

**Credible Catholic Little Book
Volume Six**

The Catholic Church

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This Volume supports The Catechism of the Catholic Church, Part Two—The Celebration of the Christian Mystery

NOTE: All teachings in the **Credible Catholic** materials conform to the **Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)** and help to explain the information found therein. **Father Spitzer** has also included materials intended to counter the viral secular myths that are leading religious people of all faiths, especially millennials, to infer that God is no longer a credible belief. You will find credible documented evidence for God, our soul, and the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ that your faith may be bolstered and we may be able to counter the attack on our youth.

Part One from the **CCC** is titled, **THE PROFESSION OF FAITH**. The first 5 Volumes in the Credible Catholic Big Books and Credible Catholic Little Books fall into Part One. **Part Two** of the CCC is titled, **THE CELEBRATION OF THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERY**. This is covered in volumes 6 through 12. **Part Three** of the CCC is **LIFE IN CHRIST** and information related to this topic will be found in volumes 13 through 17. Credible Catholic Big and Little Books volumes 18 through 20 will cover **Part Four** of the CCC, **CHRISTIAN PRAYER**.

We all need to be Credible Catholics. St. Augustine said in his work, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*,

“Usually, even a non-Christian knows something about the earth, the heavens and other elements... Now, it is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics; ...If they find a Christian mistaken in a field which they themselves know well and hear him maintaining his foolish opinions about our books, how are they going to believe those books in matters concerning the resurrection of the dead, the hope of eternal life, and the kingdom of heaven...”

If we can't respond to these secular myths, credibly, who will?

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CHAPTER SIX:

THE STRUCTURE OF DIOCESES AND PARISHES

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Chapter One: Why Do We Need a Church?

We've talked a lot about who God is, how he is present to us and the life he is calling us to. If our connection to God is so personal, why do most people encounter God through a church—a religious community sharing common belief, common ritual and tradition, and common worship—instead of just “one-on-one”? Two reasons:

1. The ways we experience God personally—the numinous experience and intuition of the Sacred we talked about in Volume 2 (Chapter 3)—are powerful but difficult to interpret, to implement meaningfully in our day-to-day lives. They are the “inner word” that need the “outer word” (the clear self-revelation of God through religious authorities in a community) to give them focus. The “outer word” similarly needs the “inner word” to keep from becoming dry and perfunctory.

2. Human beings are interpersonal by nature—we are born into family relationships and function not as solitary individuals but as members of a community. Our relationship with God is no different—our spiritual experience is as part of a community, both exteriorly by participating in a church and interiorly by our sense of connection to all humanity. We have an implicit sense of being caught up in a cosmic struggle between good and evil, in which our own struggles are connected to the broader struggle for the fate of humanity. (Hence the popularity of stories on this theme, like *The Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*, and *Star Wars*—more on this in Volume 13) For St. Paul, this sense of our universal spiritual connectedness is enhanced when we enter the Christian Church through baptism, and become members of the “Body of Christ,” a unity of humanity through God whose lives are tied up with one another—such that we can contribute to or diminish happiness, love, and goodness through our words and actions. This is why the Eucharist is the sacrament of *communion*—we all “partake of the one bread” and are connected with one another in our reception of Jesus. We are not called only to an individual relationship with a Transcendent Personal Being, but to a relationship with the whole of humanity through that Transcendent Being. We are called not only to individual prayer but to *Koinōnia*—Church community and spiritual communion.

Beyond the need for spiritual community (both interiorly and exteriorly) there are four other reasons we need church to actualize our true dignity and destiny:

1. A source of Revelation—we saw in Volume 1 that proving God's existence leaves many questions about the heart of God—does he love us? Does he have a purpose for us? All

such questions require the self-revelation of God—and this in turn requires prophets and other religious authorities to mediate the revelatory Word of God to the community

2. A form of sacred ritual, worship, and symbol,
3. A source of teaching to help us interpret sacred doctrines in light of the practical requirements of living in an ever-changing world,
4. A source of spiritual teaching and guidance to help us in our relationship with God through prayer.

We saw in Volume 3 the seven similarities that underlie the various world religions, leading to the question of whether God would give a definitive revelation of himself. We looked at the evidence of Jesus as this revelation, and—in Volume 4—at the many unique revelations he made that changed the world. Though Revelation comes through the Person of Jesus Christ, it is mediated through religious texts, (i.e. the New Testament) and the religious authorities and churches that formulated and continued to interpret those texts. This leads us to the question concerning which religious authority—which church of the many Christian churches—we will want to choose as the true interpreter of the revelation of Jesus.

Chapter Two: Why the Catholic Church?

We have a record of Jesus' life and teachings in the New Testament that we can follow. But scriptural interpretation is not a simple matter—it is transmitted to us through oral traditions, literary genre, and the interpretive lenses of the Gospel and Epistle writers. When scripture passages appear to conflict with one another or different interpretations appear to conflict with one another, the faithful can be caught in confusion, and seriously deceived. This means that there will have to be some kind of teaching authority within the Church. If there were not, the Church community would be divided into factions, each having different interpretations of the same basic books of scripture. Such factions arose even in the early church, and of course, following the Reformation movement of the 1500s, there are thousands of denominations in our own time. Did Jesus anticipate the possibility of such divisions? This chapter takes up the evidence for Jesus' intention to establish a teaching authority, to start one church which was to be governed by Peter and his successors until the end of the world—that is, the Catholic church (governed by the successors of Peter).

I. Jesus as the Universal Temple—the Unifying Body of the Christian Church

Jesus was no stranger to the dangers of religious division. He lived at a time when Judaism was divided and even fragmented into many parties and schools—Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, Zealots, and many other sub-factions and extremes. But Jesus intended to make His body the mystical unification of a *universal* Church (Jn. 2:21). This would not be a “temple created by human hands” (Jn. 2: 19)—situated in a particular place like Jerusalem but a temple made by God for everyone everywhere. Jesus knew He would have to leave His disciples, but intended to give them the Holy Spirit (Jn 20:22 and Acts 2:1-4) to guide them and their successors to “Go and make disciples of every nation” (Mt.28:19-20).

II. Did Jesus Think the Church would have to Endure beyond the Apostles?

Since Jesus instructed his disciples to proclaim the gospel to the whole world (Mt. 28:19-20 and Mk. 13:10), it would certainly seem he intended his church to last longer than just one generation. (He even speaks of tribulations the church will face in the final days before the Second Coming of Christ.) It seems likely, then, that Jesus’ commission to Peter was not merely to Peter alone—but to all his successors. Otherwise, if Jesus saw the need to have a final juridical authority in Peter to prevent these divisions in Peter’s generation, why would he have allowed all subsequent generations to fall victim to division and disunity?

III. The Historicity of Matthew’s Commissioning Logion (Mt. 16:17-19)

Let’s take a look at the actual text where Jesus commissions Peter as the head of his church:

“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And I tell you that you are Peter, [*Petros*] and on this rock [*petra*] I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 16:17-20).

It might seem surprising that a text so significant to the future of the church is only found in one gospel; however, Matthew’s text here appears to be quoting an earlier account

that was familiar to and referenced by other New Testament writers. (We'll look at those references in a moment). How do we know this was an early, well-known tradition? Matthew's gospel was written in Greek, but this passage contains many idiomatic expressions used in Aramaic (the language Jesus used) that must have been found in the original Aramaic version—phrases like “Blessed are you” and “flesh and blood” (to refer to a person). The most significant of these is the Aramaic pun when Jesus renames Peter: “You are *Cephas*, and on this *Cephas* (Rock), I will build my church.” (This doesn't work as well in the Greek translation, where rock is a feminine word-“*petra*”—that doesn't perfectly match the name “*Petros*”).

This renaming of Peter also indicates that Jesus himself is the origin of this primitive Aramaic tradition. Why? It requires a very high authority like Jesus' to rename a person in Semitic culture, where the name chosen by the parents is almost sacrosanct.

As mentioned above, this early tradition of Jesus commissioning Peter is referenced by several other New Testament writers:

St. Paul—Paul's account of his own commissioning as an apostle in Galatians 1 and 2 has several parallels to Peter's commissioning by Christ. For instance, in connecting his commissioning with Peter's commission, Paul translates the name “*Cephas*” “*Petros*” to show his Greek readers the meaning of Peter's name—“Rock”—indicating foundation of the Church. This is the only time Paul translates the name “*Cephas*.”

Also, St. Paul uses the same idiomatic expression “flesh and blood” to refer to “human” that we saw used in Peter's commissioning in Matthew. This is the *only time* he uses this expression in all his New Testament letters. Is it merely a coincidence that this unique use of these terms—which precisely parallels Matthew—is used in a passage referring to Paul's own commissioning? (See the Big Book for even more parallels.)

St. John—St. John's gospel contains several references to Jesus' commissioning of Peter (John 21:15-19), his conferral of the power to bind and loose on the apostles (John 20:21-23) and his renaming of Peter (John 1:42).

St. Luke—Though the Gospel of Luke does not mention commissioning, Luke's account of the early church, the Acts of the Apostles, frequently illustrates Peter's central role in the church: it sets Peter in a central place (in Acts 1-15), makes him spokesman of the universal church at the Council of Jerusalem, and implies his superiority to Paul (who defers to Peter's judgments in several controversies).

If Peter had not received this special commissioning authority, we would instead have expected this authority to be disputed, both in the Acts of the Apostles and in the other writings and history of the early church. Instead, we find this authority acknowledged consistently, as we'll see illustrated in early church writings later in this chapter.

IV. Did Jesus' Commission of Peter Include His Successors?

We mentioned above that, just from a logistics standpoint, it wouldn't make sense for Jesus to establish a guiding and stabilizing authority if the Church would lose this authority once the apostles were dead. But we can also discern clues in the words Jesus used to commission Peter that indicate Jesus' intention to establish an office of authority, rather than a commission to the person of Peter only. Let's look at these significant words:

“Rock”—A name in the First Century Jewish thought represents the core identity of a person as well as his purpose in life. Thus, the renaming of Simon as “*Cephas*” (which is unique to Peter) indicates that his purpose is to be the foundation of Jesus' Church and the foundational leader of the new people of God.

“My Church”—Just as Jesus promised to replace the localized temple of Jerusalem with the new universal temple, Jesus uses the future tense “I will build my church” to describe the universal church he will establish.

“The Gates of Hades”—the expression, “the gates of Hades shall not overcome it,” has an obvious ring of permanence. The Church build on Peter will thus endure for a very extended time, not simply for Peter's lifetime.

Authority to “Bind and Loose”—In the Jewish faith, binding and loosing were terms for a rabbi's authority to make a binding judgment on matters of faith and practice as well as the power to excommunicate and even the power to bind the devil in exorcism. By singling out Peter with this authority (which would later be given in a more general way to the apostles after Easter), Jesus is designating him as the highest teaching and juridical authority for Jesus' church.

“The Keys to the Kingdom”—This phrase echoes an Old Testament moment when the prophet Isaiah announces that God has appointed a new prime minister for Israel, saying “I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.” Thus it appears that Jesus, similarly, is establishing an *office* of highest authority in his Kingdom and *installing* Peter in that office.

If Peter was in fact installed in an office of highest authority, an office that would need to endure through successors as long as the church itself endured, we can look at the scriptural accounts of the early church to see how Peter both exercised that office and set in motion that succession.

V. Peter in the Acts of the Apostles and at the Council of Jerusalem

Peter plays a central a role in the Acts of the Apostles. If he did not have supreme doctrinal and juridical authority, the roles he plays in the early church would be completely inexplicable. He establishes the succession of the Church hierarchy by proposing the election of a successor to the apostle Judas. He is the spokesman for the church at Pentecost and afterwards. He makes authoritative decisions like expanding the Church by preaching to Gentiles as well as Jews.

In fact, a great illustration of Peter's office is found in Acts 15, which describes the very first council of the church, the Council of Jerusalem (around 50 AD). Many church leaders, including the apostle Paul, traveled to Jerusalem to ask the apostles to resolve the controversial question of whether new Gentile converts to the church needed to follow Jewish law. When Peter decrees his decision, the assembly falls silent, meaning that Peter's word put an end to all debate and discussion—it was definitive for the whole church. (By contrast, the apostle James, who administrated the local church at Jerusalem, makes a statement that is much more limited than Peter's—unlike Peter, he doesn't speak on his own authority and instead relies on scriptural quotations to support his statement, which is directed to his local church and not the universal church.) It can scarcely be believed that Peter would have this unique and universal authority if it were not given to him explicitly by Jesus.

VI. Were Peter's Successors accorded Primacy by Bishops in the Post-Petrine Church?

After the Acts of the Apostles, we have only limited records of the leaders of the early Church. There are four texts we can look at that relate to the primacy of Peter and his successors (the Bishops of Rome). As we'll see, they confirm an unbroken line of thought from the death of St. Peter to the writings of Cyprian of Carthage that the successors of St. Peter maintained his primacy over the universal church in matters of teaching and the resolution of juridical disputes.

VI.A Pope Clement I

Pope Clement I was consecrated Bishop of Rome by Peter with authority over the universal church, according to two early sources (Tertullian and the *Liber Pontificalis*). In a letter sent to the Church in Corinth, he directs them to be “obedient to the things which we have written through the Holy Spirit.” Clement was clearly certain that he possessed the authority of God—as Peter’s successor—to resolve disputes for the whole church—beyond the See of Rome. If he had not possessed this authority which other local churches recognized as coming from God, the dispute in Corinth (which involved a dispute over who were their rightful local leaders) would have gone unresolved, leading to further breakdown in the church mere decades after Christ established it.

VI.B St. Ignatius of Antioch

St. Ignatius of Antioch, Bishop of Antioch, at the turn of the First Century, wrote a letter to the Church of Rome acknowledging that it was superior to—and presided over—all other Christian Churches. It was addressed to the church “which holds the presidency, in the location of the country of the Romans.”

VI.C St. Irenaeus

About 100 years after Ignatius of Antioch, St. Irenaeus declares that the Church of Rome (whose presiding bishop is the pope) is owed obedience in matters of teaching by all other Christian churches. He states that “with that church, because of its superior origin, all the churches must agree.”

VI.D Cyprian of Carthage

Cyprian of Carthage, one of the greatest Latin apostolic fathers and bishop of Carthage wrote an important treatise on *The Unity of the Catholic Church* in 251 AD. In a key passage, he recounts Jesus’ commission of Peter and observes that therefore “a primacy is given to Peter, whereby it is made clear that there is but one Church and one chair . . . If someone does not hold fast to this unity of Peter, can he imagine that he still holds the faith?”

VI.E Conclusion

These texts, spread over the first two and a half centuries of the Church, indicate that the whole Church submitted itself to the primacy of the successor to St. Peter occupying his chair at the Roman See in matters of doctrine—and the resolution of doctrinal and juridical disputes. This leadership seems to have achieved its intended role: though there were many heresies and challenges facing the young church, the primacy of Peter’s successors vouchsafed the teaching of Jesus and maintained the unity of the Church.

Chapter Three: The Purpose and Benefit of the Church: Relationship, Worship, Learning, and Service

Once we've traced the origins of the Church as the means Jesus gave us to pursue our relationship with God, what do we do now? How can we best enter into the church community so that its richness can influence every aspect of our spiritual lives?

The church has four major gifts to offer:

1. An entryway into relationship with God and the church community. (This is the church's central role—the three other gifts are there to help us deepen this relationship)
2. Worship—Eucharist and liturgy.
3. Learning—scripture and doctrine and wisdom.
4. Service and saints.

These gifts only work if we actively participate in them, so let's take a look at each.

I. Relationship with God

The responsibility of the church community is to convey a sense of the personhood of God, to help us understand who God is so we can enter into a meaningful relationship with him. This is not as easy as it sounds: Scripture talks about God from the vantage point of many different cultures—for example, the Patriarchal culture of Abraham, the warrior culture of Judaism before the Temple, the culture of Second Temple Judaism (influenced by the later prophets, Hellenism, and Wisdom literature), and of course, the Church culture initiated by Jesus himself—and in different literary forms from different sources. In view of all this, it should not be surprising that there are literally dozens of different interpretations of the personhood of God and Jesus.

This is where the guidance of the Church is helpful. A student in CCD class will learn that God is Love, and we looked in Volume 4 at the teachings of Jesus (the parable of the Prodigal Son, the use of “Abba,” the two great commandments, the Beatitudes) which support this emphasis that God as unconditional love. But if we set aside the centuries of emphasis the Church has placed on the loving God, we could easily be confused by other scripture passages that might make us question that emphasis. Without expertise in scriptural exegesis, reading phrases like “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!” (Matt 7:23) could lead us into one of the false images of God—the “payback God,” “disgusted God,” “stoic God,” or “angry God”—discussed in Volume 4 (See the Big Book for examples

from Fr. Spitzer’s own formative encounters with Church figures on the question of God’s love). Such images of God can radically effect our life—if we can’t recognize God’s love, we will view him with fear or indifference and close ourselves off from that love. The Church gives us the teaching of God’s love, but also gives us kindly pictures of Jesus, prayers of contrition, and traditions like Christmas and the Sacred Heart devotion that all help to bring this image of God alive in our lives.

The Church has its imperfections and failings, because it has real people who are all on a journey to the Lord, and those real people make mistakes—even terrible ones out of egocentricity and narcissism, yet these imperfections do not outshine the good and the grace of the faithful community striving to grow closer to the God who inspires it.

II. Worship, Eucharist, and Liturgy

Going to a concert or watching a game by yourself is a very different experience from doing it with friends. Even such simple acts of enjoyment are much more powerful when they are shared. This is all the more true of something as profound as our relationship with God. We not only need private, but also public prayer—or what might be called “worship.”

Worship is the celebration of being called by God to share with others in His unconditionally loving providence and eternity. It is a complex act involving praise and prayer which is wrapped up in the hearts and presence of other people, the beauty of art and architecture, and the inspiration of the scriptures. Thus worship involves giving praise to God through community prayer and song, hearing the word of God and its interpretation by a minister of that word, community prayers of petition for the needs of the congregation as well as the culture and the Church, and a public confession of commonly held beliefs. Catholic worship contains all this, and centers it around Christ’s ritual of the Last Supper, making the crucified and risen God physically present. We explored the meaning of this ritual in Volume 3, but will also spend all of Volume 8 unpacking this mystery in depth. This ritual of the Eucharist is, for Catholics, the primary avenue to salvation—the more we participate, the further we move into the mind, heart and salvation of Jesus Christ.

III. Learning—Scripture, Doctrine, and Wisdom

The role of the Church as teacher is most critical during times of disagreement and dispute when the same words of Jesus are interpreted in several different ways, which could produce misleading and destructive teachings or division within the community. We discussed how Jesus addressed this danger in his commissioning of Peter, an authority which has been used through the centuries to resolve dozens of disputes and questions, producing an extensive body of doctrine (discussed in Chapter 5, below).

But there is much more to ponder and learn in the world beyond the essential questions addressed in scripture and doctrine. We are also trying to express the nuance and beauty of God’s interaction with us through all the methods of the humanities and sciences. We are interested in what great thinkers and artists have to say—such as the religious physicists, philosophers, and mathematicians mentioned in the foregoing chapters, the great novelists, poets, and writers—from Dante and Shakespeare to Hugo, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Tolkien, Lewis, and Greene. We immerse ourselves in the political ideas of St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Erasmus, St. Thomas More, Francisco Suarez, the social encyclicals of the Popes, Jacques Maritain; and John Courtney Murray, and we are edified by centuries of religious art, architecture, and music. See the Big Book for a sampling of authors to explore in philosophy, biblical scholarship, theology, literature, and political theory—there are dozens of disciplines, hundreds of authors and thousands of works to be discovered in the Catholic intellectual tradition.

IV. Service and Saints

All service is an act of love for another human being. Love does not have to be a burden or an effort—all we need do is let ourselves see the true goodness and lovability of the other—who becomes somewhat irresistible. This is easier said than done, because we can block our view of the good news (which in turn blocks empathy) for a variety of motives—limited time/resources/energy or just plain egocentricity and selfishness. A relationship with God can help us overcome egocentricity and become more actively loving, but more fundamentally, it moves us to become more loving because—as we get to know him better—we want to be more like God, who is so unconditionally loving himself. (This is part of why Love of God and Love of Neighbor are linked as the two greatest commandments.)

How to do this? The following three-step process has proved valuable for many Christians:

- 1.Looking at the example of Christ in the New Testament—seeing him in his humility, compassion, friendship with sinners, and love of his disciples. One of the best ways of doing this is through *Lectio Divina*—a contemplative reading of the scriptures—particularly the narratives where Jesus is associating with sinners, healing the sick, exorcising unclean spirits, and dealing with his disciples “drawbacks.”
- 2.Engaging in the “Examen Prayer”—a meditative prayer used by Jesuits to use the power of gratitude to imitate Christ in the beatitudes—see Volume 18.
- 3.Finding a ministry (perhaps one in your church) in which you can imitate Christ in action.

The first two steps are oriented toward imitating the heart of Christ so that we might serve others with the heart of Christ (the third step). The service we choose should match our abilities, interests and responsibilities (e.g. a parent can't bail on their spouse and kids to go volunteer full-time) We have a limited amount of time and psychic energy, and so we must strike a balance between depth relationships (close personal ties involving lots of time and responsibility) and breadth relationships (serving lots of people that we only briefly interact with). There are different kinds of service, too—mission trips, shelters and food banks for the physically energetic; youth ministry for people good with kids; educational and administrative parish roles for people with intellectual and organizational skills, etc. Different religious orders are even based around these different skills, or *charisms*. Depending on the form of service we pursue, there are many lives of the saints—holy men and woman recognized by the Church as examples for us to follow—that may inspire us. See the Big Book for specific recommendations of saints to study for intellectual and educational service, for pastoral ministries, for prayer and spiritual ministries, for charitable ministries, and for missionary vocations.

V. Conclusion

We have looked into three ways in which the Church deepens our encounter and relationship with God—worship, learning, and serving. If we are to deepen our relationship with God through these vehicles, then we will want to be purposeful about reflecting and acting on each of them—attending mass (worship) as often as possible, finding areas of learning that will deepen us in our areas of interest (for example, philosophy, scripture, theology, spirituality, history, literature, art, music, architecture, and poetry) and giving ourselves to loving service in accordance with our gifts, availability, and opportunities. (We'll talk about another important practice, personal prayer, in Volumes 18-20.)

Chapter Four: The Catholic Church's Structure

The hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church goes back to the First Century. By 100 AD, the offices took a familiar form—the Pope is the central authority as Peter's successor, then individual regions are administered by bishops (successors to the apostles), then come priests (Presbyters), then deacons. We already saw the significance of this centralized structure in the Council of Jerusalem, where Peter's universally recognized authority resolved a controversy that threatened to divide the church. Here is a more in-depth breakdown of the various roles in the church's hierarchy:

The Pope—leader of the universal Catholic Church and the Bishop of Rome. His primacy (over every believer) comes from his authority as successor to Peter (commissioned by Jesus Himself as discussed in Chapter 2, above). The pope has the power to definitely resolve all juridical disputes within the Church and to define teachings infallibly—by his own authority or in concert with ecumenical councils of bishops.

Cardinal—generally an ordained archbishop (though not a requirement). Cardinals have the authority to elect the Pope when the See is vacant. Cardinals also have administrative offices in the Roman Curia, and counsel the Pope when requested.

Roman Curia—an administrative body through which the Pope conducts the affairs of the universal Catholic Church. Basically an organizing headquarters to serve the needs of the particular churches around the world.

Archbishop—a bishop with authority over a large diocese (an “archdiocese”), and frequently over a metropolitan region (a “See”).

Bishop—a consecrated and ordained member of the Catholic clergy who enjoys apostolic succession going back to the twelve apostles of Jesus. Bishops are given authority over a regional See (including “Ordinary Magisterium” teaching responsibilities (see Chapter Five, below). They also have the power to ordain clergy—including other bishops. When they gather as an ecumenical council in concert with the Pope, they can collectively define doctrines infallibly (see Chapter Five).

Priest—one who stands in the place of Christ, a priest celebrates the holy sacrifice of the mass and confers other sacraments. Priests are authorized to preach, teach, and confer the sacraments wherever permission is granted by the local bishop. Diocesan priests have authority over a specific parish community.

Deacon—authorized to render service within a parish by preaching, teaching, baptizing, and witnessing marriages. They also help the pastor with other services. Permanent deacons may be married (if marriage occurs before their ordination to the diaconate).

Chapter Five: The Teaching Authority of the Church

“Magisterium” refers to the teaching authority of the Catholic Church (derived from the Latin term “*magister*”—“master teacher”). There are three levels of magisterial authority when it comes to any official church teaching or pronouncement:

1. Extraordinary Magisterium
2. Ordinary Magisterium
3. Prudential Judgment

I. Extraordinary Magisterium

Extraordinary Magisterium is concerned with defined doctrines of the Church. These are irrevocable decisions, by which the supreme teaching authority in the Church decides a question pertaining to faith or morals, and which binds the whole Church. Four conditions are required for a defined doctrine:

1. It must be a decision by the supreme teaching authority in the Church. This can be either A) the Pope, when he declares himself speaking as supreme teacher of all Christians (*Ex Cathedra*) or B) the bishops of the Church united in ecumenical council in concert with the Pope.
2. The decision must concern a doctrine of faith (what Christians must believe) or morals (what Christians must do).
3. The decision must bind the Universal Church (all the faithful, not merely some part of the faithful)
4. The decision must be irrevocable (declared to be definitive, will never be changed).

II. Ordinary Magisterium

Extraordinary Magisterium is considered infallible (protected from error by the Holy Spirit due to the special teaching authority to bind and loose conferred by Christ)—that’s why it has all the conditions we listed, because it is not exercised lightly. Ordinary Magisterium can be infallible in the instance of Ordinary *Universal* Magisterium (when the Pope and all the dispersed bishops over a long period of time have taught the same particular doctrine of faith and morals to be held by the faithful) but usually, Ordinary Magisterium is non-infallible. It includes the authoritative teachings of a Pope or ecumenical council when they aren’t making infallible definitive pronouncements. It also includes the teachings on

faith and morals delivered by individual Bishops or by regional conferences of Bishops (see Section IV below). These kinds of non-infallible teachings about salvation are not 100% guaranteed from even the slightest of errors, but can still be trusted not to lead away from our salvation. (Basically, a bishop or encyclical might use a theological term to describe the action of grace that the Church will later decide is too ambiguous . . . but a bishop or encyclical won't say that Jesus isn't God or that murder is now fine.)

To clarify the different levels of teaching:

When a pronouncement of the Pope or Bishops is not defined infallibly, it is not Extraordinary Magisterium. When a teaching of the Pope or Bishops does not concern salvation (or there is uncertainty about whether it leads to salvation), it is not Ordinary Magisterium. It must therefore be considered either theological opinion (in the case of faith) or prudential judgment (in the case of morals). Which brings us to...

III. Prudential Judgment and Catholic Social Teaching

This third category of teaching is important for *applying* the Church's social teaching to particular times and places. For example, there are six general principles of social teaching that are binding on the faithful as Ordinary Magisterium:

- 1.The pursuit of the common good in a spirit of service,
- 2.The development of justice with particular attention to situations of poverty and suffering,
- 3.Respect for the autonomy of earthly realities,
- 4.The principle of subsidiarity (matters ought to be handled by the smallest, lowest or least centralized competent authority),
- 5.The promotion of dialogue and peace in the context of solidarity.
- 6.The intrinsic dignity (worth) of every human being.

Every Catholic must follow these principles, but there will still be questions of *how to apply* these principles to the specific circumstances of the society you live in. Often the teaching authorities in the Church, especially a bishop or bishops' conference close to the people involved in a particular social issue, will offer advice on how to apply the principles. Such advice is Prudential Judgment—it should guide us but does not bind us.

IV. The Status of Regional Councils of Bishops

Regional Conferences of bishops can sometimes be confusing—can they be infallible, like an ecumenical council? Or do they just have ordinary teaching authority, like the individual bishops themselves? Basically, it’s the latter—a regional conference of bishops derives its teaching authority from that of the individual bishops involved, so it just has the same Ordinary Magisterium teaching authority as those bishops do when speaking on universal truths that lead to salvation, and the same Prudential Judgment authority those bishops do when speaking on the application of principles, as we discussed in Section III.

Chapter Six: The Structure of Dioceses and Parishes

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|------------------|---|--|
| Diocese | Bishop → | ↓ |
| Deaneries | ↓ | Vicar General Diocesan Curia Priest’s Council |
| Parishes | Pastors | |
| | ↓ | |
| | Parochial Vicars | Pastoral Councils |
| | ↓ | |
| | Parish Council | |
| | ↓ | |
| | Parish Officers and Committees | |