

Papal Superiority Revived

Commentary for July 13, 2007 — The Catholic Church Reasserts Itself

Pope Benedict XVII gave permission to release and publish questions and answers regarding the status of the Catholic Church in today's world. See the Associated Press article "[Pope Asserts Catholic Primacy](#)" cited in *The Washington Times* on July 11, 2007. The article begins:

"Pope Benedict XVI reasserted the primacy of the Roman Catholic Church, approving a document released yesterday that says other Christian communities are either defective or not true churches and Catholicism provides the only true path to salvation."

• *The Washington Times, July 11, 2007*

Reading the full Vatican article,¹ this analysis of the Associated Press article accurately describes the text of the Vatican document. This act by this papal administration follows on the heels of an assertion that the Latin Catholic Mass be reinstated.

It is no surprise that the Catholic Church considers itself the "true church." Many major and minor Christian denominations express this same point of view. What is surprising is that after downplaying that assertion for many years by popes prior to him, Pope Benedict XVII is now reasserting that primacy.

Why Is This Important

This Vatican statement is important because it is responding to various problems within the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church in America is the major financial supporter of that international religious body, and contributions from America to Rome have fallen off considerably due to two factors.

First, sex scandals have cost the Catholic Church hundreds of millions of dollars in court and settlement costs. Contributors to the Catholic Church do not want their donations and gifts to pay for deviant sexual behavior by clergy. While sexual abuse by clergy is worldwide and has occurred throughout history, the Catholic Church, by virtue of it being the largest denomination, faces huge financial losses in this regard while victims are more and more emboldened to come forward with their testimony, evidence, and court filings.

Catholic dioceses in San Diego, Spokane, Tucson, Davenport, and here in Portland, Oregon, all filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy.² Many more dioceses are facing numerous, multi-plaintiff lawsuits. In December 2006 the Archdiocese of Los Angeles settled with numerous plaintiffs for \$60 million in a class action sexual abuse case. In 1997 a jury awarded a \$120 million settlement in a case against the Dallas Archdiocese. The Boston Archdiocese is facing settlements of \$100 million. These are the public settlements.

In an April 2007 article a \$75 million settlement was reached in a Portland, Oregon Archdiocese case. The award went to 160 alleged victims relating to 177 instances of abuse. See the *Catholic Online* article "[1st Catholic U.S. Bankruptcy Ends with \\$75 Million Settlement.](#)"

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1. The article on the Vatican website is titled "[Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine on the Church.](#)"
 2. See the sources in the article "[Roman Catholic sex abuse cases](#)" from Wikipedia. (Wikipedia articles occasionally have inaccurate information, so they should be considered for general beginning information only, and the sources should be referred to for greater accuracy.)

Second, the Roman Catholic Church has suffered from a crisis of conscience by its members. It was perceived that the Second Vatican Council held in the 1960s liberalized the doctrines of the Catholic Church, symbolized by a severe mandated reduction in the use of Latin for the Catholic Mass. While this issue holds no meaning for most Protestants, it is an important consideration for a large segment of Catholic believers in America. The Latin Mass holds a special place because the ritual and formula is comforting and pleasing to many of those people. It gives them a sense of belonging with other Catholics around the world, and down through the centuries. Liberal Catholics believe that the Latin Mass symbolizes many of the outmoded ideas the Catholic Church held before the Second Vatican Council.

The current Pope Benedict recently reasserted the importance of the Latin Mass in a document titled "[Motu Proprio Data](#)" dated July 7, 2007. In this document he stated that the Latin Mass must be done if requested by parish members. For these and other reasons many Catholic Churches have closed or converted to other faiths. Congregations have diminished (so say my Catholic friends). Belief in the Catholic creeds is as strongly held as in the past.

So What? Who Cares?

The Roman Catholic Church is the largest Christian denomination. It and most other denominations use Scripture without believing or obeying Scripture. Things such as tradition or the authority of leaders effectively overrule Scriptural authority on all too many issues. For a description of the present (and future situation) of the world's churches, see Dr. Martin's excellent articles: "[Anatomy of a Church, Part 1](#)" (Part 2 follows from that article), "[The Curse of Church Authority](#)," "[Chaos in the Churches](#)," and "[Decline of the Churches](#)." Papal superiority or primacy is a fiction. Christ is the only mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5).

In our lives the Bible should be of primary importance in our study and in our spiritual fellowship with other people. If you feel the need for such fellowship and do not have any, then start a fellowship yourself. The apostle Paul gives guidelines for leaders in the *ekklesia* of God:

"And the servant of the Lord [1] must not strive; but [2] be gentle unto all men, [3] apt to teach, [4] patient, [5] In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover [awake] themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will."

• 2 Timothy 2:24–26

It is no one else's responsibility to "lead you" to an organization so you can have fellowship. Fellowship is about serving others, not yourself. If you cannot serve other believers, then serve your neighbors. Your example may lead them to ask you about your beliefs, and that can be the beginning of fellowship. No one in the world has any more authority to promote the Gospel of Christ than you do. No one has any less.

Many of you have gone from church to church, from organization to organization, looking to be taught the truths of God. Examine your beliefs to see if you rely too much on any one teacher or organization, and that includes ASK. I believe ASK has the finest teaching available through the work and study of Dr. Ernest L. Martin, yet the Holy Scriptures should be your primary source of spiritual teaching and information. If it is not, then something is wrong, and you need to reexamine your relationship with God. It is, after all, your most important relationship.

Just as you can read the thoughts from the minds of ancient dead authors of the past such as Plato or Cicero, so too you can read information from the mind of the living God and Christ through the Holy Scriptures. By reading, learning, and studying the Scriptures, you receive information from God and Christ into your mind, in a way God intended so that your faith may grow naturally as it is guided by God's Holy Spirit.

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