



Study 2: Catholicism & the Church

Personal Preparation

1. Read Chapter 4 of 'Nothing in my hand I bring'.

Group Discussion Questions

What are some different ways the bible is viewed? eg. for an atheist, he/she would perhaps consider the bible to be a book of fairytales. So how else do people view the bible?

1. On page 50 of 'Nothing in my hand', Ray Galea mentions 'general revelation'. What do you think this concept called 'general revelation' means? Why is this form of revelation not enough?
2. What is unique about the Roman Catholic view of how we receive 'special revelation'?
3. On page 51 Ray Galea presents official Roman Catholic teaching. It states: "The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church along". Try to see it from the Roman Catholic point of view - what might be helpful by insisting that the Pope and his bishops are the ones with sole authority to interpret what the bible says and what is infallible (absolute God-given) teaching?
4. Ray Galea makes the point, page 51 – 'If there are two sources of special revelation in Catholicism, there remains only one authority: the Church of Rome itself'. What does he mean?

When you examine issues of infallible teaching of the Roman Catholic church, you encounter such terms as 'ex-cathedra', 'dogma' and 'doctrine'. These terms are in the footnotes of the book, Here is an explanation from Father John Flader, The Catholic Weekly, 2007:

Ex-cathedra literally "from the chair" is a theological term which signifies authoritative teaching and is more particularly applied to the definitions given by the Roman pontiff...When the Pope teaches in this way, his teaching is considered infallible. That is to say, it cannot be in error, since it is made with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. But not all ex cathedra statements involve the declaration of a dogma, which is a more formal declaration of a truth to be held by all. In the last century and a half, there have been only two new dogmas defined by Popes: the Immaculate Conception of Mary, defined by Pope Pius IX in 1854, and the Assumption of Mary into heaven, defined by Pope Pius XII in 1950.

It is confusing with all the nuanced differences between theological terms that are used within the Roman Catholic church. But just to understand – the Pope can speak with all the authority of the bible itself, that is, can speak infallibly. Two examples are given above in the explanation given by Father John Flader. And these 'ex-cathedra' statements are now taken as official authoritative teaching of the church.

5. **Read Ephesians 5:23-24.** What is the relationship between Jesus and the church?

6. In practice, how do you think the church is to submit to Christ?

7. On page 52-53, what is Ray Galea's point about how the Roman Catholic church has become unreformable? What is wrong with that?

8. **Read 2 Timothy 3:15-17.** What does this passage say about the sufficiency and clarity of Scripture?

9. What place should the bible have in our lives?

10. What can be the strengths but also the danger of traditions?



In making his point about the way 'traditions' can actually draw people away from obedience to God's word, Ray Galea points to the example of the tradition of 'indulgences' which ignited the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century. Galea points out that indulgences remain in force to this day. For instance, in December 5 2007, Pope Benedict XVI announced that a 'plenary indulgence' is available to Catholics who travel to French town of Lourdes during 2008 for the 150th anniversary of when Mary appeared to a girl (St Bernadette Soubirous) in that town. The indulgence is available to those who make pilgrimage and visit the Massabielle grotto throughout the year. A plenary indulgence was also available between February 2 – February 11 2008 if a person venerated an image of 'Our Lady of Lourdes' in an any chapel or church. This indulgence will reduce the time spent being washed of sin after death.

the Massabielle grotto

11. At freshchurch it is the minister who generally teaches on a Sunday and it is he who even writes the bible study for growth groups to look at. In this case, are we insisting that there are those within the church who have authority? Why/Why not?

12. What do we need to do to ensure that it is God's Word to us, the bible, that is our authority?

Note: if you have not discovered it yet, there are two appendices at the end of this booklet. Appendix 1 is a glossary of some of the terms you will encounter while reading 'Nothing in my hand I bring'. Appendix 2 is a quick guide to the Reformation figure, Martin Luther.