

Catechism of Trent’s Errors

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Catechisms are not infallible

Catechisms are fallible and thus can contain heresies and other errors. In fact, many modern catechisms, such as the so-called Pope Pius X catechism, contain heresies. (See *Catholic Topic Index: Catechisms: Catechisms are fallible*.) Although a catechism is not infallible, it can contain infallible teachings. The teachings in a catechism that are infallible must be rooted (contained) in the dogmas of the solemn magisterium or the ordinary magisterium or the natural law. A catechism’s teachings that deal with faith or morals and that are *not* part of the solemn magisterium or the ordinary magisterium or the natural magisterium (the natural law) are fallible and hence can contain any error including heresy. (See RJMI book *The Salvation Dogma: Salvation Heresy Enters Catechisms in U.S.A.*) Because catechisms are not infallible, *The Catechism of the Council of Trent*, also known as *The Roman Catechism* or *Catechism of Trent*, is fallible and thus can and does contain errors. An introduction to the *Catechism of Trent* teaches this truth:

Introduction to *The Catechism of the Council of Trent (The Roman Catechism)*: “*The Roman Catechism*... Its teaching is not infallible; but it holds a place between approved catechisms and what is *de fide*. (Footnote 37: A Compendium of Catech. Instruction, i. Pp. li. lii.)”¹

Revisions to original text

Revisions have been made to *The Roman Catechism*. I will be referring to the Frs. McHugh-Callan edition, 1923 [hereafter *Catechism of Trent*]:

Catechism of Trent, Introduction by John A. McHugh, O. P., and Charles J. Callan, O. P., 1923: “This translation used as its basis the Manutian text as reflected in the Maredsous edition of 1902, the fourth Roman edition of 1907 and the Turin edition of 1914. The purpose in the present version has been to reproduce the sense of the original as exactly as possible in clear, dignified, modern English.”

¹ *The Catechism of the Council of Trent*, Tan Edition, 1982, Introduction, p. xxxvi, John A. McHugh, O.P., Charles J. Callan, O.P.

Catechism of Trent, The Creed, Article 9, I Believe in the Holy Catholic Church, Unity of Government: “Lastly, St. Ambrose says: ‘Because he alone of all of them professed (Christ) he was placed above all.’ ” [Footnote a: “This quotation from St. Ambrose is not found in the earliest and best editions of the Roman Catechism; apparently the lacuna was due to a typographical mistake. The above passage has been supplied from the Roman edition of 1761.”]

Therefore, the below errors and poorly worded passages that seem to be heretical may not have been in the original edition of the *Catechism of Trent*.

Seemingly heretical - There are only two parts of the Church

The *Catechism of Trent* seems to heretically teach that there are only two parts of the Church, the Church Triumphant and the Church Militant, thus excluding the Church Suffering, which consists of the souls in purgatory. This would be heretical if it actually meant to deny the existence of the Church Suffering, the souls in purgatory. But other passages in the same catechism teach of purgatory. It would also be heretical if it meant to teach that the Church Suffering is not a part of the Church:

Catechism of Trent, Article 9, I Believe in the Holy Catholic Church; the Communion of Saints: “The Parts of the Church. ... The Church consists principally of two parts, the one called the Church triumphant; the other, the Church militant. The Church triumphant is that most glorious and happy assemblage of blessed spirits, and of those who have triumphed over the world, the flesh, and the iniquity of Satan, and are now exempt and safe from the troubles of this life and enjoy everlasting bliss. The Church militant is the society of all the faithful still dwelling on earth. It is called militant because it wages eternal war with those implacable enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil. We are not, however, to infer that there are two Churches. The Church triumphant and the Church militant are two constituent parts of one Church; one part going before, and now in the possession of its heavenly country; the other, following every day, until at length, united with our Saviour, it shall repose in endless felicity.”

Here is an example of an extremely incompetent and careless use of words. One wonders how this passage could have escaped the author, and worse, those in authority who approved the catechism.

Seemingly heretical - No grace exists outside the Church

The Church has condemned the doctrine that no grace exists outside the Catholic Church:

Pope Clement XI, Bull *Unigenitus*, 1713, Condemned propositions of the Jansenist Quesnel: “Condemned proposition 29. Outside the Church, no grace is granted.” (Denzinger 1379)

Yet the *Catechism of Trent*, contrary to the above infallible condemnation, seems to teach the heresy that no grace exists outside the Catholic Church:

Catechism of Trent, The Sacraments, The Eucharist: The Grace of the Eucharist Sustains: “For the Eucharist is the end of all the Sacraments, and the symbol of unity and brotherhood in the Church, outside which none can attain grace.”

This is another extremely incompetent passage. As it stands, it seems to be heretical. To escape heresy, the author could have meant two things: One, that no one can attain grace from receiving the Eucharist if they are outside the Catholic Church, although the passage does not clearly say so; two, that sanctifying grace is not given outside the Church but actual grace is

given in order to effect conversions—but he did not make this distinction. Here is a good example of a very badly worded passage that should have been corrected.

The truth is that actual grace, which comes from the Catholic Church, is given to those outside the Catholic Church (non-Catholics) to effect their conversion. Whereas sanctifying grace is given only to those inside the Catholic Church, to Catholics.

Seemingly heretical - Only the reception of sacraments forgives sins

The Council of Trent infallibly teaches that a Catholic's mortal sins can be forgiven without receiving the sacrament of penance if he has perfect contrition and the desire to go to confession:

Council of Trent, On Penance: “The Synod teaches, moreover, that, although it sometimes happens that this contrition is perfect through charity, and reconciles man with God before this Sacrament be actually received, the said reconciliation, nevertheless, is not to be ascribed to that contrition, independently of the desire of the Sacrament which is included therein.”²

The *Catechism of Trent* contradicts this teaching. It teaches that only by the administration and thus the reception of the sacraments can sins be forgiven:

Catechism of Trent, The Creed, The Forgiveness of Sins, Limitation of Power: “...For sins can be forgiven only through the Sacraments, when duly administered.”

Seemingly heretical - Basic dogmas can be denied without guilt

It is an infallible truth that Catholics with the use of reason must know and believe the basic dogmas (basic infallible truths) of the Catholic faith in order to be Catholic and to be saved and hence cannot be excused for ignorance:

Pope Pius X, *Acerbo Nimis*, 1905: “We are forced to agree with those who hold that the chief cause of the present indifference and, as it were, infirmity of soul, and the serious evils that result from it, is to be found above all in ignorance of things divine. And so, Our Predecessor Benedict XIV had just cause to write: ‘We declare that a great number of those who are condemned to eternal punishment suffer that everlasting calamity because of ignorance of those mysteries of faith which must be known and believed in order to be numbered among the elect.’ ”

If a Catholic denies just one basic dogma, he is a formal heretic, excommunicated from the Church, and is no longer Catholic. However, the same does not apply to deeper dogmas. A Catholic who denies a deeper dogma may not be a formal heretic.³

The *Catechism of Trent* does not make this distinction. It allows the reader to heretically believe that a Catholic can deny a basic dogma, such as the divinity of Christ or the resurrection, and under certain circumstances remain Catholic, not being formally guilty because of an excuse of ignorance:

Catechism of Trent, Article 9, I Believe in the Holy Catholic Church; the Communion of Saints, the Importance of This Article: “...For a person is not to be called a heretic as soon as he shall have offended in matters of faith; but he is a heretic who, having disregarded the authority of the Church, maintains impious opinions with pertinacity. Since, therefore, it is impossible that anyone be infected with the contagion of heresy, so long as he holds what

² *Council of Trent, On Penance*, sess. 14, chap. 4; Denzinger 898.

³ See RJMI book *Heresy and Heretics*: Heretics: Formal Heretics Are Guilty of the Mortal Sin of Heresy.

this Article proposes to be believed, let pastors use every diligence that the faithful, having known this mystery and guarded against the wiles of Satan, may persevere in the true faith.”

This passage only refers to Catholics who believe in heresy. It is correct regarding Catholics who deny deeper dogmas. But it is incorrect regarding Catholics who deny basic dogmas. For example, the instant a Catholic denies or doubts a basic dogma, he becomes an automatically excommunicated formal heretic. There is no need for obstinacy because basic dogmas must be known and believed by all Catholics in order for them to be saved, with no excuses for ignorance:

A Commentary on the New Code of Canon Law, by Rev. P. Chas. Augustine, O.S.B., D.D., 1920, Commentary on Canon 752: “Concerning the extent of this instruction, the Roman Ritual [Footnote 38] demands that neophytes ‘be carefully instructed in the Christian faith and holy manners.’ By Christian faith are to be understood the principal mysteries, i.e., those which must be believed *necessitate medii*, viz.: the Blessed Trinity and the Incarnation. Express belief in our Lord Jesus Christ is specifically mentioned in one decision of the Holy Office. [Footnote 39] The Apostles’ Creed, which is enjoined in an Instruction of the S. C. Prop. Fide, [Footnote 40] contains the principal mysteries of the faith.” (FN 38: Tit. II, c. 3, n. I; FN. 39: S. O., May 10, 1703, ad 2; Jan. 25, 1703 (Coll., nn. 256, 254); FN 40: Oct. 18, 1883 (Coll., n. 1606, n. XVII).)

Pope Benedict XIV, *Cum Religiosi*, June 26, 1754: “1. We could not rejoice, however, when it was subsequently reported to Us that in the course of religious instruction preparatory to Confession and Holy Communion, it was very often found that these people were ignorant of the mysteries of the faith, even those matters which must be known by necessity of means; consequently they were ineligible to partake of the Sacraments... 4. See to it that every minister performs carefully the measures laid down by the holy Council of Trent... that confessors should perform this part of their duty whenever anyone stands at their tribunal who does not know what he must by necessity of means know to be saved...”

Pope Benedict XIV, *Ubi Primum*, 1740: “3 ...[Clerics] should teach those things which the faithful must know for their salvation and explain the main principles of divine law and Catholic dogma. ...They should...teach the children the basics of that same faith.”

For example, a Catholic who doubts or denies the basic dogma that Jesus is God cannot be in the way of salvation and thus has to be an automatically excommunicated formal heretic no matter if he is obstinate or not. Seeming to contradict itself, the *Catechism of Trent* elsewhere rightly teaches that no one with the use of reason has an excuse of ignorance if he denies a basic dogma, such as the dogma of the Holy Spirit:

Catechism of Trent, Creed, Article 8, I Believe in the Holy Spirit, Importance of This Article: “Hitherto we have expounded, as far as the nature of the subject seemed to require, what pertains to the First and Second Persons of the Holy Trinity. It now remains to explain what the Creed contains with regard to the Third Person, the Holy Spirit. On this subject the pastor should omit nothing that study and industry can effect; for on this Article, no less than on those that preceded, ignorance or error would be unpardonable in a Christian. Hence, the Apostle did not permit some among the Ephesians to remain in ignorance with regard to the Person of the Holy Spirit. Having asked if they had received the Holy Spirit, and having received for answer that they did not so much as know that there was a Holy Spirit, he at once demanded: In whom, therefore, were you baptised? to signify that a distinct knowledge of this Article is most necessary to the faithful.”

This above teaching is correct. A Catholic becomes a formal heretic if he denies a basic dogma (in this case the basic dogma that the Holy Spirit is God and the Third Divine Person of the Most Holy Trinity), with no excuse for ignorance; and thus he does not have to be obstinate in his doubt or denial. Hence the *Catechism of Trent*’s correct teaching in Article 8 that

“ignorance or error [of a basic dogma] would be unpardonable in a Christian” contradicts its erroneous teaching in Article 9 that says a Catholic can only become a formal heretic by obstinately denying or doubting any dogma—“but he is a heretic who, having disregarded the authority of the Church, maintains impious opinions with pertinacity.” (See RJMI book *Heresy and Heretics*: Formal heretics are all baptized persons who do not know or believe in all of the basic dogmas.)

Seemingly heretical - The saints are in a state of violence

It is a basic dogma of the Catholic faith that at the General Judgment all souls will be reunited with their bodies for eternity. The *Catechism of Trent* teaches this truth but uses an erroneous example to try to prove this dogma by reason and in so doing teaches that the saints in Heaven are in a state of violence:

Catechism of Trent, The Creed, Article 9, The Resurrection of the Body, Arguments Drawn from Reason: “The reasons also adduced by ecclesiastical writers seem well calculated to establish this truth. In the first place, as the soul is immortal, and has, as part of man, a natural propensity to be united to the body, its perpetual separation from it must be considered as unnatural. But as that which is contrary to nature and in a state of violence cannot be permanent, it appears fitting that the soul should be reunited to the body, and consequently that the body should rise again. This argument our Saviour Himself employed, when in His disputation with the Sadducees He deduced the resurrection of the body from the immortality of the soul. (Mt. 22:23)”

This example implies that the saints who are in Heaven, previous to the General Judgment, are in a “state of violence” because they do not have their bodies. The truth is that they are in complete and total peace and joy. It then wrongly says that in Matthew 22:23 Jesus supports this line of reasoning. Let us see what Matthew 22:23 actually says and means:

“That day there came to him the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection; and asked him, saying: Master, Moses said: If a man die having no son, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up issue to his brother. Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first having married a wife, died; and not having issue, left his wife to his brother. In like manner the second and the third and so on, to the seventh. And last of all the woman died also. At the resurrection therefore whose wife of the seven shall she be? For they all had her. And Jesus answering, said to them: You err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they shall neither marry nor be married, but shall be as the angels of God in heaven.” (Mt. 22:23-30)

In this verse Jesus teaches there is a resurrection of the body, there are no marriages in Heaven, and the saints live like the angels. But Jesus does not teach that the souls in Heaven who do not yet have their bodies are in a “state of violence.” Hence the *Catechism of Trent* seems to deny the dogma that the saints in Heaven are in a state of peace and joy by teaching they are in a “state of violence” until they get their bodies back.

Possibly erroneous - The soul is created in the body some time after conception

The *Catechism of Trent* teaches a non-infallibly defined doctrine that may be erroneous. It teaches that a soul is not created in the body upon conception but some time afterward:

Catechism of Trent, Article 3, By the Holy Spirit: “According to the order of nature, the rational soul is united to the body only after a certain lapse of time.”

It is also an allowable opinion to believe that the soul is created within the body at the very instant of conception. Hence this teaching in the *Catechism of Trent* may be erroneous. (See RJMI article “When Is the Soul Created within the Body?”)

Possibly erroneous - Catechumens can be sanctified by baptism of desire

(See RJMI book *Baptism Controversy Revision: The Catechism of Trent is fallible and contains errors: Possibly erroneous – Catechumens can be sanctified by baptism of desire.*)

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