

# The Papacy According To The New Catechism Of The Catholic Church

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A key difference between Lutherans and Catholics has always been their views of the papacy. Now, however, ecumenical Catholics and Lutherans have been negotiating a redefined papacy which allegedly would be acceptable to both Catholics and Lutherans. Such a papacy would have limited powers over the whole church. The new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* gives us an opportunity to see if such a papacy would be acceptable to Rome.

The catechism still maintains that the pope is the head of the whole church by divine command:

The sole Church of Christ is that which our Savior, after his Resurrection, entrusted to Peter's apostolic care, commissioning him and the other apostles to extend and rule it....This Church, constituted and organized as a society in the present world, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him. Par. 816.

The catechism places some of the blame for divisions in the church on Catholics and softens its condemnation of Christians who are outside the church of Rome:

Large communities became separated from full communion with the Catholic Church—for which, often enough, men of both sides were to blame. Par. 817.

However, one cannot charge with the sin of separation those who at present are born into these communities that resulted from such separation and in them are brought up in the faith of Christ, and the Catholic Church accepts them with respect and affection as brothers. Par. 818.

Nevertheless, it makes it clear that such "separated brethren" can be saved only in so far as they are really "anonymous Catholics":

Fully incorporated into the society of the Church are those who...are joined in the visible structure of the Church of Christ, who rules her through the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops. Par. 837.

The Church knows that she is joined in many ways to the baptized who...do not profess the Catholic faith in its entirety or have not preserved unity or communion under the successor of Peter. Par. 838.

"Outside the Church there is no salvation." How are we to understand this affirmation, often repeated by the Church Fathers? Reformulated positively, it means that all salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church....Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it....This affirmation is not aimed at those who, through no fault of their own, do not know Christ and his Church....Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by his grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—those too may achieve eternal salvation. Par. 846-847.

Christians who knowingly separate from the church of Rome can not be saved, but heathen who do their best to do good works can be saved. This clearly shows that Rome's deprecation of faith remains unchanged. The God-given authority of the pope over the church and his infallibility remain undiminished.

The Pope, Bishop of Rome and Peter's Successor, is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of faithful. 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. Par. 882.

The Roman Pontiff, head of the college of bishops, enjoys this infallibility in virtue of his office, when as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful—who confirms his brethren in the faith—he proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals. Par. 891.

Three things can be noted about these most recent official statements of Rome concerning the papacy:

1. Rome speaks somewhat more kindly to Christians who ignorantly have separated themselves from the Pope's authority.
2. Rome now allows the heathen to be saved by works.
3. Rome still maintains the authority and infallibility of the pope.

The old axiom *Roma semper eadem* remains an apt description of Rome's official view of the papacy.