

THE CHURCH

The Catholic Church has existed for nearly 2000 years, despite constant opposition from the world. Any merely human organizations with some of its leaders and members unwise, corrupt or prone to heresy would have collapsed early on. However, the Church is today the most vigorous church in the world (and the largest, with a billion members), and that is testimony not to the cleverness of the Church's leaders, but to the protection of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 16:18).

Four Marks of the True Church

The Church is One (Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 10:17, 12:13)

Jesus established only one church, not a collection of differing churches. The Eastern Orthodox churches broke away from unity with the pope in 1054. The Protestant communities were established after the Reformation (Lutheran: Luther, 1521; Anglican: Henry VIII, 1536; Presbyterian: Calvin, 1536; Baptist: Smyth, 1609; Methodist: Wesley, 1729) and produce more offshoots.

His Church also teaches just one set of doctrines, which must be the same as those taught by the apostles (Jude 3). The letter to the Ephesians exhorts Christians to "make every effort to preserve the unity which has the Spirit as its origin and peace as its binding force. There is but one body and one Spirit just as there is but one hope given all of you by your call. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all." (Eph 4:1-2) This is the unity of belief to which Scripture calls us (Phil 1:27, 2:2).

The Church is Holy (Eph 5:25-27; Rev 19:7-8)

The Church itself is holy because it is the source of holiness and is the guardian of the special means of grace Jesus established, the sacraments (Eph 5:26). This does not mean that each member is always holy. Jesus said there would be both good and bad members in the Church (John 6:70), and not all the members would go to heaven (Matt 7:21-23).

The Church is Catholic (Matt 28:19-20; Rev 5:9-10)

Jesus' Church is called catholic ("universal" in Greek) because it is his gift to all people. Nowadays the Church is found in every country of the world and wants all of us to be members of the universal family (Gal 3:28).

The Church Jesus established was known by "the Catholic Church", at least as early as the year 107, when Ignatius of Antioch used that title to describe the Church.

The Church is Apostolic (Eph 2:19-20)

The Church Jesus founded is apostolic because he appointed the apostles to be the first leaders of the Church, and their successors were to be its future leaders. Since the first century, there has been an unbroken line of the handing on what the apostles taught. What these first Christians believed is still believed by the Catholic Church. No other church can make that claim.

Scandals in the Church

The Church

In the past several years, the Catholic Church in the United States has been hit with one scandal after another. Many of these crimes involve priests in acts of pedophilia. This is a hideous sin, and in priests it is truly an abomination. Many people try to use these scandals to challenge the claim that the Catholic Church is the true Church.

The Catholic Church is both human and divine. Because it is human, it will have scandals. Because it is divine, it will last forever. The Church contains sinners as well as saints, tares along the wheat (Mt 13:24-30). In the Old Testament, we find baby sacrifice and temple prostitution involving leaders of the religion (Jer 32:32-35; 2Kgs 23:7). Of the twelve apostles, one betrayed Christ, one denied Him, one refused to believe in His resurrection, and they all abandoned Him at the Garden of Gethsemani. There were also grievous scandals in the early Church, such as in Corinth (1 Cor 5:1-7), Ephesus (Acts 20:29-30), Pergamum (Rev 2:14-16), Thyatira (Rev 2:20-24) and Laodicea (Rev 3:15-17). If there were scandals in the early Church, we should not be surprised there are scandals in the Church today, and we should be ready to admit it.

However, *scandals do not prove that the Church is false.* As Paul puts it, "What if some were unfaithful? Will their infidelity nullify the fidelity of God? Of course not!" (Rom 3:3-4). Christ's faithfulness to His Church remains even when some of its members are unfaithful (2Tim 2:13). Besides, scandals are found in all denominations; they have nothing to do with the Catholic Church being the true Church.

READING

The Church's Five Foundations (*This Rock, January 1997*)
One Priest's Answer to the Scandal

Further Research

- Does the Church have the responsibility and authority to keep its unity? (Matt 18; Acts 15,16; Jude 3)