

Pope Benedict XVI and Protestantism

Not for the first time in recent years the individual currently known as Pope Benedict XVI has put the proverbial cat amongst the ecumenical pigeons. In a document published by the Vatican in July 2007 Rome reasserted her claim that she alone is the one true expression of the genuine Christian 'Church'. Her claims were in the document entitled *'Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine on the Church'*.

The document can be viewed on a number of official Roman Catholic websites including the Zenit news agency and this link will take you to it –

<http://www.zenit.org/article-20090?l=english>

The 'question' in question was number 5. This is how it read together with the response –

Fifth Question: Why do the texts of the Council and those of the Magisterium since the Council not use the title of "Church" with regard to those Christian Communities born out of the Reformation of the sixteenth century?

Response: According to Catholic doctrine, these Communities do not enjoy apostolic succession in the sacrament of Orders, and are, therefore, deprived of a constitutive element of the Church. These ecclesial Communities which, specifically because of the absence of the sacramental priesthood, have not preserved the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic Mystery[19] cannot, according to Catholic doctrine, be called "Churches" in the proper sense.[20]

[19] Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree "Unitatis redintegratio," 22.3.

[20] Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Declaration "Dominus Iesus," 17.2: AAS 92 [2000-II] 758.

As I mentioned earlier this is not the first time that the current Pope has been involved in upsetting the ecumenists with this Roman claim for her to be exclusively the one expression of the genuine Christian 'Church' – the footnote [20] refers back to the Vatican's *'Dominus Iesus'* document issued by the ***Congregation For the Doctrine of the Faith*** [better known as the office of The Inquisition] in 2000. The then Pope, John Paul II officially approved the document that was primarily authored by the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger who is of course now Pope Benedict XVI.

That document stated in ***Section 17 – 'Therefore, there exists a single Church of Christ, which subsists* in the Catholic Church governed by the Successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him...On the other hand, the ecclesial communities which have not preserved the valid Episcopate and the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic Mystery are not churches in the proper sense; however, those who are baptised in these communities are, by Baptism, incorporated in Christ and thus are in a certain communion, albeit imperfect, with the Church...Therefore these...communities as such, although we believe they suffer from defects, have by no means been deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation'***.

**** Collins English Dictionary – Subsist – to be sustained, to continue in existence, to reside by virtue.***

There was not surprisingly quite a lot of 'hostile' reaction to this July 2007 document, as the following Roman Catholic reports make clear –

<http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0703953.htm>

Protestant groups dismayed at new document on identity of 'church'

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

ROME (CNS) -- Several Protestant organizations reacted with dismay to the Vatican's recent document on the identity of the church, but the Vatican's chief ecumenist, an Orthodox leader and a Swiss bishop said that, by clarifying its position, the Vatican actually is helping ecumenical dialogue...It reaffirmed Catholic teaching that the Catholic Church is the one, true church of Christ, even if elements of truth and Christ's saving grace can be found in separated churches and communities.

The most ecumenically sensitive part of the new document was its assertion that while the term "sister church" can be used to refer to any of the Orthodox churches, a Christian community born out of the Protestant Reformation cannot be called "church" in the way Catholic theology defines the term...The Protestant communities, however, are not churches because they do not have apostolic succession -- the unbroken succession of bishops going back to St. Peter, it said...

In a July 11 statement, Cardinal Kasper said..."The document does not say that the Protestant churches are not churches, but that they are not churches in the precise sense, that is, they are not churches in the way that the Catholic Church uses the term 'church,'"

<http://www.zenit.org/article-20116?l=english>

VATICAN CITY, JULY 12, 2007 (Zenit.org).- The president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity calls the document on the nature of the Church, published by the doctrinal congregation, an "invitation to dialogue." The June 29 document "Responses to some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine on the Church" from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith caused an initial "heated reaction among Protestant Christians," Cardinal William Kasper said....In a statement released to ZENIT, Cardinal Kasper stated: "This is not a new development and therefore there is no reason for resentment or to feel as if they have been treated offhandedly. Dialogue presupposes clarity on differing positions."... "An attentive reading of the text shows that the document does not say that Protestant churches are not churches, but that they are not churches in the proper sense, that is, they are not churches in the sense in which the Catholic Church defines Church."

Cardinal Kasper affirmed that "according to Catholic doctrine," as the document explains, "these communities do not have apostolic succession in the sacrament of holy orders, and therefore lack an essential element of being a Church."

He added: "The so-called ecclesial communities, that, because of the lack of ministerial priesthood, have not conserved the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic ministry, cannot, according to Catholic doctrine, be called 'Churches' in the true sense."

It is quite amazing to consider very carefully what Rome has said on this matter of 'The Church'. She informs non-Roman Catholics who have been '**baptised**' that through that ritual they have been '**incorporated in Christ**' but because of their non-recognition of certain aspects of the Roman Catholic 'Church' '**they suffer from defects**' and are members of '**ecclesial communities**' that are '**not churches in the proper sense**'.

Rome would seek to pass off her comments as in no way inferring that the members of these '**defective ecclesial communities**' are in any major eternal spiritual danger – she assures such that they '**have by no means been deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation**'.

Is that reassuring statement fully what Rome believes? – I think not for in **Vatican II: Volume 1** we read on **page 456** '**Nevertheless, our separated brethren, whether considered as individuals or as communities and Churches [Orthodox], are not blessed with that unity which Jesus Christ wished to bestow on all those to whom he has given new birth into one body and whom he has quickened to newness of life...For it is through Christ's Catholic Church ALONE, which is the universal help TOWARDS salvation, that THE FULNESS OF THE MEANS OF SALVATION CAN BE OBTAINED**'.

I hope you are able to fully grasp the enormity of Rome's 'doublespeak' on people being '**in Christ**' and yet not being in '**Christ's Catholic Church**' that claims a monopoly on being '**the universal help towards salvation**' and that claims to uniquely possess '**the fullness of the means of salvation**'.

God's Word draws no such distinction between some being '**in Christ**' and yet somehow being on the outside of or being alienated from **HIS** Church. The Apostle Paul had to deal with factional difficulties amongst the Christians at Corinth and he reminded them in **1st Corinthians 12:12-13** "**For as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many are one body, so also is Christ. For by one spirit were we all baptised into one body**" [Cecil's comment: This is not speaking of water baptism but of "spirit baptism" that occurs at the moment of Holy Spirit regeneration/conversion].

In his letter to the Christians at Colosse Paul identifies '**the body**' as being Christ's 'Church' – he wrote in **Colossians 1:18** "**And he [Christ] is the head of the body, HIS CHURCH**".

Christ says to people – *Come unto Me and I will put you in My church.*

Rome says to people – *Come unto us and we will put you in our church.*

When it comes to Rome identifying Christians who do not acknowledge her to be '**Christ's Catholic Church**' as '**suffering from defects**' that is, to paraphrase a well-known saying, a clear case of the harlot calling the bride scarlet.

In response to Rome's arrogant and unbiblical claim that genuine Protestant Christians who belong to '**Christian Communities born out of the Reformation of the sixteenth century**' are merely in '**imperfect communion with the Church**' I want to close by reproducing [with gracious permission] an excellent article by Peter J Gadsden that appeared in the Spring 2007 edition of '**Our Inheritance**'. The article is entitled –

PROTESTANTISM IS TRUE CHRISTIANITY

‘Some professing Christians use the name Protestant with pride, others hold it in disdain. Sadly a growing number of denominations openly deny that they are Protestant. At least one of these is a mainline denomination. They claim that Protestantism began in the 16th Century Reformation, whilst their origins date back to the Apostles. This claim is made despite the fact that the historic origins of this group cannot be found before the 17th century! Even if these claims of apostolic origins are genuine, to deny that they are Protestants is to deny the faith they claim to uphold.

Many claim the term was invented at the time of Martin Luther’s stance for the truth, when he declared “Here I stand; I can do no other”. It might however come as a surprise to some to learn that the name Protestant derives from the Latin meaning “*standing for a witness*”. A Protestant is a person who stands positively for his faith, just like Luther. However we must go back to the words of the Lord Jesus Himself, when He said to His disciples “*Ye shall be my witnesses*” Acts 1:8. The infant Church was a Protestant Church; the Apostles without exception were Protestants. The rot set in when the Roman Emperor Constantine decreed that Christianity should be the state religion and sowed the seeds for the advent of the Antichrist, the papacy. Make no mistake about it, the Antichrist is alive and well today, seated on the papal throne.

In recent years the news media have given the Protestant Church a bad press, presenting it as very negative and sectarian. This is not surprising, considering the weak and inept leadership there is and what still passes as the Protestant Church. Added to this is the powerful influence that the Church of Rome has in the media. Maybe it is because of these things that many feel that in this first decade of the 21st century, Protestantism has little or no significance.

It should be pointed out that despite all the misgivings people may have, Britain is a Protestant Nation and the Church of England is a Protestant Church. When Queen Elizabeth II opened her first parliament in November 1952 she made the following Declaration – “*I do solemnly, and in the presence of God profess, testify and declare, that I am a faithful Protestant and that I will, according to the true intent of the enactments which ensure the Protestant succession to the Throne of my realm, uphold and maintain the said enactments to the best of my power according to law*”.

On June 2nd 1953, at our Queen’s Coronation Service, the Archbishop of Canterbury asked her the following questions: - “*Will you to the utmost of your power maintain the Laws of God and the true profession of the Gospel? Will you to the utmost of your power maintain in the United Kingdom the Protestant Reformed religion established by law?* Her Majesty’s response was to lay her hand on the open bible and say – “*All this I promise to do*”.

Also at her Coronation the Queen was presented with a copy of God’s Word during which the following words were used; “*Our Gracious Queen, we present you with this Book, the most valuable thing that this world affords. Here is wisdom, this is the royal Law, these are the lively Oracles of God*”. Protestants believe that the Bible is the most valuable possession we can have. Tens of thousands have given their lives for it and many Protestants still suffer today because they refuse to give up reading it.

Let it be said very clearly and without any equivocation, true Protestantism is Bible Christianity, and our Queen is the sworn upholder of it. Protestantism is the Christianity of the Bible; it is the Christianity of Christ; it is the Christianity of the apostles; it is the Christianity of the early Church; Protestantism is the return to the Faith once and for all delivered unto the saints and is revealed to mankind in the pages of the Inspired word centring on the glorious Person of the Incarnate word, our Lord Jesus Christ.

As already mentioned, many reject the title Protestant and have arrogantly adopted the term *"We are just ordinary Christians"*. There is no such thing as an ordinary Christian who is not a Protestant. The two terms cannot be separated from one another.

A Protestant is a person who believes everything contained in the Bible. There are many who claim to be Christians and say that they believe the Bible, yet they ignore parts they do not like, misinterpret others and even follow the heretical doctrines of the Jesuits, who were commissioned by the Papacy to *"confuse the doctrines of the protestant church"*. A Protestant agrees with what the Bible says about itself *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God"*. Since the Bible is the Word of God, then we must listen to all that He says and believe all that He has revealed.

A Protestant owes everything to God. Today people like to think of themselves as self-sufficient. They approach life with the attitude *"I can look after myself, I do not need anything other than my own abilities"* and are quick to insist on *"their rights"*. Protestants know that they owe everything to the Lord Jesus, as He said, *"without me ye can do nothing"*. Were it not for His grace and mercy they know they would have nothing. This is true in every aspect of life, but particularly with regard to salvation. We cannot save ourselves, or live a righteous and godly life, for the Bible says *"our righteousnesses are as filthy rags"* *"there is none righteous, no not one"* and furthermore, we learn that *"It is by grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast"*.

A Protestant is a person who trust only in Christ. The vast majority of people live with the impression that as long as they live fairly decent lives, they will eventually go to heaven. Protestants know that this is not so. They also know that calling themselves a Protestant will not get them to heaven. Others trust in human priestly intercession and absolution, in prayers that may be prayed after they die, in order to get them out of the mythical place called Purgatory, or in the intercessions of Mary. Let us be clear however, that the only way to Heaven is through faith [alone] in the Lord Jesus Christ. What we could never do, He has done by His life, death and resurrection. Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me"*.