

Catholicism: Introduction

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"WHAT IS CATHOLICISM?"

The Meaning of the Word

Catholicism is a rich and diverse reality. It is a Christian tradition, a way of life, and a community. That is to say, it is comprised of faith, theologies, and doctrines and is characterized by specific liturgical, ethical, and spiritual orientations and behaviors; at the same time, it is a people, or cluster of peoples, with a particular history.

The word *Catholic* is derived from the Greek adjective, *katholikos*, meaning "universal," and from the adverbial phrase, *kath' holou*, meaning "on the whole." The term was first used by St. Ignatius of Antioch (d.c.107) in his *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*: "Where the bishop is to be seen, there let all his people be; just as wherever Jesus Christ is present, we have the catholic Church" (n.8). Ever since the Reformation, the word has commonly been used in opposition to *Protestant*, but its real opposite is *sectarian*, which pertains to a part of the Church that has separated itself off from the worldwide Church and, to some extent, from the world itself. Thus, St. Augustine (d. 430) contrasted the separatist and sectarian movements of his time, especially Donatism in North Africa, with the Catholic Church that is both universal and orthodox in its faith. In his letter to Honoratus, a Donatist bishop, he wrote: "Do you happen to know why it should be that Christ should lose his inheritance, which is spread over the whole world, and should suddenly be found surviving only in the Africans, and not in all of them? The Catholic should exist throughout the whole world. Whereas your party, which is called the party of Donatus, does not exist in all those places in which the writings of the apostles, their discourse, and their actions have been current" (*Epistle 49*, n. 3).



St. Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386) was even more explicit: "The Church is called 'Catholic' because it extends through all the world. . . because it teaches universally and without omission all the doctrines which ought to come to human knowledge. . .because it brings under the sway of true religion all classes of people, rulers and subjects, learned and ignorant; and because it universally treats and cures every type of sin. . .and possesses in itself every kind of virtue which can be named...and spiritual gifts of every kind" (*Catechetical Lectures*, 18, n. 23).

The word *Catholic* was incorporated into the creeds along with the other notes of the Church: one, holy, and apostolic. It appears in the Creed of Cyril of Jerusalem, the Creed of Epiphanius (d. 403), and in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381) that is still recited in the liturgy today.

But the use of the word *Catholic* became divisive after the East-West Schism of the eleventh century and the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. The West claimed for itself the title *Catholic Church*, while the East, which severed the bond of communion with Rome, appropriated the name *Holy Orthodox Church*. After the ruptures of the Reformation those in communion with Rome retained the adjective *Catholic*, while the churches that broke with the papacy were called *Protestant*. However, some today insist that the adjective *Catholic* applies also to many other Christians who regard themselves as evangelical, reformed, and Catholic alike. Indeed, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) broadened the notion of catholicity to include churches outside the Catholic Church (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, n. 8), and spoke of them as possessing varying "degrees" of catholicity (*Decree on Ecumenism*, n.3).

Catholic or Roman Catholic?

There is another, still unresolved, aspect to the controversy, however. Are Catholics who are in communion with Rome *Roman Catholics* or just plain Catholics? Some inside as well as outside the Catholic Church think it ecumenically insensitive to drop the adjective *Roman* because so many Anglican, Orthodox, Protestant, and Oriental Christians also regard themselves as Catholic. But other Catholics object to the use of the adjective *Roman* on



ecclesiological grounds. For such Catholics *Roman* tends to confuse rather than define the reality of Catholicism.

The history of the Church begins with Jesus' gathering of his disciples and with the post resurrection commissioning of Peter to be the chief shepherd and foundation of the Church—but in Jerusalem, not in Rome. Therefore, it is not the *Roman* primacy that gives Catholicism one of its distinctive marks of identity within the family of Christian churches, but the *Petrine* primacy. The adjective *Roman* applies more properly to the diocese, or see, of Rome than to the worldwide Church which is in union with the Bishop of Rome. Indeed, it strikes some Catholics as contradictory to call the Church Catholic and Roman at one and the same time.

Eastern-rite Catholics who are in union with Rome (sometimes pejoratively called *Uniates*) also find the adjective *Roman* objectionable. They prefer to speak of their churches as Catholic and then to distinguish particular ecclesial traditions within the Catholic communion. In addition to the Latin, or Roman, tradition, there are seven other non-Latin, non-Roman ecclesial traditions: Armenian, Byzantine, Coptic, Ethiopian, East Syrian (Chaldean), West Syrian, and Maronite. Each of these is a Catholic church in communion with the Bishop of Rome; none of these is a *Roman* Catholic church. Catholicism, therefore, is neither narrowly Roman nor narrowly Western. It is universal in the fullest sense of the word.

It should be evident from the title of this book (*Catholicism* rather than *Roman Catholicism*) which argument the author finds more compelling. To choose one side, however, is not necessarily to reject the other. One can apply the term *Catholic* to the community of churches in union with Rome without precluding its wider application to Anglicans, Orthodox, Protestants, and Oriental Christians. At the same time, Catholics can reject the adjective *Roman* without lapsing into ecclesiastical triumphalism. What is important is that each side explain and support the reasons for the position taken.



The Context of Catholicism

Catholicism is not a reality that stands by itself. The word *Catholic* is not only a noun but an adjective. As an adjective it is a qualification of *Christian*, just as *Christian* is a qualification of *religions*, and *religions* is a qualification of *human*. Thus, Catholicism refers to a community of persons (the human dimension), who believe in God and shape their lives according to that belief (the religious dimension), who believe that God to be triune, and Jesus Christ to be the Son of God and the redeemer of humankind (the Christian dimension), who express and celebrate that belief in the Eucharist and who recognize the Bishop of Rome to be "the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity of the bishops and of the multitude of the faithful" [*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, n. 23] (the ecclesial dimension). To be Catholic, therefore, is to be a kind of human being, a kind of religious person, and a kind of Christian belonging to a specific eucharistic faith-community within the worldwide, or ecumenical, Body of Christ.

To be Catholic is, before all else, to be *human*. Catholicism is an understanding, affirmation, and expression of human existence before it is a corporate conviction about the pope, or the seven sacraments, or even about Jesus Christ and redemption. The first theological questions we ask ourselves are, "Who am I?" and "Who are we?" Every other theological question comes back to these. We cannot understand God, or Jesus Christ, or the Church, or anything else unless and until we come to terms with the question of ourselves. (The wider human context of Catholicism is treated in Part One, chapters 35. Its distinctively Catholic moral and spiritual outcomes are treated in Parts Six and Seven, chapters 25-31.)

But Catholicism is more than a corporate understanding, affirmation, and expression of what it means to be human. Catholicism answers the question of meaning in terms of ultimacy. With the Lutheran martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer (d. 1945), Catholicism affirms that there is more to life than meets the eye, that there is "a beyond in our midst" (*Letters and Papers from Prison*). With Paul Tillich (d. 1965), one of the most prominent and influential Protestant theologians in the twentieth century, Catholicism affirms that there is a "ground of being" which is Being itself (*Systematic Theology*). With St. Thomas Aquinas (d.1274), Catholicism



affirms that all reality is rooted in the creative, loving power of that which is most real (*ens realissimum*). Catholicism answers the question of meaning in terms of the reality of God. In brief, Catholicism is a *religious* perspective, and not simply a philosophical or anthropological one. Catholicism offers an understanding of God, and that understanding is the foundation and context for its understanding of creation, redemption, incarnation, grace, the Church, moral responsibility, eternal life, and each of the other great mysteries and doctrines of Christian faith. The doctrine of the triune God is what Christian and Catholic faith is all about. (The wider religious context of Catholicism is treated in Part Two, chapters 6, 7, and 10.)

But Catholicism is not some undifferentiated religious view. It is a form of *Christian* faith, alongside Protestantism, Anglicanism, Orthodoxy, and Oriental Christianity. Catholicism's understanding of and commitment to God is radically shaped by its understanding of and commitment to Jesus Christ. For the Christian the ultimate dimension of human experience is a triune God: a God who creates and sustains us and who identifies with our historical condition, and a God who empowers us to live according to the vocation to which we have been called. More specifically, the God of Christians is the God of Jesus Christ. (The wider Christian context of Catholicism is treated in Part Two, chapters 89, and Part Three, chapters 11-15.)

However, just as Jesus Christ gives access to God, so, for Catholicism, the Church gives access to Jesus Christ. Catholicism has an *ecclesial* dimension. But the Church is composed of many churches. The Church universal is the communion of local, or individual, churches (denominations, dioceses, patriarchates). Thus, the noun *church* is always modified: the Catholic Church, the Baptist Church, the Orthodox Church, the Lutheran Church, and so forth. Moreover, even these modifiers can themselves be modified: the Maronite Catholic Church, the Southern Baptist Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, the Lutheran Church/Missouri Synod, and so forth.

There are many churches, but one Body of Christ. For Catholicism, however, within the community of churches there is one Church that alone fully embodies and manifests all of



the institutional elements that are necessary for the integrity of the whole Body, in particular the Eucharist and the Petrine ministry. In Catholic doctrine that one Church is the Catholic Church. As ecumenical as the Second Vatican Council was, it did not retreat from this traditional Catholic conviction: "They are fully incorporated into the society of the Church who, possessing the Spirit of Christ, accept its entire system and all the means of salvation given to it, and through union with its visible structure are joined to Christ, who rules it through the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops. This joining is effected by the bonds of professed faith, of the sacraments, of ecclesiastical government, and of communion" (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, n. 14). (The wider ecclesial context of Catholicism is treated in Part Four, chapters 16-20, and Part Five, chapters 21-24).

The Spirit of Catholicism

Before the Second Vatican Council most people inside and outside the Catholic Church had no apparent difficulty locating the line that separated Catholics from other Christians. Sometimes their answers were truly superficial. Thus, Catholics didn't eat meat on Friday, or Catholics don't practice birth control. The most common answer held to do with the papacy. It was said that Catholics are different from non-Catholic Christians because Catholics believe in the authority of the pope. Even liberal or progressive Catholics accepted that answer. In the most influential book published just prior to the council, a young Swiss theologian, Hans Kung, wrote that "the chief difficulty in the way of reunion lies in the two different concepts of the Church, and especially of the concrete organizational structure of the Church. . . . Ultimately all questions about the concrete organizational structure of the Church are crystallized in the question of *ecclesiastical office*. . . . But the heart of the matter of ecclesiastical office, the great stone of stumbling, is the Petrine office. The question 'Do we need a Pope?' is the key question for reunion" (*The Council and Reunion*, London: Sheed & Ward, 1961, pp. 188-89, 193). Since the council, however, that traditional line of distinction has been blurred considerably. The Lutheran-Roman Catholic Consultation in the United States, for example, achieved a



remarkable measure of consensus on the questions of papal primacy and papal infallibility (see *Papal Primacy and the Universal Church: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue V*, Paul Empire and T. Austin Murphy, eds., Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974; and "Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church," *Theological Studies* 40 [March 1979] 113-66). Furthermore, it has become increasingly evident that there are sometimes sharper divisions *within* the Catholic Church than there are between some Catholics and some Protestants. One has only to examine the content and orientation of two national Catholic newspapers in the United States to appreciate the point: *The Wanderer* on the right and the *National Catholic Reporter* on the left.

Therefore, a more theologically fruitful approach to the question of Catholic distinctiveness would seem to lie in the direction of identifying and describing various characteristics of Catholicism, each of which Catholicism shares with one or another Christian church or tradition. But no other church or tradition possesses these characteristics in quite the same way as Catholicism. In other words, there is a particular *configuration* of characteristics within Catholicism that is not duplicated anywhere else in the community of Christian churches. This configuration of characteristics is expressed in Catholicism's systematic theology; its body of doctrines; its liturgical life, especially the Eucharist; its variety of spiritualities; its religious congregations and lay apostolates; its official teachings on justice, peace, and human rights; its exercise of collegiality; and, to be sure, its Petrine ministry. Catholicism is distinguished from other Christian churches and traditions especially in its understanding of, and practical commitment to, the principles of sacramentality, mediation, and communion. Differences between Catholic and non-Catholic (especially Protestant) approaches become clearer when measured according to these three principles.

Sacramentality

In its classical Augustinian meaning a sacrament is a visible sign of an invisible grace (namely, the divine presence). In his opening address before the second session of the Second Vatican Council in 1963, Pope Paul VI provided a more contemporary definition: "a reality



imbued with the hidden presence of God." A sacramental perspective is one that "sees" the divine in the human, the infinite in the finite, the spiritual in the material, the transcendent in the immanent, the eternal in the historical. For Catholicism, therefore, all reality is sacred. Over against this sacramental vision is the view, confirmed by memories of past excesses in the sacramental vision, that God is so "totally other" that the divine reality can never be identified with the human, the transcendent with the immanent, the eternal with the historical, and so forth. The abiding Protestant fear is that Catholics will take the sacramental principle to the point of idolatry.

The Catholic sacramental vision "sees" God in all things (St. Ignatius Loyola): other people, communities, movements, events, places, objects, the environment, the world at large, the whole cosmos. The visible, the tangible, the finite, the historical--all these are actual or potential carriers of the divine presence. Indeed, for Catholicism it is only in and through these material realities that we can encounter the invisible God. The great sacrament of our encounter with God, and of God's encounter with us, is Jesus Christ. The Church, in turn, is the fundamental sacrament of our encounter with Christ, and of Christ with us. And the sacraments, in turn, are the signs and instruments by which that ecclesial encounter with Christ is expressed, celebrated, and made effective for the glory of God and the salvation of all.

Catholicism, therefore, insists that grace (the divine presence) actually enters into and transforms nature (human life in its fullest context). The dichotomy between nature and grace is eliminated. Human existence is already graced existence. There is no merely natural end of human existence, with a supernatural end imposed from above. Human existence in its natural, historical condition is radically oriented toward God. The history of the world is, at the same time, the history of salvation.

This means that, for Catholicism, authentic human progress and the struggle for justice and peace is an integral part of the movement toward the final reign of God (see Vatican II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, n. 39). The Catholic tradition, unlike the Lutheran, for example, has espoused no doctrine of the Two Kingdoms. The vast



body of Catholic social teachings, from Pope Leo XIII in 1891 to the present, is as characteristic of Catholic Christianity as any element can be. In virtue of the sacramental principle, Catholicism affirms that God is indeed present to all human life and history. To be engaged in the transformation of the world is to be collaboratively engaged in God's own transforming activity. Our human work becomes a form of collaboration with God's creative work, as Pope John Paul II put it in his 1981 encyclical, *Laborem Exercens*.

For Catholicism the world is essentially good, though fallen, because it comes from the creative hand of God, is redeemed, sustained, and nurtured by God, and is destined for the final perfection of the reign of God at history's end. That world has been redeemed by God in Jesus Christ, and experiences healing and unity through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, the "first fruits" of the final reign, or kingdom, of God.

Mediation

A second principle--really a corollary of the first--is that of mediation. A sacrament not only signifies (as Protestants have historically emphasized); it also *causes* what it signifies. That is, God is not only present as an object of faith in the sacramental action; God actually achieves something in and through that action. Thus created realities not only contain, reflect, or embody the presence of God, they make that presence spiritually effective for those who avail themselves of these sacred realities. Encounter with God does not occur solely in the inwardness of conscience or in the inner recesses of consciousness. Catholicism holds, on the contrary, that the encounter with God is a mediated experience rooted in the historical, and affirmed as real by the critical judgment that God is truly present and active here or there, in this event or that, in this person or that, in this object or that.

Again, the Protestant raises a word of caution. Just as the principle of sacramentality edges close to the brink of idolatry, so the principle of mediation moves one along the path toward magic. Just as there has been evidence of idolatry in some Catholic piety, so there has been evidence of a magical view of the divine-human encounter in certain forms of Catholic devotional life. Some Catholics have assumed, for example, that if a certain practice were



performed a given number of times or on a given number of days in an unbroken sequence (like the nine First Fridays), their salvation would be guaranteed. A magical view, of course, is not a solely Catholic problem, but it is an inherent risk in Catholicism's constant stress on the principle of mediation.

Catholicism's commitment to the principle of mediation is evident especially in the importance it has always placed on the ordained ministry of the priest. God's dealings with us are not arbitrary or haphazard. God is present to all and works on behalf of all, but there are also moments and actions wherein God's presence is specially focused. The function of the priest as mediator is not to limit the encounter between God and the human person, but to focus it more clearly for the sake of the person and ultimately for the sake of the community of faith.

The principle of mediation also explains Catholicism's historic emphasis on the place of Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. Catholicism affirms the role of Mary in salvation on the same ground that it affirms the role of Jesus Christ--without equating the two. God is present in, and redemptively at work through, the humanity of Jesus. This is the principle of mediation in its classic expression. Catholicism understands that the invisible, spiritual God is present and active on our spiritual behalf through the visible and the material, and that these are made holy and spiritually effective by reason of that divine presence. Catholicism, therefore, readily engages in the veneration (not worship) of Mary and asks her to intercede for us, not because Catholicism perceives Mary as some kind of goddess or super-creature or rival of the Lord himself, but because she is a symbol, image, and instrument of God. It is the God who is present in her and who fills her whole being that is the real object of Catholicism's veneration. Her importance, like that of the other saints, is rooted in the fact that she is a "sacrament" of the divine. And sacraments both signify and cause grace.

Communion

Third, Catholicism affirms the principle of communion: Our way to God and God's way to us is not only a mediated, but also a communal, way. Even when the divine-human



encounter is most personal and individual, it is still communal, in that the encounter is made possible by the mediation of a community of faith. Thus there is not simply an individual personal relationship with God or with Jesus Christ that is established and sustained by meditative reflection on Sacred Scripture, for the Bible is the Church's book and the testimony of the Church's original faith. For Catholicism there is no relationship with God, however profound or intense, that dispenses entirely with the communal context of every relationship with God.

And this is why, for Catholicism, the mystery of the Church has always had so significant a place in its theology, doctrine, pastoral practice, moral vision, and devotional life.

Catholicism has always emphasized the place of the Church as the sacrament of Christ, mediating salvation through sacraments, ministries, and other institutional elements, and as the Communion of Saints and the People of God. It is here, at the point of Catholicism's understanding of itself as Church, that we come to the heart of the distinctively Catholic understanding and practice of Christian faith. For it is here, in Catholic ecclesiology, that we find the most vivid convergence of the three principles of sacramentality, mediation, and communion.

The Protestant again raises a word of caution. If we emphasize too much the principle of communion, we can endanger the freedom of the individual believer. If sacramentality can lead to idolatry, and mediation to magic, the principle of communion can lead to a collectivism that suppresses individuality, and an authoritarianism that suppresses freedom of thought and of action. One can find many instances in history where this Protestant concern has been justified. Church members have been burned at the stake, literally and figuratively, for articulating opinions at variance with those of the Church's ruling authorities.

But stress upon the individual also has its inherent weakness, just as there are inherent weaknesses in the historic Protestant insistences on the otherness of God (over against the Catholic sacramental principle) and on the immediacy of the divine-human encounter (over against the Catholic principle of mediation). In recent years, in fact, some important Protestant theologians have come to acknowledge these inherent problems in Protestantism



itself and the corresponding truth of the Catholic sacramental vision. Paul Tillich's *The Protestant Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948) and Langdon Gilkey's *Catholicism Confronts Modernity: A Protestant View* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975, pp. 160) are two cases in point.

For Gilkey, Catholicism manifests "a remarkable sense of humanity and grace in the communal life of Catholics. ... Consequently the love of life, the appreciation of the body in the senses, of joy and celebration, the tolerance of the sinner, these natural, worldly, and 'human' virtues are far more clearly and universally embodied in Catholics and Catholic life than in Protestants and Protestantism." The Catholic principle of symbol or sacramentality, Gilkey suggests, "may provide the best entrance into a new synthesis of the Christian tradition with the vitalities as well as the relativities of contemporary existence" (pp. 17-18, 20-22).

Other Catholic Principles

Sacramentality, mediation, and communion are not the only principles or themes one might select to describe and explain the distinctive reality of Catholicism, although these three principles are implied in all others.

1. *Tradition.* Catholicism is a tradition that places great emphasis on tradition. It recognizes that the Bible itself is the product of tradition (or, more precisely, of many traditions). Before there were written texts the faith was handed on through proclamation, catechesis, worship, and personal example. For Catholicism, God speaks through means such as these, not only through words but through deeds as well. History in general and the history of the Church in particular are carriers of this divine revelation. Catholicism, therefore, not only reads its Sacred Scripture, but also its own corporate life and experience. As Pope John XXIII (d. 1963) once said, history itself is a teacher.
2. *Reason.* Catholicism also respects and emphasizes the role of reason in the understanding and expression of Christian faith. For Catholicism all created reality is



- graced, including the intellect. Though fallen, it is redeemed. Though tainted by sin, it is permeated and elevated by grace. That is why philosophy, apologetics, and so-called natural theology have occupied so important a place in Catholic thought. For Catholicism it is never sufficient merely to repeat the words of Sacred Scripture or even of official doctrinal pronouncements. The critical faculties must also be applied to the data of faith if we are to understand it and appropriate it and then put it into practice. Accordingly, the First Vatican Council (1869-1870) not only rejected rationalism (the belief that reason alone could grasp the mysteries of faith), but also Fideism (the belief that an uncritical faith, apart from reason, is sufficient to grasp God's revelation).
3. *Analogy*. Catholicism's use of reason is also analogical. Indeed, some have spoken of a "Catholic imagination" as distinctively analogical (David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, New York: Crossroad, 1981). It pertains to a way of thinking about God and of understanding the divine-human encounter that seeks always to find "similarity-in-difference," in contrast to a more typically Protestant way of thinking that is dialectical--emphasizing always what is unique in God and, therefore, the radical dissimilarities that exist between the divine and the human. For Catholicism we come to a knowledge of God through our knowledge of the created world, and especially of the humanity of Jesus, who is the "primary analogue," and through an understanding of our own human experience. Because the reality of God is mediated through such visible signs as these, the Catholic analogical imagination is essentially sacramental.
 4. *Universality*. As its very name suggests, Catholicism is characterized, finally, by its universality, that is, a radical openness to all truth and to every value. It is comprehensive and all-embracing toward the totality of Christian experience and tradition, in all the theological, doctrinal, spiritual, liturgical, canonical, institutional, and social richness and diversity of that experience and tradition. It is neither a sect nor a schismatic entity, although sectarianism and schism are not unknown to it.



Nor is it inextricably linked with the culture of a particular nation or region of the world. Catholicism is, in principle, as Asian as it is European, as Slavic as it is Latin, as Mexican or Nigerian as it is Irish or Polish.

There is no list of Catholic "Fathers" or Catholic "Mothers" which does not include the great theological and spiritual writers of the period *before* as well as after the division of East and West and the divisions within the West. Ignatius of Antioch and Gregory of Nyssa are as much Catholic Fathers as are Augustine or Thomas Aquinas. Thecia and Brigid of Kildaire are as much Catholic Mothers as are Catherine of Siena or Teresa of Avila.

Nor are there schools of theology which Catholicism excludes, variations in their inherent strengths and weaknesses notwithstanding. Catholicism continues to read Irenaeus of Lyons and Clement of Alexandria, Athanasius and Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory of Nazianzen and Augustine, Anselm of Canterbury and Bernard of Clairvaux, Abelard and Hugh of St. Victor, Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure, Robert Bellarmine and Johann Adam Mohler, Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar.

Nor are there spiritualities which Catholicism excludes, their variations again notwithstanding. Catholicism is open to *The Cloud of Unknowing* and the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, to Francis and Clare of Assisi and to Bernard of Clairvaux, to Hildegard of Bingen and Julian of Norwich, to Ignatius Loyola and John of the Cross, to Abbot Marmion and Thomas Merton.

Nor are there doctrinal streams and mighty rivers that Catholicism closes off. Catholics are as guided by the Council of Nicea as by Vatican I, by Chalcedon as by Lateran IV, by Trent as by Vatican II. They read Gregory the Great as well as Paul VI, Clement of Rome as well as Leo XIII, Pius XII as well as John XXIII.

Catholicism is characterized, therefore, by a both/and rather than an either/or approach. It is not nature *or* grace, but graced nature; not reason *or* faith, but reason illumined by faith; not law *or* Gospel, but law inspired by the Gospel; not Scripture *or* tradition, but normative tradition within Scripture; not faith *or* works, but faith issuing in works and works as



expressions of faith; not authority *or* freedom, but authority in the service of freedom; not unity *or* diversity, but unity in diversity. In a word, Catholicism is *catholic*.

Summary

1. Catholicism is a Christian tradition, a way of life, and a community.
2. The word *Catholic*, derived from the Greek, means "universal." Its opposite is sectarian rather than Protestant.
3. Many non-Catholic Christians insist on the use of the adjective *Roman* to describe the Church that is in union with Rome, because they also regard themselves as Catholic. But there are Eastern-rite churches that are in union with Rome, and yet are not of the Roman, or Latin, rite. Therefore, the adjective *Roman* would pertain only to a portion of the Church that is in union with Rome, albeit the largest portion by far.
4. Catholicism is, first of all, a way of being human, then a way of being religious, and then a way of being Christian. Catholicism can only be understood within this wider context.
5. Catholicism is characterized by three principles: sacramentality, mediation, and communion. The special configuration of these three principles within Catholicism constitutes its distinctiveness. It is a tradition that sees God in all things (sacramentality), using the human, the material, and the finite (mediation), to bring about the unity of humankind (communion).
6. Other distinctively Catholic principles include its emphasis on tradition, its regard for reason, its analogical imagination, and its universality, including a both/and rather than an either/or approach to Christian faith and practice.

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