

## Are Catholics Christians?

By Paul-Joseph Stines

Through the Catholic Church, God has offered salvation to the world for the past 2,000 years. Nearly everyone is aware of the Catholic Church, but very few outside the Catholic Church know what Catholics believe. Many people are surprised when they learn of the many commonalities between Catholicism and other religions. While the Catholic Church believes that it alone possesses the fullness of truth, all human expressions of religious devotion embrace truth in varying degrees. First and foremost among these is that there is a spiritual element to reality that human beings can discover and in which they can participate.

The three “Great Religions” of the Western world are Judaism, Christianity and Islam. All three believe that there is one God to whom all human beings owe their existence. All three believe that God is a Creator; that He created the Universe and all that is contained within it. These three Great Religions believe that God has chosen to reveal Himself to mankind through spokesmen known as prophets. All three believe that God wants us to know what to expect of Him and what He expects of us in return.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam believe in many of the same prophets including Noah, Abraham and Moses. Each of the three Great Religions traces its spiritual heritage back to the Patriarch, Abraham. Therefore, they are known as the Abrahamic religions. All three agree that Abraham enjoyed a special relationship with God called a covenant. Muslims trace their heritage through Abraham’s first-born son, Ishmael. Both Judaism and Christianity believe that God’s covenant was extended to Isaac, Abraham’s only son to be born of his wife Sarah.

Both Judaism and Christianity accept the authority of the Ten Commandments given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai, and in so doing, agree on much of the same moral code. Judaism and Christianity believe in many of the same Sacred Scriptures and that they are the inspired Word of God revealed to the prophets. The Jewish Scriptures, called the *Tanakh*, comprise the Christian *Old Testament*. Christianity is unique in its acceptance of the *New Testament* as inspired Scripture, including the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the apostolic epistles or letters from the apostles, and the Book of the Apocalypse or Revelation. The twenty-seven books of the New Testament as we have it today were pronounced to be “canonical” or authoritative by the Synod of Rome under Pope Damasus I in the year 382 A.D. and is contained in all Christian Bibles.

All Christian bodies, including the Catholic Church, believe that the Bible is the inerrant and inspired Word of God; and while some may accept books others do not, all accept the same New Testament. All Christian bodies believe in the Trinity, the central doctrine of Christianity, a belief in one God in Three Divine Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the eternally begotten Son of the Father. Christians, including Catholics believe that the eternal Son of God was incarnated as a human being 2,000 years ago as Jesus of Nazareth. This is the pivotal event in human history; God became man and dwelled among us.

All Christians share a belief that Jesus was born of a virgin in Bethlehem. The life of Jesus was the most remarkable in history. Christians, including Catholics, believe He went about teaching,

healing the sick and working miracles. Then all Christians believe that Jesus was arrested, tried by the Roman Procurator, Pontius Pilate, and sentenced to death by crucifixion. Christians believe that Jesus then rose from the dead and ascended into heaven where He is seated at the right hand of God. The belief that Jesus will return has been the hope of Christians since the First Century. Upon His return, Jesus will judge the living and dead and reign forever as king.

All Christian bodies believe that Jesus' death was an atonement for our sins and through His death we can find reconciliation with God and the forgiveness of our sins. Like most Christians, Catholics believe in receiving baptism using the Trinitarian formula, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Catholics, like most Christian groups, worship on Sunday, as did Christians in the First Century. We believe we are called to spread Christ's message of the gospel, the Good News, throughout the world.

Catholics are Christians. In fact, Roman Catholics make up the largest Christian group in the world. Catholics share more in common with other Christian groups than differences. However, there are differences. We invite you to come learn about us, we welcome your questions.