

Do You Have to be Catholic to Go to Heaven?

Question: Is it the policy of the Roman Church to indulge in a campaign of hatred, abuse, and criticism of everything that savors of protestantism?

Answer: No. The policy of Catholics, insofar as they are Catholics, is to seek first the Kingdom of God and His justice. Primarily they must sanctify their own souls, clothing themselves with the virtues of Christ. Secondly they must labor to save other souls by prayer, good example, and a readiness to give an account of their own faith to all who desire a knowledge of it. But in all their relations with others their policy is charity. As a matter of fact, Catholics have nothing whatever to gain by the mere destruction of protestantism anywhere. For it is more than likely that protestants who lose a belief in their own religion will drift simply to indifference, unbelief in Christianity at all, and almost complete irreligion. No Catholic wants that. If we point out the things in which we believe protestantism to be mistaken, we have no desire whatever to destroy belief in those doctrines in which it is not mistaken. Our one purpose is that non-Catholics should progress from partial views to complete views, and receive that fullness of the Christian religion which is to be found in the Catholic Church. And any efforts we make in that direction are prompted, not by hatred, but by love of our neighbors whom we want to be benefited by graces and blessings of which they are as yet unaware.

Source: Frs Rumble and Carty, *Radio Replies, Second Volume*, TAN Books, 1979 (original copyright 1940)

Question: Protestants say that the Catholic Church still regards them as heretics.

Answer: Some protestants may say that. Certainly not all do. Multitudes of protestants are not sufficiently interested in their religion to bother as to whether it is right or wrong; and still less interested as to the views of the Catholic Church concerning it. Consequently they say nothing on the subject, their conversation being dictated by other interests altogether. Those who are sufficiently interested in the subject may say that the Catholic Church regards them as heretics. But such a statement, as it stands, can be misleading. It would be better to say that the Catholic Church regards all forms of protestantism as heretical. If you say, "But those who profess heretical forms of religion are heretics," the Church replies that only those who know their protestantism to be wrong are guilty of heresy if they continue to adhere to it. Those who know no better, and are quite in good faith are not guilty of the sin of heresy.

Source: Frs Rumble and Carty, *Radio Replies, Third Volume*, TAN Books, 1979 (original copyright 1942)

Question: Will Catholics who leave the Church go to hell?

Answer: Some will, some won't. We don't know the proportions, but leaving the Church is always a blunder.

Let's look first at what makes one a member of the Church. Pope Pius XII put it concisely in his encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi* (On the Mystical Body of Christ, 1943): "Only those are to be accounted really members of the Church who have been regenerated in the waters of baptism, profess the one true faith, and have not cut themselves off from the structure of the Body by their own unhappy act or been severed therefrom, for very grave crimes, by the legitimate authority."

So three things identify the full Catholic:

1. valid reception of the sacrament of baptism,
2. profession of the Catholic faith, and
3. participation in the communion of the Church.

By manifesting these marks one comes under the triple office of the Church: priestly (baptism), teaching (confession of faith), and pastoral (obedience to Church authority).

When you were baptized, an indelible mark was placed on your soul. You never need to be baptized again because there's no way to undo your baptism. Not even the worst sin, including heresy and apostasy, can remove a valid baptism. Once baptized, always baptized. (Similarly, once confirmed, always confirmed, and once ordained, always ordained--confirmation and holy orders also leave indelible marks on the soul.)

Jesus taught that baptism is necessary for entering the kingdom of God (John 3:5). In the case of an adult, a profession of faith must precede baptism (Mark 16:16), but young children are exempt because they're incapable of making a profession of faith. They can be baptized anyway and their godparents make a profession of faith for them.

Catholic Sacred Tradition has held that those dissociating themselves from the Church voluntarily cease to be full members of the Church. Paul says that after a heretic has been admonished once or twice, he is to be avoided (Titus 3:10). Tertullian, who himself fell into heresy in his later years, wrote that "heretics have no share in our doctrines and the withdrawal from the communion testifies that in any case they are outside of it" (On Baptism, 15). Augustine called a heretic a limb "which has been cut off from the body" (Sermon 267, 4, 4). In short, neither heretics nor schismatics--those who separate themselves over matters of authority rather than doctrine--are considered full members of the Church.

People leave the Church for various reasons. Some never were "in" it except out of habit. Their faith, if not dead, was a candidate for the intensive care unit. One day they simply stopped going to Mass, and that was that. Others want spiritual nourishment but can't seem to find it in their parishes, so they go elsewhere. There is an irony in this, of course, since the greatest spiritual nourishment is the Eucharist, which is available in every parish, but some people don't really understand what--or, better, who--the Eucharist is. They leave the Church for a denomination that seems to be "alive."

Still others leave in good faith, thinking--wrongly, of course--that the Catholic faith is untrue and some other faith is true. If they and the others don't realize their actions are wrong, they remain related to the Church spiritually, even though they cease to be legal members of it. They still may achieve justification and salvation, but these are harder to achieve the further one distances oneself from the complete truth, found only in the Catholic Church, and the ordinary sources of grace, the sacraments. Leaving the Church, even with the best of intentions, is a great blunder because, all things else being equal, the move diminishes one's chances for heaven.

If people leave in bad faith--if they leave knowing full well the Catholic Church is the one founded by Jesus and that they ought to be members of it and believe all its doctrines without exception--then they have adopted for their motto what Dante put above the gates of hell: "Abandon all hope ye who enter here." No one knowingly abandoning the truth and failing to repent can be saved.

Source: Keating, Karl, *What Catholics Really Believe -- Setting the Record Straight*, Servant Publications, 1992

Question: Do you maintain that one is obliged to join your infallible, one, holy, catholic, apostolic, and indefectible Church, if he wishes to be saved?

Answer: If a man realizes that the Catholic Church is the true Church, he must join it if he wishes to save his soul. That is the normal law. But if he does not realize this obligation, is true to his conscience, even though it be erroneous, and dies repenting of any violations of his conscience, he will get to Heaven. In such a case, it would not have been his fault that he was a non-Catholic and God makes every allowance for good faith.

Question: So I deserve Hell because I am a non-Catholic?

Answer: If you say, "I know quite well that the Catholic Church is the true Church, which God obliges me to join, but what of that!" then you deserve Hell. That would be a serious sin. But apparently you do not realize this obligation. Your position is

based on insufficient or false information, and this leads you to a wrong if sincere conclusion.

Source: Frs Rumble and Carty, Radio Replies, First Volume, TAN Books, 1979 (original copyright 1938)