



Exploring Catholicism

Discussing
'Nothing in my hand
I bring', Ray Galea

June 2008, Freshchurch

Nothing in My Hand I Bring

The Roman Catholic Church is the world's largest Christian church, representing one-sixth of the world's population. In Australia it is the largest Christian denomination representing around 25% of the nation's population. In July of this year there will be the 'World Youth Day' in Sydney which will involve the Pope as well as half a million visitors who will require accommodation. Organisers expect this to be a bigger logistical exercise than the 2000 Olympics.

Plainly Catholicism is big! It has and continues to shape people's lives. In the area of family, social justice, health care, politics, and culture, Catholicism is a major influence around the globe.

But what actually do Catholics believe? What makes them different from protestants (eg. Presbyterian, Anglican, Baptist, etc)? Do they all believe the same things? And do any differences even really matter anyway?

Ray Galea, Anglican minister in Sydney has recently released a book, 'Nothing in my hand I bring' on this very topic. Rather than wanting to stir up old battles over religion, Ray Galea presents a personal and heart-felt explanation of his exploration of Catholicism from his own background of growing up in the Maltese-Catholic church. It's a book that's sure to challenge us.

During June with growth groups we are doing something different from the usual pattern. Rather than the usual way of working our way through a book of the bible that matches what happens on Sunday, we're encouraging everyone to read through this book and use it as a basis for discussion.

As we go through this book in growth group, we will in a sense be re-tracing Ray Galea's own personal investigation, examining Catholic teaching and seeing what the bible has to say. But please note: it's very important to be mindful of why we are doing this—our aim is to not simply fulfil our own curiosity about what others believe, nor do we want to be judgemental towards others. We are doing these studies so that we can work together towards our goal of growing followers of Jesus—followers of Jesus who are **clear-thinking** about God's Word and also **compassionate** towards others.

Ray Galea has taken the title of his book from the 1763 Christian Hymn, 'Rock of Ages'. The hymn goes,

'Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to the cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless look to Thee for grace....

It's an old hymn with some old-fashioned words, but as we read this book and discuss it together, we will be encouraged to ask the questions —what do these words means for us? And is there truth there that should shape our church?

Enjoy 'Nothing in my hand I bring'.



Study 1: Catholicism & the Mass

Personal Preparation

1. Read Chapters 1-3 of 'Nothing in my hand I bring'.
2. Read Hebrews 7-10.

Group Discussion Questions

Is there anyone in the group who grew up as a Catholic? Please share with the group some of your experiences of what that was like? What were some positives &/or negatives about your upbringing in the Catholic church?

In that upbringing were there things that you were aware of that made you distinctly different from those who were not Catholic?

Others in the group might like to share what are some things that come to mind when they think about Catholicism. If you have been to a Catholic mass, share with the group what that was like?

1. In Chapter 2, 'Which Catholicism', Ray Galea makes the point that before exploring Catholic beliefs, we need to ask the question, 'Which Catholicism are we talking about'. What does he mean?
2. The chapter seems to suggest that there can be a difference between 'official and authoritative teaching of the Roman Catholic Church' and what individual Catholics believe. How might this work out in practice?

It's important to realise, that as his book states, Ray Galea is offering a critique of official Roman Catholic Church doctrine, recognising that individuals may have different beliefs.

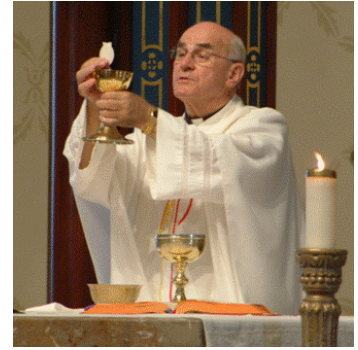
3. From your reading of chapter 3 'Christ and the Mass', what are the special duties that the Roman Catholic priest performs? Did any of this surprise you?

4. How important is the priest in the Roman Catholic faith? Why?

5. Read Hebrews 7:26-28; Hebrews 9:25-26; Hebrews 10:12-14

After reading each passage, jot down what it has to say about:

- the significance of what Jesus did on the cross;
- the need for more priests and sacrifices.



6. What makes Rev. Garnet W. Swann! Different from a priest?!

7. According to 1 Peter 2:9-10, who are priests today and what priestly role is there still left to perform?

8. Is it even important that we worry about whether we should have a special class of priests today? What do you think is at stake?

9. The book outlines the Roman Catholic doctrine of 'transubstantiation'. It is a bit complicated, but how would you summarise what it means? And how is it different to what is done with 'the Lord's Supper' at freshchurch?

10. The book of Hebrews is a warning to new Christians to not be fooled into thinking they need to take on a Jewish approach (priests, sacrifices, temple) to their relationship with God. Do you think this message is still relevant for us today? Why?

11. How has the study given encouragement to you or challenged you with what Jesus has done did on the cross?