

CATHOLIC Q & A

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What do I need the Church for? Can't I go straight to Jesus? All I need is my personal relationship with Jesus and God's Holy Word (the Bible).

Let us examine which Jesus you wish to worship, which Bible you wish to read and how you are to interpret that which you read.

Docetism

If we travel back in time to the apostolic period, we see the advent of a heretical sect called the Docetists. Their name was derived from the Greek word *dokesis*, which means "appearance" or "semblance", because they taught that Jesus Christ only "appeared" or "seemed" to be a man, to have been born, to have lived and suffered. Docetists were part of the Gnostic sect that believed that matter and spirit were opposed to each other. The spirit was good and the body was bad. Docetists taught that the way to achieve salvation is to become free from the bondage of the body and to return as a pure spirit to the Supreme Spirit.

Docetism did not deny so much Christ's divinity as it denied his true humanity. This heresy, which destroyed the very meaning and purpose of the Incarnation, was combated by the Apostles and the early Church Fathers such as St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Polycarp, Tertullian and St. Hippolytus of Rome.

Marcionites

In A.D. 144 a heretical sect was founded by a man named Marcion who rejected the writings of the Old Testament and taught that Christ was not the Son of the God of the Jews, but the Son of the Good God. The Old Testament God was evil and therefore the Old Testament writings should be rejected.

This heretical sect continued in the west for 300 years and in the East for some centuries longer. They arose in the very infancy of Christianity and adopted from the beginning a strong ecclesiastical organization, parallel to that of the Catholic Church.

Marcion wanted a Christianity untrammelled and undefiled by association with Judaism. Christianity was the New Covenant pure and simple. The Old Testament was a scandal to the faithful and had to be set aside. Marcion created his own New Testament

and admitted but one gospel, a mutilation of St Luke and only ten epistles of St. Paul.

St. Justin Martyr and St. Polycarp, both contemporaries of Marcion, condemned his teachings. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) paragraph 121 states: The Old Testament is an indispensable part of Sacred Scripture. Its books are divinely inspired and retain a permanent value, for the Old Covenant has never been revoked.

Adoptionists

Adoptionists or Theodotians are heretics of the second and third centuries. The founder of the sect was a leather-seller from Byzantium named Theodotus. Adoptionists taught that Jesus was tested by God and after passing this test and upon His baptism, He was granted supernatural powers by God and adopted as the Son. As a reward for His great accomplishments and perfect character Jesus was raised from the dead and adopted into the Godhead.

Pope Victor (c.190-200) excommunicated Theodotus as a heretic and condemned Adoptionism as a heresy. The CCC reaffirms this early Church teaching by stating in paragraph 465: the Church ... had to affirm that Jesus Christ is Son of God by nature and not by adoption.

Monarchians

The Monarchians exaggerated the oneness of the Father and the Son so as to make them but one Person. God the Father appears on earth as Son. The Monarchians emphatically declared that God is one, wholly and perfectly one, and that Jesus Christ is God, wholly and perfectly God. There however are no real distinctions in the one God. No Trinity. The Son Himself is the Father and the Father is the Son.

Sabellius became the leader of the Monarchians in the early 3rd century. He is said to have founded his views based on the Gospel according to the Egyptians. Sabellius was condemned by Pope St. Zephyrinus and Pope St. Callistus I (c. 220 AD).

Arianism

Arius was a priest in Alexandria early in the 4th century. He was very familiar with the Scriptures, but ran into difficulty with the paradox that occurs when Jesus says "I and the Father are one" and when Jesus says, "the Father is greater than I". How could Jesus be the same as the Father, but also be less than the Father? Arius' interpretation was that Jesus was the first created being before the rest of the world was created. Therefore He is a god but not of the same substance as the Father. Arius described the Son as a

second, or inferior God, standing midway between God the Father and all other creation. Therefore, Jesus at one time did not exist.

Arius was formally condemned at the ecumenical council of Nicea in 325 AD. The council affirmed that Jesus was truly the Son of God, and of the same substance (consubstantial) with the Father. Catholics profess this truth when we recite the Nicene Creed on Sunday: We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in being with the Father.

Proper biblical interpretation indicates that the Father generates the Son; therefore in this sense the Father is greater because he is the principal of the Son, but not the cause of the Son. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three distinct persons that share the same substance, therefore, three persons, one God.

Macedonians

Macedonius was the leader of a heretical sect, which flourished in the latter half of the fourth century. Macedonians denied the divinity of the Holy Ghost. They claimed that the Holy Spirit was not God but a mere creature and a ministering angel.

This heresy was condemned at the First Council of Constantinople in the year 381 A.D. The Church Council affirmed that the Holy Spirit is God and of the same substance as the Father and the Son.

Nestorianism

Nestorius was a priest and a monk who was chosen to be the Patriarch of Constantinople in the year 428 AD. Nestorius taught that not only are there two natures in Christ, human and a divine, but there are actually two persons in Christ, human and divine. Therefore, Mary was not the Mother of God, but the mother of the human person Jesus.

Nestorius and his teachings were condemned at the Council of Ephesus in the year 431 AD. The Church Council stated that while there are two natures in Christ, there is only one person, the Divine, from all eternity. Therefore Mary is the Mother of God (*Theotokos*).

Monophysites

The monophysites taught that the two natures in Christ, the Divine and the human, were so intimately united that they became one. The human nature of Christ was completely absorbed by the Divine nature.

The Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon held in 451 AD, condemned this heresy and reaffirmed the

teaching of the Church that the Divine person, Jesus Christ has two natures, fully human and fully Divine.

The CCC states in paragraph 75 and following:

Christ the Lord, in whom the entire Revelation of the most high God is summed up, commanded the apostles to preach the Gospel.... In keeping with the Lord's command, **the Gospel was handed on in two ways:**

-Orally "by the apostles who handed on,... what they themselves had received from the lips of Christ, from his way of life and his works, or whether they had learned it at the prompting of the Holy Spirit" (**Sacred Tradition**).

-In writing "by those apostles and other men associated with the apostles who, under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, committed the message of salvation to writing" (**Sacred Scripture**).

Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, then, are bound closely together and communicate one with the other. For both of them flow out from the same divine well-spring...

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 Holy Scriptures alone**. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.

In order that the full and living Gospel might always be preserved in the Church, **the apostles left bishops as their successors. They gave them their own position of teaching authority....**

The apostles entrusted the "Sacred deposit" of faith, contained in Sacred Scripture and Tradition, to the whole of the Church. **The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church alone...** Yet this Magisterium (the teaching office of the Church) is not superior to the word of God, but its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devotedly, guards it with dedication, and expounds it faithfully.

Conclusion

The Catholic Church is the means established by Providence, by which we know who Jesus truly is, by which we know that there are three Divine Persons in the Trinity and by which we know which books are included in and make up the New Testament and how to properly interpret those Sacred Texts.

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