

RESEARCH: ROMAN CATHOLICISM

The Roman Catholic Church (RCC) claims to be the one true Church as established by Jesus and His apostles. However, an examination of the doctrines upheld and taught by the RCC demonstrates that it stands in contrast with – and even in opposition to – biblical Christianity. Though not exhaustive, the following overview analyzes and compares some of the core tenets of the Roman Catholic tradition with Scripture.

THE COUNCIL OF TRENT

Perhaps one of the most important events in the history of the Roman Catholic Church is the Council of Trent (1545–1563). This gathering sought to counter and respond to the Protestant Reformation. It was at this ecumenical meeting that Rome ultimately anathematized, or condemned, the biblical doctrine of justification:

- Canon 9: If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is not in any way necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the action of his own will, let him be anathema. [\[1\]](#)
- Canon 14: If anyone says that man is absolved from his sins and justified because he firmly believes that he is absolved and justified, or that no one is truly justified except him who believes himself justified, and that by this faith alone absolution and justification are effected, let him be anathema. [\[2\]](#)
- Canon 24: If anyone says that the justice received is not preserved and also not increased before God through good works, but that those works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not the cause of its increase, let him be anathema. [\[3\]](#)
- Canon 30: If anyone says that after the reception of the grace of justification the guilt is so remitted and the debt of eternal punishment so blotted out to every repentant sinner, that no debt of temporal punishment remains to be discharged either in this world or in purgatory before the gates of heaven can be opened, let him be anathema. [\[4\]](#)
- Canon 33: If anyone says that the Catholic doctrine of justification as set forth by the holy council in the present decree, derogates in some respect from the glory of God or the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, and does not rather illustrate the truth of our faith and no less the glory of God and of Christ Jesus, let him be anathema. [\[5\]](#)

The Christian will recognize that these condemnations of justification by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone stand in direct contradiction to Scripture and amount to an anathema upon the Gospel itself. [Romans 3:20–28](#), [4:3](#), [5:1](#), [Galatians 3:1–3](#), [Ephesians 2:8–9](#) and [Colossians 2:13–14](#) are just a few of the numerous passages that address the various condemnations which Rome set forth at the Council of Trent.

AT A GLANCE

	<i>Roman Catholicism</i>	<i>Biblical Christianity</i>
<i>Salvation</i>	“The process of salvation for the Catholic means a Catholic must have faith in Christ and the Roman Catholic Church,	As the perfect sacrifice for the sins of men, Christ’s death and resurrection provided salvation for all who would

participate in the sacraments, take the Eucharist, keep the commandments, perform penance, and do indulgences in order to attain, maintain, and regain salvation as well as reduce the punishment due to him for the sins of which he has already been forgiven.”^[6]

“The Church affirms that for believers the sacraments of the New Covenant are necessary for salvation. ‘Sacramental grace’ is the grace of the Holy Spirit, given by Christ and proper to each sacrament. The Spirit heals and transforms those who receive him by conforming them to the Son of God. The fruit of the sacramental life is that the Spirit of adoption makes the faithful partakers in the divine nature by uniting them in a living union with the only Son, the Savior.”^[7]

believe. Salvation is the forgiveness of sins and the saving from the wrath and condemnation of God.

Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone ([Eph. 2:8-9](#)).

Salvation is a free gift from God to those who believe (trust) in Him ([Rom. 1:16; 6:23; Eph. 2:8-9](#)).

Salvation cannot be earned ([Rom. 11:6](#)).

Eucharist

Teaches transubstantiation: the idea that at the Mass the bread and the wine are transformed into the literal body and blood of Christ (also known as ‘The Real Presence’):

The Council of Trent summarizes the Catholic faith by declaring: “Because Christ our Redeemer said that it was truly his body that he was offering under the species of bread, it has always been the conviction of the Church of God, and this holy Council now declares again, that by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation.”^[8]

Because these elements are the presence of Christ Himself, they are worshiped: “In the liturgy of the Mass we express our faith in the real presence of Christ under the species of bread and wine by, among other ways, genuflecting or bowing deeply as a sign of adoration of the Lord. “The Catholic Church has always offered and still offers to the sacrament of the Eucharist the cult of adoration, not only during Mass, but also outside of it, reserving the consecrated hosts with the utmost care, exposing them to the solemn veneration of the faithful, and carrying them in procession.”^[9]

It is claimed that the Mass is a representation of Christ’s sacrifice. The Catholic Catechism calls this sacrament a “divine sacrifice”^[10], a “single

The Lord’s Supper, or Communion, is celebrated in remembrance of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in obedience to His words ([Lk. 22:19–20; 1 Cor. 11:23–26](#)).

Jesus Christ was sacrificed only once for the forgiveness of sins of all those who will believe ([Heb. 7:26–27, 9:28, 10:10–12](#)). This single sacrifice was sufficient to save for all time those who are being sanctified ([Heb. 10:14](#)).

The sacrifice of Christ on the cross is what makes propitiation for the sins of His people ([Heb. 2:17; 1 John 2:2](#)).

If a man dies without Christ, there are no works that can be done, either for himself in Purgatory or by those still alive on Earth, that can gain him entry “into the light and peace of Christ” ([Heb. 9:27](#)).

sacrifice” with Christ’s that is “truly propitiatory”^[11] and capable of making restitution for sins.^[12]

This sacrament is practiced for those who have already died: “The Eucharistic sacrifice is also offered for the faithful departed who “have died in Christ but are not yet wholly purified,” so that they may be able to enter into the light and peace of Christ.”^[13]

Mary

Mary was born free from original sin and preserved as such throughout her life: “The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Saviour of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin.”

“The Fathers of the Eastern tradition call the Mother of God “the All-Holy” (Panagia), and celebrate her as ‘free from any stain of sin, as though fashioned by the Holy Spirit and formed as a new creature.’ By the grace of God Mary remained free of every personal sin her whole life long.”^[14]

Teaches the perpetual virginity of Mary: “The deepening of faith in the virginal motherhood led the Church to confess Mary’s real and perpetual virginity even in the act of giving birth to the Son of God made man. In fact, Christ’s birth “did not diminish his mother’s virginal integrity but sanctified it.” and so the liturgy of the Church celebrates Mary as *Aeiparthenos*, the ‘Ever-virgin’.”^[15]

Teaches that, now in Heaven, Mary continues to act as a mediator for the Church: “This motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues uninterruptedly from the consent which she loyally gave at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, until the eternal fulfilment of all the elect. Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix.”^[16]

Scripture clearly teaches that “in Adam all die” (1 Cor. 15:22) and that no man is righteous or without sin (Rom. 3:10–18), with the exception of Christ Himself. “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us (1 John 1:8). If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us (1 John 1:10).” Thus, Mary, like all mankind, was a sinner.

Scripture indicates that the Lord Jesus had brothers and sisters (Matt. 1:24–25, 12:46–47, 13:55; Mark 6:2–3; John 2:12; Acts 1:14; 1 Cor. 9:4–5; Gal. 1:19).

The only One who acts as a mediator between man and God is Jesus Christ. He alone is the high priest (Heb. 5:5, 6) who offered His own blood as an acceptable sacrifice for the sins of those who would believe (Heb. 9:14–15, 10:14).

“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.” (1 Tim. 2:5–6)

Scripture

Equates Scripture and man-made tradition: “Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, then, are bound closely together, and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one

The Bible supports tradition only when it affirms what God has already revealed in His Word and through the teaching of the Apostles (2 Thess. 2:15, 3:6; 1 Cor. 11:2).

When man’s tradition contradicts Scripture (as many of the traditions of

thing, and move towards the same goal.” Each of them makes present and fruitful in the Church the mystery of Christ, who promised to remain with his own ‘always, to the close of the age’.”^[17]

“As a result the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, ‘does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honoured with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.’”^[18]

“Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God’ (DV 10) in which, as in a mirror, the pilgrim Church contemplates God, the source of all her riches.”^[19]

Includes the Apocryphal books as part of the inspired canon (considered as part of the Old Testament): “This complete list is called the canon of Scripture. It includes 46 books for the Old Testament (45 if we count Jeremiah and Lamentations as one) and 27 for the New: The Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah, Tobit, Judith, Esther, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, the Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Baruch, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zachariah and Malachi.”^[20]

Scripture (as many of the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church do), then it must be rejected ([Mark 7:8–9](#), [Col. 2:8](#)).

“The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men. ([2 Tim. 3:15–17](#), [Gal. 1:8–9](#), [2 Thess. 2:2](#)) Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word: ([John 6:45](#), [1 Cor 2:9–12](#)) and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed. ([1 Cor. 11:13–14](#), [1 Cor. 14:26, 40](#)) which are always to be observed ([1 Cor. 11:13](#)).”^[21]

Purgatory

Teaches that some men must undergo additional purification after death before being able to enter the kingdom of Heaven:

“All who die in God’s grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.

The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned. The Church formulated her doctrine of faith on Purgatory especially at the Councils of Florence and Trent. The tradition of the Church, by reference to certain texts of Scripture, speaks of a cleansing fire: As for certain

The idea that men must atone for their own sins, whether in life or death, runs contrary to the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone, and denies the full efficacy of the penal substitutionary atonement of Christ. Christ’s sacrifice achieved the salvation of all who will believe, apart from any work or merit of their own doing.

Purgatory is not a Scriptural concept. Scripture does speak quite clearly, however, about the two possible destinations after one’s death: Heaven or Hell ([Matt. 25:31–34](#)).

lesser faults, we must believe that, before the Final Judgment, there is a purifying fire. He who is truth says that whoever utters blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will be pardoned neither in this age nor in the age to come. From this sentence we understand that certain offenses can be forgiven in this age, but certain others in the age to come.”^[22]

Indulgences

“An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions through the action of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints.”

”An indulgence is partial or plenary according as it removes either part or all of the temporal punishment due to sin.”Indulgences may be applied to the living or the dead.”^[23]

“Through indulgences the faithful can obtain the remission of temporal punishment resulting from sin for themselves and also for the souls in Purgatory.”^[24]

The teaching of indulgences negates the sufficiency of Christ’s work on the cross. Christ alone has born the punishment for the sins of those who will believe ([Rom. 5:1, 9](#); [Eph. 2:8](#); [Isa. 53:4–6](#)).

Penance

A sacrament of reconciliation for sins committed after baptism. Necessary to re-establish a right relationship with God: “Penance is a liturgical action. the elements of the celebration are ordinarily these: a greeting and blessing from the priest, reading the word of God to illuminate the conscience and elicit contrition, and an exhortation to repentance; the confession, which acknowledges sins and makes them known to the priest; the imposition and acceptance of a penance; the priest’s absolution; a prayer of thanksgiving and praise and dismissal with the blessing of the priest.”^[25]

The deeds of men are as filthy rags before God ([Isa. 64:6](#)), and thus the Christian can only be reconciled to God by grace through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ ([Rom. 3:24, 5:1, 11:6](#); [Eph. 2:8](#)).

The Papacy

Built upon a misinterpretation of [Matt. 16:18](#), the RCC asserts that the pope is Christ’s representative on earth and the visible successor of Peter:

“Simon Peter holds the first place in the college of the Twelve; Jesus entrusted a unique mission to him. Through a revelation from the Father, Peter had confessed: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Our Lord then declared to him: “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.” Christ, the “living Stone”, thus assures his Church, built on Peter, of

The perfect life, death and resurrection of Christ was accomplished in full so that man would no longer require another mortal mediator between himself and God. Sinful man, through Jesus Christ alone, can now approach the throne of God ([Heb. 10:19–22, 4:16](#)).

Please see the list of ‘Further Reading’ below for additional discussion of the interpretation of [Matt. 16:18](#).

victory over the powers of death. Because of the faith he confessed Peter will remain the unshakable rock of the Church. His mission will be to keep this faith from every lapse and to strengthen his brothers in it.”^[26]

When the pope speaks “ex cathedra,” he “defines a doctrine regarding faith or morals to be held by the universal Church, by the Divine assistance promised to him in Blessed Peter, is possessed of that infallibility with which the Divine Redeemer willed that his Church should be endowed in defining doctrine regarding faith or morals, and that therefore such definitions of the Roman pontiff are of themselves and not from the consent of the Church irreformable.”^[27]

FURTHER READING

ON SALVATION

- [Saving Faith: How Does Rome Define It?](#)
- [Roman Catholic Salvation and Justification](#)
- [Salvation and the Sacraments](#)
- [Summary of the Process of Salvation in Roman Catholicism](#)
- [The Roman Catholic View on Justification](#)

ON THE EUCHARIST

- [John 6 and Transubstantiation](#)
- [Transubstantiation and the Real Presence](#)
- [John 6:53, Unless You Eat My Flesh](#)
- [Communion: Spiritual Fellowship with the Lord, and the Roman Catholic Mass](#)
- [The Mass and the Sacrifice of Christ](#)

ON MARY

- [What the Roman Catholic Church Teaches About Mary](#)
- [The Immaculate Conception: Is there a Biblical basis?](#)
- [Summary of Roman Catholic Teachings on Mary](#)
- [Did Mary Have Other Children?](#)
- [The Assumption of Mary](#)
- [The Biblical Mary and Tradition](#)
- [The Immaculate Conception](#)

ON SCRIPTURE

- [Does the Bible Teach Sola Scriptura?](#)
- [Sola Scriptura and the Church Fathers](#)
- [The Old Testament Canon and the Apocrypha](#)
- [The Apocrypha: Is It Scripture?](#)

ON PURGATORY

- [Purgatory: Purifying Fire or Fatal Fable?](#)
- [1 Corinthians 3 and Purgatory](#)
- [Purgatory and 1 Cor. 3:15](#)

ON THE SACRAMENTS

- [Penance and Confession](#)
- [Indulgences](#)
- [Penance](#)
- [Salvation and the Sacraments](#)

ON THE PAPACY

- [Documentation of the Patristic Exegesis of the Rock of Matthew 16:18](#)
- [The Papacy and the Doctrine of Development](#)
- [Papal Claims of Apostolic Succession](#)
- [Is Peter the Rock on which the Church Is Built?](#)
- [The Rise of the Papacy](#)

GENERAL RESOURCES

- [The Roman Catholic Church Hasn't Changed Its Condemnation of the Gospel](#)
- [Is Rome the One True Church?](#)
- [Hard Questions to Ask Good Catholics](#)
- [Catholic Traditions](#)
- [Preparing for Eternity](#)
- [The Empty Hand of Faith](#)
- [The Real Issue About Roman Catholicism](#)
- [RC Sproul: The Roman Catholic Church Anathematized the Gospel](#)
- [Is the Reformation Over?](#)
- [Does the Vatican Still Condemn Christians?](#)

FOOTNOTES

1. Documents of the Council of Trent: Session VI, accessed 16 September 2012, <http://www.catholicforum.com/saints/trento6.htm> [↔]
2. Documents of the Council of Trent: Session VI, accessed 16 September 2012, <http://www.catholicforum.com/saints/trento6.htm> [↔]
3. Documents of the Council of Trent: Session VI, accessed 16 September 2012, <http://www.catholicforum.com/saints/trento6.htm> [↔]
4. Documents of the Council of Trent: Session VI, accessed 16 September 2012, <http://www.catholicforum.com/saints/trento6.htm> [↔]
5. Documents of the Council of Trent: Session VI, accessed 16 September 2012, <http://www.catholicforum.com/saints/trento6.htm> [↔]
6. Matt Slick, *Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry*, "[Summary of process of salvation in Roman Catholicism.](#)" [↔]
7. Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), Paragraph 1129. [↔]
8. CCC, Paragraph 1376 [↔]
9. CCC, Paragraph 1378. [↔]
10. CCC, Paragraph 1068. [↔]
11. CCC, Paragraph 1367. [↔]
12. CCC, Paragraph 1444. [↔]
13. CCC, Paragraph 1371. [↔]
14. CCC, Paragraph 491, 493. [↔]
15. CCC, Paragraph 499–501. [↔]
16. CCC, Paragraph 969. [↔]
17. CCC, Paragraph 80. [↔]
18. CCC, Paragraph 82. [↔]
19. CCC, Paragraph 97. [↔]
20. CCC, Paragraph 120. [↔]
21. Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 1, Paragraph VI. [↔]
22. CCC, Paragraph 1030, 1031. [↔]
23. CCC, Paragraph 1471. [↔]
24. CCC, Paragraph 1498. [↔]
25. CCC, Paragraph 1480. [↔]
26. CCC, Paragraph 552. [↔]
27. Catholic Encyclopedia, "Ex Cathedra," accessed 15 September 2012, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05677a.htm>. [↔]

CRN ARTICLES ABOUT ROMAN CATHOLICISM

DEVOTION/TEACHING

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- [Rome's Strategy to Reverse the Reformation](#) 5 OCTOBER 2012
- [What the Roman Catholic Church Teaches About Mary](#) 27 AUGUST 2012
- [Southern Baptists Assist The Roman Catholic Church To Infiltrate Evangelicalism](#) 6 MAY 2012

- [Dear Catholic Friend](#) 14 APRIL 2012
- [Can the Roman Catholic Gospel Save?](#) 31 MARCH 2012

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- [Conservative Catholics Grapple with Pope's Perceived Liberalism](#) 12 NOVEMBER 2013
- [Pope Francis: Catholics Should Not Be 'Obsessed' with Speaking Against Homosexuality, Abortion](#) 21 SEPTEMBER 2013
- [Churches Help Catholics Learn Baptist Doctrine](#) 21 AUGUST 2013
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- [Priest Who Defended Homosexual 'Marriage,' Transgenderism Defrocked by Vatican](#) 19 APRIL 2013
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- [Vatican Introduces New Security Measures After Vatileaks Scandal](#) 3 DECEMBER 2012
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- [Biden: 'My Religion Defines My Life;' Pope: 'There Is a Grave and Clear Obligation to Oppose' Legalized Abortion](#) 13 OCTOBER 2012
- [Australian Roman Catholic Church Admits Child Sex Abuse](#) 22 SEPTEMBER 2012
- [Christians Condemn Idolatrous 'Queenship of Mary' Observance, Emphasize Need for Evangelism](#) 25 AUGUST 2012
- [Vatican besieged by reports of money laundering, plot to kill the pope](#) 11 FEBRUARY 2012

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- [Roman Catholics: The Neighborhood Mission Field](#) 6 AUGUST 2012
- [Tim Keller and the Problems with Ignatius of Loyola](#) 22 JUNE 2012
- [40 Days for Life and Evangelical Compromise](#) 10 APRIL 2012
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