

# The Bluffer's Guide to the Christian Church

(A cheap and cheerful Ecclesiology)

## Lecture 4 – Is the Pope a Catholic? (The Catholic vision of the Church).

### The 'Great Commission':

*And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'* Matt 28:18-20

### The 'Body of Christ' metaphor:

*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.* 1Cor 12:12-14

### St Paul's collection for the 'saints' in Jerusalem:

*For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have. I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written, 'The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.'* 2Cor 8:12-15 (see also 1Cor 16:1-4, 2 Cor 9:1-15 and Acts 11:27-30)

### The 'Vine' metaphor:

(This has roots in the Old Testament, referring to Israel.)

*Let me sing for my beloved a love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dugged it and cleared it of stones and planted it with choice vines; he built a watch tower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. (Isaiah 5: 1-2)*

*And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it will be devoured; I will breakdown its walls, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and the briars and thorns shall grow up;... For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold a cry! (Isaiah 5:5-7)* The image recurs in Hosea, Psalm 80, Isaiah 60, Ezek 17.

This provides the context for Jesus' use of the metaphor in John 15:

*'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches...'* (John 15:1-5)

St Paul also uses the metaphor in Romans to show how Gentiles are incorporated into God's salvation promised to Israel:

*Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry in order to make my own people jealous, and thus save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead! If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; and if the root is holy, then the branches also are holy. But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were*

*grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree, do not vaunt yourselves over the branches. If you do vaunt yourselves, remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you. (Rom 11:13-18)*

## Other non-biblical sources

*Our apostles also knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife over the name of the bishop's office. So for this reason, since they had perfect foreknowledge, they appointed the aforesaid persons and subsequently gave them permanence, so that, if they should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed to their ministry. (Clement of Rome, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, XLIV.1,2 – circa AD96)*

*Avoid divisions, as the beginning of evil. Follow, all of you, the bishop, as Jesus Christ followed the Father; and follow the presbytery as the Apostles. Moreover, reverence the deacons as the commandment of God. Let no-one do anything pertaining to the Church apart from the bishop. Let that eucharist be considered valid which is under the bishop or him to whom he commits it. Wheresoever the bishop appears, there let the people be, even as wheresoever Christ Jesus is, there is the Catholic Church. It is not lawful apart from the bishop either to baptize, or to hold an agape. But whatsoever he approves, that also is well-pleasing to God, that everything which you do may be secure and valid. (Ignatius, *To the Smyrnaeans*, VIII – circa AD106)*

*"For in the Church," it is said, "God has set apostles, prophets, teachers," (1 Corinthians 12:28) and all the other means through which the Spirit works; of which all those are not partakers who do not join themselves to the Church, but defraud themselves of life through their perverse opinions and infamous behaviour. For where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church, and every kind of grace; but the Spirit is truth. Those, therefore, who do not partake of Him, are neither nourished into life from the mother's breasts, nor do they enjoy that most limpid fountain which issues from the body of Christ; but they dig for themselves broken cisterns out of earthly trenches, and drink putrid water out of the mire, fleeing from the faith of the Church lest they be convicted; and rejecting the Spirit, that they may not be instructed. (Irenaeus, *Against the heresies*, III.xxiv.1 – Late 2<sup>nd</sup> century)*

*True knowledge is the teaching of the apostles, the order of the Church as established from the earliest times throughout the world, and the distinctive stamp (character) of the body of Christ, passed down through the succession of bishops in charge of the church in every place, which has come down to our own time, safeguarded without any spurious writings by the most complete exposition, received without addition or subtraction, the reading of the Scriptures without falsification; and their consistent and careful exposition, avoiding danger and blasphemy; and the special gift of love ... (Irenaeus, *Against the heresies*, IV.xxxiii.8 – Late 2<sup>nd</sup> century)*

*The Lord speaks to Peter, 'I say to you,' he says, 'you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.' Upon him, being one, he builds his Church; and though he gives to all the apostles an equal power, and says, 'As my Father sent me, even so send I you; receive the Holy Spirit: those whose sins you remit they shall be remitted to him and those whose sins you retain, they shall be retained.' Yet in order to manifest unity, he has by his own authority so placed the source of the same unity, as to being from one. Certainly, the other apostles also were what Peter was, endued with an equal fellowship both of honour and power; but a commencement is made from unity, that the Church may be set before us as one... He who holds not this unity of the Church, does he think that he holds the faith? He who strives against and resists the Church, is he assured that he is in the Church? For the blessed apostle Paul teaches this same thing, and manifests the sacrament of unity, thus speaking: 'there is one body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one Faith, one baptism, one God...' (Cyprian, *On the unity of the Catholic Church* 4 – 6, mid-3rd century)*

*Can the power of baptism be greater and stronger than the confession which confesses Christ before men, and the suffering by which a man is baptized in his own blood? Yet not even this baptism can profit the heretic who, though he has confessed Christ, is put to death outside the Church... If not even the baptism of a public confession and of blood can profit a heretic for salvation, since there is no salvation outside the Church (salus extra ecclesiam non est), it certainly cannot profit him to be baptized in a lair and den of robbers with the infection of polluted water, where, so far from putting off his old sins, he still loads himself with fresh and graver ones. (Cyprian, Epistle 73.21 – to Jubaianus)*

*The church is thus called “catholic” because it is spread throughout the entire inhabited world (oikoumene), from one end to the other, and because it teaches its totality (katholokos) and without leaving anything out every doctrine which people need to know relating to things visible and invisible, whether in heaven and earth. It is also called “catholic” because it brings to obedience every sort of person – whether rulers or their subjects, the educated and the unlearned. It also makes available a universal (katholikos) remedy and cure to every kind of sin, whether in body or in soul, and contains within itself every kind of virtue ... Now the word “church” has different senses. It can refer to the crowd which filled the theatre at Ephesus (Acts 19:41) ... or to gatherings of heretics ... And because of this variation in the use of the word “church”, the article of faith “and in one holy catholic church” has been given to you, so that you can steer clear of [the heretics’] meetings and remain within the holy catholic church within which you have been born again. If you ever have cause to visit a strange town, do not ask simply ... “where is the church?” Instead, ask: “where is the catholic church?” This is the distinctive name for this, the holy church and mother of us all. She is the bride of our Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God. (Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lecture XVIII, 23, 26 – mid-4<sup>th</sup> century, translation in Alister McGrath, *The Christian Theology Reader*)*