

'Roman" Catholic

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Is it correct to call the Church in union with the Pope 'The Roman Church', or 'The Roman Catholic Church', and to call her members 'Roman Catholics'? We answer that if properly understood these terms are correct, but because they are ambiguous in English and have been consistently and deliberately misused to suggest false teaching about the nature of the Church, we dislike them. We call the Church 'The Catholic Church', and ourselves 'Catholics', quite simply. No more is necessary.

'CATHOLIC' THE NORMAL NAME

'Catholic' is the ancient name by which the Church of Christ has been known for nineteen centuries and more, and this name was given to her not for reasons of controversy, to prove something, but because it identifies her uniquely. It was first used by St Ignatius, bishop of Antioch in Syria, who was martyred about A.D. 110. On his way to Rome to his death he wrote a letter to each of seven 'churches' or dioceses, in all but one of which he urged the Christians to keep their unity within the Church, each diocese gathered about its bishop and all dioceses gathered in the Body of Christ, the Katholike. The Greek word is made up of two words kata and holon, which mean 'over the whole (world)'. In his letter to the church of Smyrna St Ignatius wrote: 'Where the bishop appears, there let the people be: as wherever is Jesus Christ, there is the Catholic Church' (Epistle to the Church of Smyrna, 8, 2).

The Church founded by Christ is here, for the first time, called 'the Catholic Church', a name clearly used to denote the Church throughout the world in union with the see or diocese of Rome. It was to stress the unity of the universal Church that St Ignatius invented the name. His letters throughout show he regarded the bishop in each diocese as like the nucleus of a living cell and all the dioceses the cells of a living organism, the Body of Christ.

This was the Church in which the diocese of Rome had pre-eminence. St Ignatius wrote this letter to Smyrna about the same time as his letter to Rome, namely, as he journeyed thither to his martyrdom. To Rome he applied a remarkable number of ornate epithets of praise and acknowledged her Special authority and pre-eminence, calling her, among other things, 'She who holds the pre-eminence in charity'. It is also very significant that although the main theme of his six other letters is an exhortation to unity, he makes no such exhortation to the diocese of Rome, thus implying that this was unnecessary as she was the centre of unity.

The name 'Catholic Church', then, means the Church united throughout the whole world and aptly describes the one Church of Christ, who commissioned His apostles to preach the gospel 'in the whole world' (Matt. 24:14; 26:13), and finally sent them out, saying: 'Going, therefore, teach ye all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world' (Matt. 28:19, 20).

The name Catholic was soon commonly used. In the Martyrdom of St Polycarp, written about A.D. 155, it occurs three times. It became the normal name for the Church in literature and popular usage, although it was not included liturgically in the Creed until the sixth century. Thus, for example, St Cyril of Jerusalem (A.D. 315-386) writes: 'if you are staying in a city enquire not simply where the Lord's house is - for the sects of the profane also try to name their own dens houses of the Lord nor merely where is the Church - but where is the Catholic Church? For this name belongs alone to this holy Church and mother of us all' (Catech. 18:25).

St Augustine likewise says it uniquely denotes the one Church of Christ to which he belonged, namely, that in union with Rome. He says Catholicity is an essential mark of the Church: 'I am kept in the Church by the very name Catholic which, in the midst of so many heresies, this Church has owned, not without cause - even though all the heretics would like to be called Catholics. Yet when a stranger asks, "Where is held the meeting of the Catholic Church?" no heretic dare point out his own basilica or house' (Contra Epistle. Manichaei Fundam, V, 6).

For them the name 'Catholic' was by itself sufficient to denote the one true Church of Christ.

Today, as in St Augustine's day, there are many sects which claim the name Catholic and, to the superficial observer, justifiably so, for they all teach some Catholic doctrines and have some Catholic practices. In the Church of England in particular there is a vigorous minority party called the Anglo-Catholic party, which is consistently struggling to recover the ancient Catholic practices and beliefs whilst remaining out of communion with the Pope and to a large extent disobedient to authority in the Church of England. But strictly speaking only one Church has the right to the title Catholic, and that is the Church in union with the See of Rome. To this Church was it given by St Ignatius and the writers and teachers of the early centuries after him, and this Church alone is in fact Catholic or universal, for it alone remains one in doctrine, authority, and worship, and yet, as the Catechism says, 'subsists in all ages, teaches all nations, and is the one ark of salvation for all'.

'ROMAN CATHOLIC' CORRECT

However, as the Church has other unique characteristics, so she has other names which may be applied to her alone and which indicate the marks by which she may be identified. Another ancient title of hers is Apostolic, that is to say, she traces her doctrine, worship, and authority of popes and bishops back to Peter and the Apostles. She is called Holy because, as the catechism says, 'she teaches a holy doctrine, offers to all the means of holiness, and is distinguished by the eminent holiness of so many thousands of her children'. These are the essential marks of the Church of Christ, unity in catholicity, holiness, and apostolicity.

'Roman' is another title of which she is proud. It is not essential that she should be Roman. She was not such before St Peter went to Rome and became its bishop. But since he was martyred and buried there and all his successors have clung to that city and have been its bishops, even during the short period of exile in Avignon, France, the title 'Roman' is a most fitting one for her to bear and is an indication that she traces her doctrine and authority back to St Peter and Jesus Christ who appointed him.

St Peter was in Rome

There was a time when the adversaries of the Church attempted to disprove that St Peter was in Rome. There is hardly a reputable historian who now denies that he was martyred and buried there. The evidence for it is overwhelming. He himself says he wrote his first letter from 'Babylon' (1

Peter, 5:13), the common early-Christian name for Rome, as the Apocalypse of St John shows. Pope St Clement, probably a contemporary of St Peter, in his famous letter to the Corinthians, written about A.D. 96, testifies that St Peter was martyred and buried in Rome, as do St Ignatius of Antioch (A.D. 106), Bishop Dionysius of Corinth (A.D. 190), St Irenaeus (A.D. 200), and Tertullian (A.D. 217), to name only the most important. The scores of paintings of St Peter and inscriptions in his honour in the catacombs show that his presence has always been felt in that city. The excavations carried out under the basilica of St Peter between 1940 and 1949 confirm the testimony of the early Fathers and of archaeology. The 'trophy', or grave-monument, discovered in the first-century cemetery precisely under the high altar of the basilica, the scratchings made by second-century Christians on the rock and the very fact that the Emperor Constantine built his basilica at great inconvenience on the side of the Vatican hill, indicate that St Peter's tomb is there.

'Roman' an Official Title

The Church is understandably proud of her title 'Roman', for it points to the fact that she was founded on the rock of St Peter (Matt. 16:18). It soon became an official title of the Church, but unlike 'Catholic' was always joined to one or more of the other titles, Holy, Apostolic, Catholic. When not joined to one of these it refers to the diocese or 'church' or the city of Rome. The Pope's diocese is 'the Church of Rome', and the cardinals are 'cardinals of the holy Roman Church'.

The Decretal of Pope St Gelasius (492-496) refers to 'The Catholic and Apostolic Roman Church' and again to 'The Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church' (Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, 164, 166). In ancient usage Catholic Church and Roman Church were synonymous, although the latter was only rarely used. St Ambrose, for example, tells how his brother Satyrus asked a bishop 'whether he was in communion with the Catholic bishops, that is, with the Roman Church?' (*De Excessu Fratris*, I, 47). For St Ambrose's brother, to be in communion with the Catholic bishops of the world and with the Roman Church were the same thing.

St Gregory of Tours says, 'They call men of our religion Romans'. The profession of faith made by converted Waldensian heretics in the twelfth century contained the words, 'We believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths one Church - not that of the heretics, but the holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church'.

The Council of Trent made 'Roman' part of the official title of the Church, and the Council of the Vatican of 1870 definitively, after a dispute to be discussed later, adopted as the name of the Church the formula. 'The Holy Catholic Apostolic Roman Church.'

'ROMAN CATHOLIC' MISUSED

All Catholics, could happily use the title Roman before the sixteenth century because, in the West at least, there could be no ambiguity. There was only one Catholic Church accepted as divine by all, and that was the one with its chief bishop in Rome. With the coming of Protestantism and the break-up of Christendom, when for the first time there appeared men claiming to be Catholics and remaining separated from the Church in union with Rome, an ambiguity arose due to the misuse of the word 'Roman' as applied to 'Catholic'.

Early Protestant Misuse

Although the sixteenth century heretics called themselves Protestants, they did not all reject the name Catholic. Luther cut the word out of the Creed. Not so in England. Many Protestant controversialists here claimed for themselves exclusively the name Catholic and branded the

Church in union with Rome with the opprobrious names of Roman, Romish, or Papist to indicate it was an abominable sect cut off from the true Church. They knew nothing of the Branch Theory in those days.

For example, the evangelical Archdeacon Philpot, put to death for heresy in the reign of Mary Tudor, complained often in his writings of the papists calling themselves Catholics. At his trial he said to his interrogator: 'I am, master doctor, of the unfeigned Catholic Church and will live and die therein: and if you can prove your Church to be the true Catholic Church, I will be one of the same' (Works; Parker Society, p. 132).

John Foxe, author of the famous Book of Martyrs, distinguished repeatedly between 'the pope's Catholic religion' and 'Catholics of the true religion' (Acts and Monuments).

When Fr. Persons, S.J., under the pseudonym of Howlet, published in 1580 'A Brief Discourse containing certain reasons why Catholics refuse to go to church', Percival Wyburn replied objecting to Person's use of the name Catholic, himself using 'Roman', 'Popish', and 'Romish Catholics'.

The Puritan Robert Cowley published in 1588 the treatise 'A Deliberate answer...' which attempted to prove 'that the papists that do now call themselves Catholics are indeed anti-Christian schismatics and that the religious Protestants are indeed the right Catholics'. He writes of those 'who wander with the Roman Catholics in the uncertain by-paths of popish devices'.

The Old Protestants were at least logical; they knew there could only be one Church, that they were different from the Church in union with Rome, and therefore, if they were in the true Church, the Roman Catholics were outside it, and indeed by applying to themselves the title 'Roman' were declaring themselves to be heretics.

The famous bishop Andrewes, in his *Tortura Torti* of 1609, taunted Cardinal Bellarmine for his use of the term *Ecclesia Romana Catholica* for what he claimed to be the one true Church: 'Why have you such a bad conscience that you dare not use the name "Catholic" alone? What is the object of adding "Roman"? What is the use of it if there is no other Catholic Church except the Roman? The only purpose which such an adjunct can serve is to distinguish your Catholic Church from another Catholic Church which is not Roman'. (Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology, p. 368).

His misuse of the term is very different from that of the modern Anglo-Catholics.

Anglo-Catholic Misuse

It was chiefly due to the influence of John Henry Newman and his disciples, in what was called the 'Oxford Movement', that a party arose in the Church of England which studied the writings and practices of the early Church in an endeavour to recapture some of the Catholic doctrines and forms of worship which had been lost at the Reformation. Faced with the difficulty of how they could call themselves Catholic and part of the great Church of past and present when obviously separated from the bulk of Christians in both the Western and Eastern Churches, Anglican divines evolved what is called the Branch Theory. This maintains that the different provinces, or groups of provinces, calling themselves Catholic and Christian are part of the One Church of Christ, as the branches of the tree, although distinct from each other, are part of the whole and live its one life. These different sections are one since (it is said) they each hold the Faith of the Apostles and the first Christians and derive spiritual authority through a continuous succession of bishops dating back to the Apostles. The three great branches, although there are other smaller ones, are said to be Anglo-Catholic, the Greek Catholic, and the Roman Catholic Churches.

But this theory cannot hold water. In the first place these Churches obviously do not all hold the full teaching of Christ and the Apostles because they contradict each other in fundamental teachings, and contradictions cannot at once be true. Nor do all their bishops hold their authority through a succession of bishops dating back to the Apostles, for it is a fact of history that a break in the succession did take place as far as the Protestant Churches were concerned. It is clear that they are all divided in matters of authority. The many Protestant Churches have no central authority, and in spite of vigorous efforts show no sign of ever acquiring one. It is equally clear that all have different acts of worship and have fundamentally different beliefs about the Eucharist. But the Church of Christ must remain always united in doctrine, worship, and authority, for Christ gave it one body of doctrines which He guaranteed she would always preserve, established one central authority in the person of Peter and his successors, and gave it one form of worship, the Eucharistic Sacrifice, and one system of sacraments. He prayed that it would always be one, with a visible unity which was to be a sign to the world that it was His Church (John 17:20, 21). The Church may indeed be compared to a tree with many branches. Christ Himself compared it to the vine. But the different Churches cannot be compared to the branches of a tree because they are divided completely in organization, worship, and sacramental life.

The Branch Theory is untenable. In fact, it suggests that the Church of Christ is a monster. John Henry Newman wrote to Henry Wilberforce on 25 June 1846 concerning this theory: 'It is to me utterly marvellous how a person of your clear intellect can seduce himself into the notion that a portion of Christendom, which has lain disowned on all hands, by East as well as West, for three hundred years, and is a part of no existing communion whatever, but a whole in itself, is nevertheless a portion of some other existing visible body, nay, of two other existing visible bodies, Greek and Latin. The Siamese twins are nothing to this portent...' (Ward's Life, Volume I, 6. 129).

A Different Meaning

The term Roman Catholic began to be used with a different meaning from that of the early Protestants as this Branch Theory became generally accepted. It no longer meant an heretical sect cut off from the "true Protestant Catholic Church", but that particular branch of the Catholic Church which was in union with the See of Rome. The early Protestants objected to 'Romans' using the name Catholic because they considered them not to be Catholics at all. The Anglo-Catholic divines began to object because, although they recognized the 'Romans' as being in the Church, they resented the suggestion that they had a unique claim to the unqualified word 'Catholic'.

Thus the celebrated Anglican divine Dr R. F. Littledale (1833-1890), a contemporary of Newman and the Oxford converts, writes: 'Is the Church of Rome Catholic? By her own admission she is not Catholic simply. Her official title, as fixed by herself at Trent and retained, in spite of protests, by the Vatican Council [of 1870], is Roman Catholic. Now, as Roman is a local adjective, while Catholic is a delocalised one, the former limits and restricts the meaning of the latter, when they are conjoined, so as to make it refer in strictness to a narrow Roman Patriarchate alone'. (Plain Reasons, p. 192).

CATHOLIC REACTION

From the sixteenth century till now, English Catholics have reacted against these misuses of the term Roman Catholic. The English martyrs and confessors, in their writings and statements at trials and on the gallows, carefully refrained from using the adjective Roman except when it was necessary, to avoid ambiguity. Fr Robert Southwell in his 'Humble Supplication to Her Majesty' of

1591 always calls his fellow-sufferers 'Catholics', as does Fr Persons in his 'Brief Discourse...' of 1603 and Blessed (now Saint) Edmund Campion in all his writings. The Catholic 'Supplication' of 1603 and the Petition presented to James I in 1604 speak of the 'Catholic Church' and 'Catholic,' simply, and in two instances make the careful inversion, Catholic Roman Church.

Strangely enough, it was an act of conciliation that the term Roman Catholic was first adopted in official usage instead of such terms of abuse as papist, popish, Romish. During the Spanish marriage negotiations of 1618-1624 the Government, to avoid offending a Catholic monarch, found the more conciliatory title of Roman Catholic. Gradually this was adopted in all official documents, although in 1791, when the Government proposed a Bill for the relief of Catholics, it called them 'Protesting Catholic Dissenters', at which the Vicars apostolic lodged a strong complaint and the title Roman Catholic was substituted in the second draft.

About this time, either to be conciliatory or because now more cowed, Catholics began to be less intransigent in rejecting the name forced on them. In the United States they were content to be known as Roman Catholics, and even the Irish bishops of the province of Leinster, in resolutions drawn up approving of the Emancipation Bill then before Parliament, used this title. The wish to conciliate hostile opinion grew as Catholic Emancipation became the burning issue and Catholics called themselves Roman Catholics more and more.

A strong reaction came in the early and middle nineteenth century, and this in opposition to the Anglo-Catholic party in the Church of England which began to use 'Roman Catholic' with a new meaning, to denote what they regarded as the Roman branch of the Catholic Church.

The Oxford converts knew well the danger of such misrepresentation and strenuously resisted the use of the term. But now the Government and all the organs of opinion, no doubt under the guidance of Anglican bishops and theologians, were trying to force the unwanted title on the Catholic Church. Nor were the converts alone in their reaction. It was Bishop Ullathorne who led the movement at the Vatican Council to have the proposed title of the Church changed lest it should seem to favour the Anglican heresy.

At the Vatican Council

The dispute over the Church's correct title at the Vatican Council (1869 and 1870) shows clearly the reason for the English Catholics' rejection of the title 'Roman Catholic'.

The Constitution concerning the Catholic Faith when first submitted to the bishops of the Council read, 'The Holy Roman Catholic Church believes...' Bishop Ullathorne of Birmingham, representing the English bishops, supported by Bishop Clifford of Clifton, protested against this title because he knew what heretical meaning would be read into it by Anglicans. He suggested that the order of words should be reversed, Roman being put after Catholic, to show that Roman was not a limiting word. 'Protestants', he said, 'wish to apply to themselves the name Catholic which comes in the Apostle's Creed, and dispute with us the exclusive right to it. They consider that the Catholic Church is divided into three parts... the Roman Catholic Communion, the Anglo-Catholic Communion, and the Greek Catholic Communion. Government officials endeavour with more and more perseverance to accustom people's minds to this idea. In new laws, in parliamentary speeches and public addresses, in writings, and in private conversation they give to us and to our Church the name Roman Catholic. They cannot bear that we should call ourselves simply Catholics, and that we should consider ourselves not a part of the Church but the whole. In our colonies we have been in conflict with the Government each time we have called ourselves Catholics and in England they

demand with insistence that we should call ourselves Roman Catholic bishops in order that the name Catholic bishops may also be used by the Anglican bishops... If now the Vatican Council calls the Church not merely Catholic and Roman but Roman Catholic, the High Church party will draw from it an argument in favour of their theory of the three branches, and the Government will spread it abroad that, conquered at last by the truth, we at last recognize that our Church is only a part of the true Church' (*Histoire du Concile du Vatican*, by Granderaath, Volume II, p. 70).

The Title Changed

Monsignor Gasser of Brixen, the Relator of the theological commission, opposed the amendment. He maintained that the teaching of the Council on the point was clear. If the term were to have the meaning the Anglicans tried to attach to it, it would have to be 'Romano-Catholic'. The Roman Church is Catholic and the Catholic Church is Roman. There was not even need to put a comma after the word Roman (as some had suggested) to show it governed 'Church' and not 'Catholic'. No one puts a comma between his Christian and his surname.

Nevertheless thirty-five bishops objected to the title and in the final draft, instead of 'The Holy Roman Catholic Church', the formula selected from many proposed was, 'The Holy Catholic Apostolic Roman Church'. The revising committee said that in making this change it was influenced by the fact that in any English translation it would be difficult to indicate the difference which existed between the term 'Ecclesia Romano-Catholica', which all Catholics would repudiate, and 'Ecclesia Romana Catholica', which, properly understood, is correct.

Government Pressure

The pressure imposed on English Catholics to make them adopt the title Roman Catholic has been persistent and directed with a theological intent inspired beyond doubt by the established Church. In 1897, Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee year, and in 1901, on the accession of Edward VII, the Catholic bishops asked leave to present loyal addresses. They were told on each occasion that their addresses would only be accepted if they changed the submitted texts and entitled themselves 'The Roman Catholic Archbishops and Bishops in England'. They reluctantly agreed. Cardinal Vaughan took occasion at the Newcastle conference of the Catholic Truth Society in September 1901 to express his regret at this and explain the sense in which the hierarchy accepted the title.

The intention of the Establishment is very clearly stated in the following instruction, issued by the Government of India in 1913: 'It has recently been brought to the notice of the Government of India that the term "Catholic" has been used in an official communication as synonymous with "Roman Catholic". As the claim of the Church of Rome to exclusive Catholicity and to the exclusive right to be styled "The Catholic Church" is disputed on historical and other grounds by other Churches, the Governor General in Council desires that such loose phraseology may be carefully avoided in the future and that in all official communications the Roman Communion and its authorities may be addressed and described as "Roman Catholic".' (*Bombay Examiner*, 22 February, 1913).

That is why the Government to this day insists that in all the official language of the Law and the Army, and in all departments of parliamentary and local government, the term 'Roman Catholic' should always be used, even though there could be no ambiguity in the simple term 'Catholic', since only the Church in union with the Holy See applies it unqualified to herself. And that is why the editors of the newspapers closely associated with the establishment insist on the adjective 'Roman' when speaking of the Catholic Church, even going to the length of inserting it in the reported speeches of prominent Catholics who had carefully avoided using it.

OUR DISLIKE OF 'ROMAN CATHOLIC'

English-speaking Catholics dislike the term 'Roman Catholic' because as used by our non-Catholic friends it is bad grammar and bad theology.

The adjective 'Roman' is part of the official title of the Catholic Church as formulated by the Councils of Trent and the Vatican, but it is an adjective qualifying the noun 'Church', as is also the adjective 'Catholic'. In the Latin language and, in strict usage, in English also, an adjective can only qualify a noun. In the expression 'Roman Catholic Church' as used by Anglicans, 'Roman' is usually taken as an adjective qualifying 'Catholic'. That is loose grammar and bad theology. There are not three churches, a Romano-Catholic, an Anglo-Catholic, and a Graeco-Catholic. There is one Church, the Church Catholic Apostolic and Roman. As Cardinal Vaughan said in 1901: 'The word "Roman" bears the same relation to "Catholic" that the centre bears to the sphere or circle. All the radii of a circle rest in their common centre. The whole circumference is thus brought into unity with its centre. This is to be Catholic. "Roman" as a prefix to "Catholic" is therefore declaratory that the central point of Catholicity is Roman, the Roman Sec of Peter' (The Tablet, 14 September, 1901).

The term 'Roman Catholic Church' is correct, but it must be understood that both adjectives govern the one noun and both notes belong uniquely to the one Church of Christ. That is the only sense which the words can have in their Latin form and in their English equivalent, according to the strict rules of grammar. It is because they are misunderstood in common usage and are deliberately misused for controversial reasons by English-speaking Protestants, and Anglo-Catholics in particular, that English-speaking Catholics reject them with an insistence not always fully understood by their fellow-Catholics in countries where men think more logically about theological matters.

Dr Lingard's Summary

Dr Lingard, in his 'Catechetical Instructions on the Doctrines and Worship of the Catholic Church', sums up the matter simply and precisely: 'What is the meaning of the word "Roman Catholic?" - It means a Catholic in communion with the See of Rome. Do you accept this name? We glory in our communion with the See of Rome, but we call ourselves English Catholics. 'Why not Roman Catholics? -- Because that name implies what we cannot admit, that a man be a Catholic without being in communion with the centre of Catholic unity, the See of Rome'.

To this he added a note: 'Roman Catholics: There is nothing offensive in this appellation, as in other names with which we are frequently honoured. If, then, we refuse to accept it, the reason is because it imports what is irreconcilable with our principles, that churches which have separated from the ancient Catholic Church may still have a right to the title Catholic'.

The learned Jesuit, Father Thurston, is stronger in his rejection of the name. He writes: 'We should uniformly protest against the use of the name "Roman Catholic" in this country, and strive by every means in our power to claim that which we have not assumed with any controversial purpose, but which has been our rightful heritage from the beginning' (The Month, September 1911).

'Christian is my name, Catholic my surname'

In short, then, the Church has four marks by which we may know her, and each mark gives her a unique name of honour. She is the One Holy Catholic Apostolic Church. These marks were essential to her from the beginning. Since Christ's first vicar on earth was bishop of Rome, was

martyred and buried there, all his successors have been bishops of that See and will be to the end of time, she has another glorious title of Roman, which she alone may bear. She is, in the formula of the Vatican Council, Sancta Catholica Apostolica Romana Ecclesia.

But there is one of these titles which alone has distinguished her from all other religions, both in popular speech and the writings of the learned, for nineteen centuries and more. She is Catholic. That name is enough to identify the one Church to whose founder-members Christ said, "Going, therefore, teach ye all nations" (Matt. 28:19).

Therefore Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922) in his encyclical letter *Ad Beatissimi* wrote: 'It is quite sufficient for each one to proclaim, "Christian is my name and Catholic my Surname".'
