

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During the last two thousand years the civilized world has passed through many phases profoundly disturbing the course of history Roman Empire, Barbarian Invasions, Feudalism and the Middle Ages, Nationalism, and Imperialism, while the international rivalries of our time show that the greatest nations feel insecure about their very existence. Nations have risen and disappeared, split into smaller ones or merged into greater ones, but not one has come through more than one such phase without being radically changed. One society alone has survived the stress and strain of those two thousand years and emerged a stronger spiritual and civilizing force than ever, in spite of persecution at the hands of powerful States, from the first century of the Roman Empire to modern times. That society is the Catholic Church.

1. A RAPID SURVEY.

(1) The Spread of the Church.

The Catholic Church was founded by Christ around a nucleus of twelve very ordinary men of the working class. On Pentecost Day, a few weeks after His death, three thousand became Christians after hearing a speech by a fisherman called Peter. In the first three centuries, the Church spread rapidly in spite of repeated fanatical and systematic attempts to crush her out of existence. By the year 313 Christianity was officially recognized as the predominant religion of the Roman Empire. Today the Church numbers 331,000, 000 (see for reference Whitaker's Almanac of 1945), including over 50,000,000 in English-speaking countries. In 2012, there were approximately 1.3 billion Catholics in the world.

(2) The Stability of the Church.

This steady growth of the Church throughout the ages would not have been possible but for her extraordinary stability. Her very existence has been imperiled by forces from within as well as from without, but she has always triumphed over them. Persecution, heresy, and schism have at different periods caused a temporary setback in the growth of the Church; she has suffered the loss of whole countries at a time. The Barbarian and Mohammedan invasions of Christendom, the savagery of the tenth century, the divisions of the fourteenth century, and the paganism accompanying the Renaissance, grievously afflicted and even disfigured the Church in many ways, but could not shake her unconquerable stability.

(3) The Church's World-Wide Unity.

One element in the Church's stability is her vital unity. Never has that unity been more clearly visible throughout the world than it is in the Church as we see her to-day, a vast, supra-national society, comprising men of all nations, races, and languages, of every variety and degree of culture and civilization. The exaggerated nationalism that is rampant in most countries nowadays has not severed the unity of Catholics the world over. They remain united in belief in the doctrine Christ

entrusted to His Church, and united in loyalty to the Pope as His representative on earth. This spiritual allegiance in no way conflicts with the loyalty of Catholics to their own country.

2. THE WORK OF THE CHURCH.

The work of the Church is to preserve and teach the doctrine of Christ and to help men to carry it out in practice. Countless religious bodies have been formed since the time of Christ, especially since the Reformation. They have claimed that the Church has perverted the teaching of Christ and that they have discovered His real meaning. But sooner or later, they have all become conscious of doubts and uncertainties even on fundamental issues, and begun to modify or discard their beliefs. To this day the Catholic Church alone can give the lead that men are looking for, conscious as she is of the authority she has received to safeguard the whole truth of Christian doctrine and morality.

(1) Doctrine.

The teaching of the Catholic Church has exerted a powerful attraction on the minds and hearts of men of all nations throughout the ages. The main factor in this attraction is the fullness of her teaching about God and the central place that Christ holds in her belief and worship. Nowhere outside the Church is God so nobly and vividly brought before the minds of men in all His goodness, mercy, and justice, in His wonderful providence and wisdom, and in His almighty power. Moreover, the Church has preserved true knowledge of, and belief in, Christ as God made man for our redemption. Christ is the true life of the Church; He is the centre of all her belief and worship. In the administration of the Sacraments and in the teaching of Christ's doctrine, the Church is carrying out the wishes of Christ Himself, who left her to take His place on earth and perpetuate His work till the day of judgment.

(2) Morality

Here again the Catholic Church speaks as one having authority. For instance, Christian teaching concerning sex, marriage, divorce, birth-prevention, abortion, and sterilization, is today clearly and authoritatively maintained in the Catholic Church and there alone. Similarly the counsels of Christ, especially the voluntary practice of poverty, chastity, and obedience (1.e. the renunciation of ownership, of the joys of married life and personal independence, to be more free for closer union with God and more wholehearted service of others), are far more vigorously upheld in the Church than in any other religious body.

(3) Holiness.

It is not surprising then that the Church is distinguished by an abundance of genuine holiness of life, shown in self-sacrificing love for God and man. The Church honours thousands of martyrs in every century who have followed their Master's example to the death rather than renounce their faith. The annals of the Catholic clergy are rich in outstanding examples of holiness and devotion to the flock of Christ. The religious orders are so many immense families of Catholic men and women freely following a life of close fidelity to the counsels of Christ, and contributing generously, by prayer and apostolic work, to the spiritual and bodily well-being of their fellow-men.

(4) Works of Charity.

The Catholic Church has always been the home of great Christian works of charity, and in all ages, thousands of her members, whether in religious orders or living in the world, have devoted themselves to the service of men for the love of God. The amount of work done by Catholics and

Catholic institutions for the poor, the sick, the aged and dying, lepers, deaf and dumb, orphans, mental deficient and the insane, in every country of the world, is incalculable. Education for all classes owed everything to the monastic schools in the "Dark Ages" and in the Middle Ages. In more recent centuries, it has been deeply indebted to the great educational orders, such as Jesuits, Christian Brothers, and Salesians, as well as numerous congregations of women whose convents provide a cultured Christian atmosphere for the education of girls.

This leaflet cannot have given a completely adequate account of the miracle of the Catholic Church, but perhaps it will have done something to show that the Church's extraordinary vitality is a proof of her divine origin and divine protection. Truly, it was in no boastful spirit, but with the consciousness of Christ's promise "Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world" that the First Vatican Council could say:

"The Catholic Church, by reason of her wonderful expansion throughout the world, her standard of holiness and the good of every kind she unfailingly inspires, on account of her world-wide unity and unshakable stability, constitutes in herself a strong and ever-fresh motive for belief in her a living testimony to her divine mission which cannot be contested.

This Apologetic leaflet was first issued by the Bellarmine Society of Oxford University. We are proud to reproduce it here in the hope that many more souls will benefit by its wisdom.

THERE IS NO SALVATION OUTSIDE THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.

For an understanding of this last statement, let us consult the following:

On Salvation Outside the Catholic Church.

By Fr. John Answer. Hardon, S.J.

SACRAMENT OF SALVATION.

The Catholic Church makes claims about herself that are easily misunderstood, especially in the modern atmosphere of pluralism and ecumenism. Among these claims, the most fundamental is the doctrine of the Church's necessity for salvation. Not unlike other dogmas of the faith, this one has seen some remarkable development, and the dogmatic progress has been especially marked since the definition of papal infallibility. It seems that as the Church further clarified her own identity as regards the papacy and collegiality, she also deepened (without changing) her self-understanding as the mediator of salvation to mankind.

The New Testament makes it plain that Christ founded the Church to be a society for the salvation of all men. The ancient Fathers held the unanimous conviction that salvation cannot be achieved outside the Church. Saint Ireneus taught that "where the Church is, there is the spirit of God, and where the spirit of God is, there is the Church and all grace." (Footnote: Saint Ireneus, *Adversus Haereses*, Book 2, chapter 24, section 1.) Origen simply declared, "Outside the Church nobody will be saved." (Footnote: Origen, *Homilia In Jesu Nave*, 3, 5.) And the favourite simile in patristic literature for the Church's absolute need to be saved is the Ark of Noah, outside of which there is no prospect of deliverance from the deluge of sin.

Alongside this strong insistence on the need for belonging to the Church was another Tradition from the earliest times that is less well known. It was understandable that the early Christian writers would emphasize what is part of revelation, that Christ founded "the Catholic Church which alone retains true worship. This is the fountain of truth; this, the home of faith; this, the temple of God."

(Footnote: Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones*, Book IV, chapter 30, section 1.) They were combating defections from Catholic unity and refuting the heresies that divided Christianity in the Mediterranean world and paved the way for the rise of Islam in the seventh century.

But they also had the biblical narrative of the "pagan" Cornelius who, the Acts tell us, was "an upright and God-fearing man" even before baptism. Gradually, therefore, as it became clear that there were "God-fearing" people outside the Christian fold, and that some were deprived of their Catholic heritage without fault on their part, the parallel Tradition arose of considering such people open to salvation, although they were not professed Catholics or even necessarily baptized. Ambrose and Augustine paved the way for making these distinctions. By the twelfth century, it was widely assumed that a person can be saved if some "invincible obstacle stands in the way" of his baptism and entrance into the Church.

Thomas Aquinas restated the constant teaching about the general necessity of the Church. But he also conceded that a person may be saved extra-sacramentally by a baptism of desire and therefore without actual membership by reason of his at least implicit desire to belong to the Church.

It would be inaccurate, however, to look upon these two traditions as in opposition. They represent the single mystery of the Church as universal sacrament of salvation, which the Church's Magisterium has explained in such a way that what seems to be a contradiction is really a paradox.

Since the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 defined that "The universal Church of the faithful is one, outside of which no one is saved," there have been two solemn definitions of the same doctrine, by Pope Boniface 8 in 1302 and at the Council of Florence in 1442. At the Council of Trent, which is commonly looked upon as a symbol of Catholic unwillingness to compromise, the now familiar dogma of baptism by desire was solemnly defined; and it was this Tridentine teaching that supported all subsequent recognition that actual membership in the Church is not required to reach one's eternal destiny.

At the Second Council of the Vatican, both streams of doctrine were delicately welded into a composite whole:

The Council relies on sacred Scripture and Tradition in teaching that this pilgrim Church is necessary for salvation. Christ alone is the mediator of salvation and the way of salvation. He presents himself to us in his Body, which is the Church. When he insisted expressly on the necessity for faith and baptism, he asserted at the same time the necessity for the Church which men would enter by the gateway of baptism. This means that it would be impossible for men to be saved if they refused to enter or to remain in the Catholic Church, unless they were unaware that her foundation by God through Jesus Christ made it a necessity.

Full incorporation in the society of the Church belongs to those who are in possession of the Holy Spirit, accept its order in its entirety with all its established means of salvation, and are united to Christ, who rules it by the agency of the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops, within its visible framework. The bonds of their union are the profession of faith, the sacraments, ecclesiastical government and fellowship. Despite incorporation in the Church, that man is not saved who fails to persevere in charity, and remains in the bosom of the Church "with his body" but not "with his heart." All the Church's children must be sure to ascribe their distinguished rank to Christ's special grace and not to their own deserts. If they fail to correspond with that grace in thought, word and deed, so far from being saved, their judgment will be the more severe. (Footnote: Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, 2, 14.)

Using this conciliar doctrine as guide, we see that the Church is (in its way) as indispensable as Christ for man's salvation. The reason is that, since his ascension and the descent of the Spirit, the Church is Christ active on earth performing the salvific work for which he was sent into the world by the Father. Accordingly, the Church is necessary not only as a matter of precept but as a divinely instituted means, provided a person knows that he must use this means to be saved.

Actual incorporation into the Church takes place by baptism of water. Those who are not actually baptized may, nevertheless, be saved through the Church according to their faith in whatever historical revelation they come to know and in their adequate cooperation with the internal graces of the Spirit they receive.

On both counts, however, whoever is saved owes his salvation to the one Catholic Church founded by Christ. It is to this Church alone that Christ entrusted the truths of revelation which have by now, though often dimly, penetrated all the cultures of mankind. It is this Church alone that communicates the merits won for the whole world on the cross.

Those who are privileged to share in the fullness of the Church's riches of revealed wisdom, sacramental power, divinely assured guidance, and blessings of community life cannot pride themselves on having deserved what they possess. Rather they should humbly recognize their chosen position and gratefully live up to the covenant to which they have been called. Otherwise, what began as a sign of God's special favour on earth may end as a witness to his justice in the life to come.

{From: The Catholic Catechism, Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1975, pages 234-236}

Outside The Church There Is No Salvation.

Question: What does this Church Statement mean?

Answered by Colin B. Donovan, STL.

The doctrine that "Outside the Church there is no salvation" is one that is constantly misinterpreted by those who won't submit to the Magisterium of the Church. Faith does not depend upon our ability to reason to the truth but on our humility before the Truth presented to us by those to whom Christ entrusted that task. This is why the First Vatican Council taught that it is the task of the Magisterium ALONE to determine and expound the meaning of the Tradition - including "outside the Church no salvation."

Concerning this doctrine the Pope of Vatican I, Pius 9, spoke on two different occasions. In an allocution (address to an audience) on December 9th, 1854, he said:

We must hold as of the 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 invincible in ignorance of the true religion are not guilty for this in the eyes of the Lord. And who would presume to mark out the limits of this ignorance according to the character and diversity of peoples, countries, minds and the rest?

Again, in his encyclical *Quanto conficiamur moerore* of 10 August, 1863 addressed to the Italian bishops, he said:

It is known to us and to you that those who are in invincible ignorance of 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.

These statements are consistent with the understanding of the Church contained in the documents of Vatican 2, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church, as well as explaining why the rigourist position of Father Feeney (that all must be actual members of the Catholic Church to be saved) has been condemned by the Magisterium. It is ironic that precisely those who know their obligation to remain united to the Magisterium, and thus on whom this doctrine is morally binding, keep themselves from union with the Roman See on this point.

CONCLUSION.

All of our writers have hoped to show you, dear reader that it is the Catholic Church which can provide you with a clear path through the forest of life, the forest of Biblical confusion, and is able to lead you into the uplands of Gods heavenly Kingdom. It was for this reason that Our Lord and Saviour gave as his Church, the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. (First Timothy 3:15.)
