

Pope Benedict's Denunciation of True Churches Exposes His Own System

By Richard Bennett and Michael de Semlyen

On July 10, 2007, Pope Benedict XVI released a new decree.¹ In it the Pope has restated his conviction that the Roman Catholic Church is the one Church founded by Jesus Christ and that other churches are either defective or not true Churches at all. What is new in this document is the authoritative statement that “Christian Communities **born out of the Reformation of the sixteenth century**” cannot be “called ‘Churches’ in the proper sense.”²

Prior to this, in September 2000, when Benedict was Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Guardian of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith³, he had stunned the ecumenical movement by launching an assault on all other Churches with the Vatican decree, “Dominus Iesus,” prepared by his office. As an arch-conservative, true to the pre-Vatican II doctrinal rigidity that viewed Bible Christians as heretics rather than “separated brethren,” Pope Benedict has long sought to correct what he describes as erroneous interpretations of Vatican Council II’s ecumenical intent.

Thus the 2007 document is formulated as five questions and answers to set the record straight on the real intentions of the Second Vatican Council. Benedict’s mission is to rescue its teaching and conclusions from Catholics who in their association with Christians are drifting away from the old hard-line Catholic dogma. In the context of this catechetical decree, the last of the five questions is of specific importance:

“Why do the texts of the Council and those of the Magisterium since the Council not use the title of ‘Church’ with regard to those Christian Communities born out of the Reformation of the sixteenth century?”

The response, which closes the decree, states,

“According to Catholic doctrine, these Communities do not enjoy apostolic succession in the sacrament of Orders, and are, therefore, deprived of a constitutive element of the Church. These ecclesial Communities which, specifically because of the absence of the sacramental priesthood, have not preserved the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic Mystery cannot, according to Catholic doctrine, be called ‘Churches’ in the proper sense.”

Biblical Truth Lays Bare the Papal Decree

In declaring the universal primacy of the Church of Rome and denying the faith of the Reformation, the Pope denounced all those Churches and Christians whose lives are committed to the Lord Jesus Christ and to His everlasting Gospel.⁴ Benedict is unable to see that these whom he

¹ “Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine on the Church.” www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20070629_responsa-quaestiones_en.html 8/10/2007

² Emphasis not in original.

³ Formerly known as the Office of the Inquisition, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is still housed in the same building in Rome as its predecessor had been during more than six terrible centuries of torture and death during which the Office made sure the inquisitorial papal decrees were carried out.

⁴ Matthew 16:16

is denouncing are the true Church founded upon the Rock, who is Christ Jesus Himself “*the Son of the living God.*” They are His people, His bride, the true Church; believers who adhere to God only and His Written Word; who are saved before the all-Holy God by grace alone through faith alone, and in Christ alone and all glory and praise is to God alone. This is the Bride of Christ, the temple of the Living God, and His dwelling place forever. This is the Church, which Christ Jesus loved, and these are His disciples for whom He gave Himself that they might be washed in His own blood. It is the Church sanctified and cleansed by His Word “*that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church.*”⁵ It is the “*general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.*” As a Roman Catholic, Benedict must reject the Gospel rediscovered by the Reformation out of the darkness of the Papacy. Ironically, in seeking to reestablish hard-line Catholic dogma, he has in fact revealed his own church as biblically counterfeit and apostate.

The basis for Benedict’s denunciation is given in his answer to the second question posed in the document:

“Christ ‘established here on earth’ only one Church and instituted it as a ‘visible and spiritual community’ that from its beginning and throughout the centuries has always existed and will always exist, and in which alone are found all the elements that Christ himself instituted...This Church, constituted and organised in this world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the successor of Peter and the Bishops in communion with him.”

The presumption here is that the Apostle Peter went to Rome, and that each Pope is the successor of Peter. This conjecture is groundless. The Scripture makes mention neither of Peter ever being at Rome nor of successors to Peter or to any other Apostle. The criteria for apostleship are given in Scripture.⁶ The position of the Apostles was unique to them and to Paul—all directly chosen by Christ Jesus with no hint of succession. In the New Testament, the Apostles appointed elders⁷ and deacons rather than other Apostles. Yet the biblically unsubstantiated claim of “apostolic succession” is the very foundation of the Papacy. Papal primacy and authority are based on it. The Lord God never entrusted His truth to a personal succession of any body of men. Such a concept is hopelessly flawed. If one link failed, the whole sequence after it would be invalid. Yet, Benedict has again hitched his star to the notion of apostolic succession. The Papacy as usual rules by fiat, this time it is via Benedict’s dogmatic statement.

The True Legacy of the Apostle Peter

“Apostolic Succession” is the defining dogma for the Pope’s universal primacy and his reason for denouncing other Churches. It is important, therefore, to review the legacy of the Apostle Peter. Peter did not proclaim an institution, a system, or an organization but rather only the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. He made known the fact that “*Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.*”⁸ The meritorious cause of Christ Jesus’ suffering was the sins of men. He offered Himself as the once and for all sacrifice to atone for the sins of His people. The Just suffered for the unjust. He substituted Himself in place of true believers and bore their iniquities in order to propitiate the just wrath of the all-holy God. He that knew no sin suffered in place of those that knew no righteousness. The blessed design of Christ Jesus’ sufferings was to bring us

⁵ Ephesians 5:25-27

⁶ Acts 1:21-22

⁷ The terms overseer and elder/pastor are used interchangeably (Acts 20:17, 28; I Peter 5:1-4).

⁸ I Peter 3:18

to God, to reconcile us to God, to give us access to the Father, to credit us with His righteousness, and finally to bring us to eternal glory. This is the bequest of Peter that he called “*precious faith*” as he began his second epistle, “*Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ.*”⁹

The teaching of Peter refutes the hierarchical organization as well as the “Holy Tradition” of the Papacy. Peter believed that all born-again Christians are “*a chosen generation, a royal priesthood,*”¹⁰ rather than a top-heavy hierarchical system, from layperson to Priest, from Priest to Bishop, from Bishop to Cardinal and from Cardinal to Pope. He taught salvation and redemption by the blood of Christ, “*forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.*”¹¹

Pope Benedict, in contrast, insists that physical sacraments are necessary for salvation.¹² Peter endorsed the writings of the Apostle Paul who condemned the traditions of men. Peter warned of false teachers who would secretly introduce heresies¹³ into the Church—which is precisely what Roman Catholicism has done. The basis for the Gospel truth proclaimed by Peter to those who are “*born again*” is the Word of the Lord. Thus he writes of “*being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.*”¹⁴ The Pope’s foundation is not the word of God alone. He decrees, “Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.”¹⁵ Peter’s teachings totally demolish the foundational doctrines of Benedict and his worldly system.

A Radical Change of Policy

For more than forty years a spurious ecumenical strategy contrived at the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) has been carried out by the Papacy. It is often said that “Vatican Council II changed everything,” but in this decree Pope Benedict has stated unequivocally, “The Second Vatican Council neither changed nor intended to change this doctrine [No. 28, Lumen gentium on the ecclesial doctrine of the Catholic Church].” Further, he cites John XXIII, the reigning Pope at the opening of the Second Vatican Council, who also clearly stated that while Catholic dogma on the church was to remain the same, the Papacy’s “manner” needed to change as “required by our times.”¹⁶ Hence that Council moved from a position of condemnation of, and separation from, other religions to a new program of false ecumenism. It was a public relations exercise on an all-

⁹ II Peter 1:1

¹⁰ I Peter 2:9

¹¹ I Peter 1:18-19

¹² *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994), Para 1129

¹³ II Peter 2:1

¹⁴ I Peter 1:23, 25

¹⁵ *Catechism*, Para 82

¹⁶ John XXIII, *Address*, 11 October 1962, in Footnote 1 of Benedict’s *Responses*, “...The Council...wishes to transmit Catholic doctrine, whole and entire, without alteration or deviation...it is necessary that the very same doctrine be understood more widely...The deposit of faith itself and the truths contained in our venerable doctrine are one thing, **but the manner in which they are annunciated is another**, provided that the same fundamental sense and meaning is maintained.”¹⁶ (Emphasis not in original.)

inclusive and global scale. The new warmth and acceptance was to be applied not just to the other major religions of the world, but also to Bible believers who were “welcomed back into the fold.” “Separated brethren” had replaced “heretics” in the Mother Church’s vocabulary. “Separated brethren” was the term to be used especially for those who before had always been considered heretics, while the major pagan religions of Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism now were to be regarded by the Papacy as “acceptable ways to God.”¹⁷ With this new strategy, the Church of Rome set out to win the world back to herself. This was necessary after the controversial reign of Pius XII and the uncompromisingly severe image that his pontificate had presented to the world. The popular Pope who followed him, John XXIII, was said to have prayed for “a new Pentecost” on his deathbed as his church set out purposefully to adopt the fledgling “Charismatic Renewal.” The backing of this movement with its blurring of doctrinal differences together with its emphasis on tolerance and unity was to prove to be a successful way forward for the Church of Rome in the 1960s and ‘70s. There were other important strands of the new policy. Another main approach was by dialogue. In 1970, the Catholic Church carefully spelled out the goals and rules of dialogue. The method of incremental advances into Bible believing churches was to be by means of “dialogue,” the purpose of which is clearly stated by the Catholic Church:

“Dialogue is not an end in itself...it is not just an academic discussion.”¹⁸ Rather, “...it serves to transform modes of thought and behavior and the daily life of those communities [non-Catholic churches]. In this way, it aims at preparing the way for their unity of faith in the bosom of a Church one and visible: thus ‘little by little, as the obstacles to perfect ecclesial communion are overcome, all Christians will be gathered, in a common celebration of the Eucharist, into the unity of the one and only Church which Christ bestowed on his Church from the beginning. This unity, we believe, dwells in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose....”¹⁹

For the duration of more than four decades and four pontificates the ecumenical mood music from the Vatican has been soothing, reassuring, tolerant and conciliatory. Although the Second Vatican Council documents were published in 1975, only once before, in all these years since that Council, was the mask slipped. Pope Benedict in his less exalted identity as Cardinal Ratzinger, issued the decree “*Dominus Iesus*”²⁰ stating then what he has now chosen to state again, “...the ecclesial communities which have not preserved the valid Episcopate and the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic mystery, are not Churches in the proper sense.”²¹

The Pontiff Again Shows His True Colors

It is one thing to declare that Christian Churches “are not Churches in a proper sense” as a Cardinal, but it is entirely another matter for a Pope to make the same statement and designate more particularly the Churches he has in mind. While he is most capable of continuing to woo Christian Churches to dialogue with the Vatican, it now seems evident that he is determined to uphold

¹⁷ Vatican Council II Document No. 56, *Nostra Aetate*, 28 October 1965 in *Documents of Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Austin P. Flannery, Ed., New Revised Edition (1975, 1984) p. 739. All Vatican II Conciliar and Post Conciliar documents are taken from this volume.

¹⁸ Post Vatican Council II Document No. 42, “Reflections and Suggestions Concerning Ecumenical Dialogue”, 15 August 1970, Sect. VI, Part 3, p. 549

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Sect. II “Nature and Aim of Ecumenical Dialogue”, p. 541

²⁰ http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html 8/13/2007

²¹ “*Dominus Iesus*”, Sect. 17

an older, traditional, aggressive stance that produced such evil fruit in the horrendous years of the Inquisition from 1203 to 1808. His present mindset was indeed already seen in his 2000 decree. In that decree he actually referred to the arrogant claim of the infamous Mediaeval Pope, Boniface VIII. In 1302, in the Papal Bull, “Unam Sanctam”, Boniface stated, “Furthermore we declare, say, define, and proclaim to every human creature that they, by necessity for salvation, are entirely subject to the Roman Pontiff.”²²

This presumed Primacy is the arrogant mindset of the Vatican hard-liners, those who oversee the strategy and wield the power, among whom is Pope Benedict, and those who elected him to pre-eminence. His dominant presupposition for Papal Rome is that the Lord has established a totalitarian hierarchy of Pope, Cardinals, Patriarchs, major Archbishops, Archbishops, Metropolitans, coadjutor Archbishops, diocesan Bishops, coadjutor Bishops, etc. This is the spirit of Diotrephes, “*who loves to have the pre-eminence*” ad absurdum. The biblical organizational structure of the bride of Christ is utterly different. In the true body of Christ, those ordained as elders and deacons are still only brothers within the same body and the one Master is Jesus Christ the Lord, “*for one is your master even Christ and ye are all brethren.*”²³

Damning Doctrine Resurfaces

Pope Benedict of the year 2007 now demonstrates that his nicknames were well chosen when as a Cardinal the media dubbed him as “the enforcer”, “the panzer” and “God’s rottweiler”. He has countless diktats of old to justify his present strategy. Besides the blasphemous imposition of subjection to the Pope as necessary for salvation contained in “Unum Sanctam”, another example of the damning Papal decree is that of The General Council of Florence in 1442. This official verdict of the fifteenth century is still published in present day papal documents. It announces:

“The Holy Roman Church...firmly believes, professes and preaches that ‘no one remaining outside the Catholic Church, not only pagans’, but also Jews, heretics or schismatics, can become partakers of eternal life; but they will go to the ‘eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels’ (Mt. 25:41), unless before the end of their life they are received into it [the Catholic Church]. For union with the body of the Church is of so great importance that the sacraments of the Church are helpful to salvation only for those remaining in it...and no one can be saved, no matter how much alms he has given, even if he sheds his blood for the name of Christ, unless he remains in the bosom and unity of the Catholic Church.”²⁴

The force and substance of this 1442 decree reappear in the 2007 ruling of Pope Benedict XVI. As we have seen, responding to Question Five, as the document ends, the Pontiff determines: “... These ecclesial Communities which, specifically because of the absence of the sacramental priesthood, have not preserved the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic Mystery cannot, according to Catholic doctrine, be called ‘Churches’ in the proper sense.”

²² Bull, “Unam Sanctam”, November 18, 1302 in *The Sources of Catholic Dogma* Tr. by Roy J. Deferrari from the Thirtieth Ed. of Henry Denzinger’s *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, tr. revised by Karl Rahner, S. J., 1954 (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1957) #469.

²³ Matthew 23:8

²⁴ *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, J. Neuner, SJ, and J. Dupuis, SJ, Eds. (New York: Alba House, 1982) #1005.

This hard-line policy does in fact perfectly fit with much of present day official teaching. The Roman Catholic Church officially states, “There is no offense, however serious, that the Church cannot forgive. ‘There is no one, however wicked and guilty, who may not confidently hope for forgiveness, provided his repentance is honest.’”²⁵ Papal Rome broadcasts the focal point of its hope: “Priests have received from God a power that he has given neither to angels nor to arch-angels....God above confirms what priests do here below. Were there no forgiveness of sins in the [Roman Catholic] Church, there would be no hope of life to come or eternal liberation. Let us thank God who has given his Church such a gift.”²⁶

In Scripture, in complete contrast, salvation is mediated through Jesus Christ alone, the only mediator between God and man.²⁷ The instrument of salvation is not a Church but rather individual faith and a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. The foundation of salvation is outlined by the Apostle Paul, “*being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,*”²⁸ showing that God’s grace is the efficient cause, and the payment is made “*through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*” To attempt to bring the Papal church into the nature of the saving work of the Godhead, indeed to make her the centre of that work is grossest blasphemy. In Scripture, salvation is in Christ Jesus alone, “*to the praise of the glory of his grace.*”²⁹

Past and Present Hard-line Papal Policy

There is a distinct parallel between the hard-line policy during centuries of Papal Inquisition and the new policy of the present Pope. During the six hundred and five years of the Inquisition, Bible believers stood remarkably strong in faith and practice. In 2007, trusting in the same Lord Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today and for ever, we must stand firm as they did. Bible believers of old confronted by ridicule, indifference and a deluded populace, still in no uncertain terms denounced the Pope along with his dictates and daily lived out the Gospel of grace.³⁰ We must do likewise. The Lord’s Glory, His Gospel, and His promise are at stake! “*Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.*”³¹ Christ Jesus prepared believers of old as He does today for condemnations and false charges. He promised, “*Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad...for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*”³² Those who are falsely denounced are to rejoice, showing forth His truth and His Gospel of grace because the Lord reigns. We, facing up to the hard-line policy of Pope Benedict, the continuing obdurate lies, the error and blasphemies of the present day, must preserve awaiting the power and might of the Righteous Lord God to respond. Benedict expects to achieve greater control through his hard-hitting decree. What he fails to realize is that such decrees of Papal monarchy let it be seen that he rules an enslaved people. The Pope’s arrogant pre-

²⁵ *Catechism*, Para. 982

²⁶ *Ibid*, Para. 983

²⁷ John 14:6; Acts 4:12; I Timothy 2:5

²⁸ Romans 3: 24

²⁹ Ephesians 1:6

³⁰ Watch our *Inquisition* video on ‘Youtube’ at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rx8PdvoELvY>

³¹ Hebrews 12:28-29.

³² Matthew 5:11-12

tensions reveal that by means of papal dictatorial rule, a lying system of works is ruthlessly imposed upon Catholic people for their entire lives.

The Absolute Response to the Decree

The conclusive response to the Pope's decree is the everlasting good news of the Lord God. The Lord Jesus Christ died in place of the true believer. His life and perfect unrepeatable sacrifice alone are the ransom payment for the believer's soul. "*The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*"³³ This was the price demanded by the All Holy God in order that His justice might be satisfied in the forgiveness of sins. As a result of this payment, the true believer who trusts in Christ Jesus alone is set free from sin, from the wiles of the devil and from the clutches of a counterfeit Church. "*For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*"³⁴ On the authority of the Bible alone, sinners turn by the conviction of the Holy Spirit to God in faith alone for the salvation that He alone gives, based solely on Christ's death and resurrection for His own. As they believe on Him alone, they realize the greatness of the Father's grace, "*being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*"³⁵ God's sovereign grace and forgiveness enables us to respond in faith and place our trust in the one who died in our place. No Church can save, no ecclesiology saves. We are made right with the All Holy God solely by His graciousness in Jesus Christ our Lord alone. ♦

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³³ Mark 10:45

³⁴ Romans 6:23

³⁵ Romans 3:24.