

of great saints and theologians

Qualities of false religion

- Attending religious ritual simply out of habit without genuine conversion or repentance
- Religious observance just for show, e.g. going to Church because everyone else does
- Unbalanced religious activism e.g. frenzied working for the poor or for social justice without cultivating a real relationship with God
- Religion that focuses on doctrine alone, without a living faith.
- Religion that is self-centered and ignores others
- Religion that is used only to secure favors from God.
- Prayer just for the sake of feeling good: enjoying God's presence without really trying to work with God.
- Pride in being outwardly moral and better than others in sticking to the letter of the law, but without having the inner attitude and dispositions of love for God and other men.
- Religious services that whip up people's emotions to manipulate them
- Religion that is used to control others
- Religion that is used to justify unacceptable actions or attitudes
- Religion that clings blindly to the past
- Isolation from Christian community: being a Christian but not attending church services
- Combining Christianity with the love of money
- Combining Christianity with an immoral lifestyle
- Justifying grossly sinful behavior with religion
- Harsh and over critical attitudes to others
- Sunday Christianity: giving one day to God and ignoring him the rest of the week

Qualities of true religion

- An overwhelming love of God and desire to serve him in all things
- Loving service of others
- Joy, peace, humility
- Working in and belonging to a Christian community

- Service of the poor and needy
- Working for justice and peace; denouncing the evils in society
- Continuous prayer in all one's actions
- Seeking God's guidance in all we do
- Ultimately living as Christ did: completely obedient to God and open to all the leadings of the Spirit

In conclusion we can say that religion is both a human activity and a divine one. It is always faulty because men have a limited understanding of the truth and even when they understand it they are not faithful to it. It is also divine because in it we find the power of God. In it we find changed lives and great miracles of grace. We find great saints and wonderful revelation by God of himself and his plan for mankind.

As Catholics we believe that the Church founded by Christ with Peter as the rock is present in its fullness in the Catholic Church. We acknowledge truth in other denominations but we invite them to find its fullness in the one Church that has survived through all the centuries of storms since Jesus died.

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Pamphlet 352

True and False Religion

Attacks on the Catholic Church

Many attacks have been made on the Catholic Church, mostly by fundamentalist and born-again churches. Very often they have claimed that the Catholic Church is a false religion that has perverted the authentic teaching of the Bible. Often born again Christians do not really understand the teaching of the Catholic Church. 1 Tim 3:15: "... *the church is the pillar and foundation of the truth*" In some cases even lies and slanders have been spread by some groups which deliberately distort or misinterpret Catholic teaching in order to discredit it with the uneducated or ill-informed. Our contention, however, is that the Catholic Church has always reflected authentic Scriptural teaching and accurately presents what Christ taught (see 2 Peter 3:16): it is rather the fundamentalist churches that often do not teach what Scripture says.

Religion not just manmade

The relationship man has with God and the practices and rituals he uses when relating to God. Yet Scripture itself uses the word religion and has a great deal to say about religious practices. While outward show without behavior or morals that God calls us to observe is condemned, religious ritual and ceremony is never condemned by Scripture.

Truth and falsity in religion

In the past it was customary for people to say that only their religion was true and condemn others to hell. Now Christians are happy to acknowledge the truth where it exists in all denominations and churches. Even non-Christian religions are seen as possessing some truth in them. This does not however mean that all religions can be seen as equal: ultimately we all have to opt for one religion as possessing the truth in a higher degree than another.

Scripture is very critical of much pagan religion. Deviations from truth in the Christian community itself are sharply condemned in the New Testament.

As Catholics we believe that in the Catholic Church subsists the fullness of what Christ taught and what has been revealed by God. But it does not mean that all Catholics really understand everything that the Church has received from Christ. It also does not mean that all Catholic teaching and writings have been (or are) free from error. The Church as a whole possesses an ever purer understanding of God's revelation and is always being led into a deeper knowledge of Christ. However individual priests, bishops and even popes have often had opinions which we know are at odds with the correct understanding of the gospel.

What Catholicism is accused of

Catholicism is often accused of being bogged down in ritual and of ignoring the gospel. However the Catholic Church officially teaches that we are justified and receive salvation through grace alone, and by faith in Jesus Christ manifested in "graced" good works (Gal 5:6) – "faith working through love", as Paul puts it. Catholics are aware of the Scripture "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb 11:6). Often people join fundamentalist and evangelical groups and claim that only then have they come to experience God's grace and accept Christ. Catholicism is accused of being a religion of works. Catholics are accused of adding to Scripture and placing human authority and rituals where God's grace lies. The Catholic Church adheres scrupulously to Paul's command in 2 Thess 2:15: " ...hold on to (all) the (sacred – not 'human') Traditions you have been taught either by word of mouth or what is written." Some groups identify the Catholic Church even with the sinful woman of the Book of Revelation. However the Catholic Church has the guarantee from Christ in Mt 16:18-19 that it will never defect from the truth.

Where Catholicism really stands

The Catholic Church is far from being a ritualistic religion bogged down in externals. The rituals that it practices are firmly founded in Scripture and tradition and are places in which abundance of

God's grace is found. Fundamentalists are ignorant of the fact that the Bible is a Catholic book whose "canon" (official list of books) was discerned by Catholic bishops at the Councils of Hippo and Carthage in the 4th century. The so-called extra books (apocrypha) of the Old Testament are not extra books at all but have been removed from Protestant bibles to tie up with the sixteenth century reformers' manmade ideas.

The real Catholic makes Christ the centre of his life and finds Christ working powerfully in the rituals of the Church. The real Catholic acts with the power of the Spirit (see Acts 1:4-5). The real Catholic lives a life centered upon Christ and continually strives to follow him more purely (see John 14:6). Much of fundamentalist criticism of Catholicism is based upon ignorance. But some groups seem to deliberately lie about what Catholics believe. Far from being a religion that is false it is the source of whatever good doctrine other churches have.

The problem with fundamentalism

The fundamentalists run a great risk of being a false religion. They recognize no authority but that of the Bible and what they do accept in the Bible they often misinterpret. Much that they should examine is ignored. The living tradition of the Church has no place with the fundamentalists. Fundamentalism is also often unconcerned with injustice and poverty in society. Fundamentalism has much to say about accepting Christ but little about growing in Christ. While Catholicism is unified, fundamentalism is fragmented. If Catholicism appears lifeless fundamentalists groups are more lively but much that happens is not of the Spirit. Much that is called spiritual is of the flesh: much egotism hides under the cloak of being "spiritual".

Much of the enthusiasm that surrounds fundamentalist religion is false. There is a deliberate whipping up of emotions. Many conversions are shallow. Many so-called miracles do not stand up to the light of rational criticism and investigation. Devils are cast out which were never there. The Bible is abused to make God's word a book of promises for

people to get rich: God is the aspirin that solves all of life's problems.

The solution

The Church teaches that Catholics should centre their lives on a personal relationship with God and learn to base their beliefs on Scripture. Fundamentalists must stop being centered on the Bible only. They ought to open themselves to the on-going work of God in the Church. They should get a better understanding of Scripture. Fundamentalists should look closely at what is false in their structures and practices. Catholics are continuously exhorted by preachers to practice their religion with more enthusiasm and expect and pray for conversions and healings. Fundamentalists need to become aware of the power of God's love in the sacraments and in the prayers and example of the saints.

What is behind the problems people experience with religion

The real issue is that religion is a human as well as a spiritual phenomenon. We need to continually discern what is of God and what comes from the flesh. Religion is often a means of propping up people's self-esteem and of justifying what happens in society and what people do. Religion suffers from all the limitations of what is human: our knowledge is imperfect and our actions and attitudes leave much to be desired. Nevertheless it is man's way of reaching up to God and in it God reaches out to man. Our faith and our following of Christ should continually become purer and more complete.

To find truth in religion we must look to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who does indeed enlighten us as individuals. But it is in the Church as a whole that the work of the Spirit must be found. There will always be priests and even bishops and popes who do not lead seemly lives. But if we look at the holiness of so many members of the Church we will see things in perspective. If truths are sometimes obscured we will find them fully revealed in the official documents of the Church and in the writings