Catholic was never a separate religion

How the name for the whole Church came to be treated as the name of one branch of it, and what the Reformation removed along the way.

ONE CHURCH, ONE NAME

Around 110 AD, St. Ignatius of Antioch used the word catholic, meaning universal, to describe the one Church founded by Christ. To be Christian was to be Catholic. From Pentecost in 33 AD until the Great Schism of 1054, roughly 1,021 years, there was one Catholic Christian Church, and the first thousand years of its history knew no separation between the two names.

HOW THE BIBLE WAS GATHERED

The Bible did not arrive as a single bound book. Early Catholic Christians wrote and circulated its texts over centuries, and Church councils in the late fourth century then discerned and confirmed which books belonged in the canon. That order of events is the heart of the Catholic objection to Scripture alone. The Bible does not list its own table of contents, so anyone who relies on Scripture alone is already relying on the Church's discernment and on Sacred Tradition to know which books are Scripture in the first place. Catholics call that circular.

Catholics hold that Christ established a living, teaching Church, and that His teaching was handed down both in writing and orally. The passage usually cited is 2 Thessalonians 2:15. There Paul tells the believers to stand firm and hold to the traditions they were taught, whether by word of

mouth or by letter, which is why the Church reads Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and the Magisterium together.

1054 AND 1517

In 1054, tensions over papal authority, politics, and the wording of the Nicene Creed, specifically the Filioque clause, formally divided the Church into the Roman Catholic Church in the West and the Eastern Orthodox Church in the East. Then came 1517. Nearly 1,500 years after Christ, Martin Luther challenged Catholic teaching and authority in Germany, and the Reformation he sparked multiplied Protestant denominations at a rapid pace. Over the course of the sixteenth century the Reformers removed seven Old Testament books from the Bible, five of the seven sacraments, and a body of core doctrine and liturgical practice that had been part of Christian worship for centuries.

WHAT THE REFORMERS REMOVED

Luther set seven Old Testament books apart in a separate section labeled the Apocrypha, along with parts of Esther and Daniel. The seven are Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Baruch, 1 Maccabees, and 2 Maccabees. His argument was that they lacked original Hebrew manuscripts. Later Protestant publishers left them out entirely, and the Protestant Bible went from 73 books to 66. Catholics did not add books. Protestants removed the ones they did not agree with.

Those books directly supported Catholic teachings the Reformers rejected. Second Maccabees 12:46 supports praying for the dead and the doctrine of Purgatory, and Tobit 12:9 speaks to the value of good works and almsgiving.

The sacraments went from seven to two. Baptism and Communion, the Lord's Supper, were kept, though most Reformers changed the meaning of Communion from the literal Body and Blood of Christ (Transubstantiation) to a symbolic memorial or a spiritual presence. Confirmation, Confession (Reconciliation), Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony were downgraded to church customs or civil institutions, and with Holy Orders went the ministerial priesthood.

Authority went too. The Reformers rejected the authority of the Pope and the unbroken line of bishops descending from the Apostles, and they replaced the joined authority of Scripture and Tradition with Sola Scriptura. Purgatory, indulgences, and prayer for souls after death were eliminated. Asking the Virgin Mary and the saints for their intercession stopped, and relics and many statues were taken out of the churches.

The Mass, understood as a re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, was replaced by services centered on preaching and hymn singing. In Protestant regions the monasteries and convents were dissolved, and the requirement of celibacy for clergy came to an end.

THE DIFFERENCE IN THE PARISH TODAY

Five centuries on, the difference is easiest to see in who stands at the front of the church. A Catholic priest typically goes through 7 to 10 years of formation after high school, including degrees in philosophy and graduate theology (often a Master of Divinity), psychological evaluations, and pastoral internships, and a diocesan priest makes a promise of celibacy and obedience to his bishop. Mainline denominations such as the Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Methodists usually require an accredited Master of Divinity and formal oversight of ordination. But anyone can legally start an independent or non-denominational church with zero theological training, on the strength of personal charisma or self-study. Catholics point to 2 Peter 1:20, "no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation," and to 2 Timothy 4:3, which warns of a time when people will gather teachers to suit their own desires.

That same priest is called to a simple way of life. He earns a modest, fixed stipend set by his bishop, he does not own his parish, and the parish books are audited by diocesan boards and finance councils. In an independent church without denominational oversight, a founding pastor may control the board and his own salary, and that arrangement has fueled high-profile cases of prosperity gospel preachers amassing personal wealth through

tithing, which Catholics view as contrary to Christ's call to poverty and self-denial. Most everyday Protestant pastors, in small churches and mainline ones, earn modest salaries and serve sincerely.

Catholic worship centers on the Eucharistic Sacrifice, in which Christ is offered to the Father, and the same Mass is offered no matter the priest's personality or how emotional the congregation feels. Many modern evangelical services center instead on concert-style music, dynamic preaching, and emotional altar calls. Catholics often critique this as making worship about human feeling and entertainment rather than objective reverence and sacrifice toward God.

THE WORD ITSELF

Today, especially in North America, many non-denominational and evangelical Protestants use the word Christian as shorthand for Protestant and treat Catholic as a completely separate religion. Catholic is the word Ignatius used for the whole Church in 110 AD. In casual speech now, it marks the original branch of Christianity as something other than Christian.