



Is the Catholic Church Infallible? No, and Here's Proof

Description



(The image above is the official regalia of the Papacy. The crossed keys represent the "keys to the kingdom".)

Let me be clear up front: I am **not** "anti-Catholic" in any way. I have several Catholics in my circle of friends and one of my wife's best friends is Catholic. Further, the Catholic Church does more for the poor than most other denominations. I often find myself defending Catholics against Protestants, especially those who – erroneously – think that "Catholics aren't Christian".

That said, I think the Roman Catholic Church does have serious doctrinal problems. I'm not even saying these doctrinal problems are worse than other denominations. I'm just saying they exist.

(Note: one of the most serious is the additional books in their Bible, and I have a whole article on [The Bible: 66 books vs 73 and Why \(the "Apocrypha" Explained\)](#).)

So, let's get started.

The Law of Non-Contradiction

“two or more contradictory statements cannot both be true at the same time in the same sense”

For example:

I can say: “Air exists” and you can say: “Air does not exist.” We can’t both be right at the same time in the same sense.

The Catholic Church claims they are infallible. Infallible means “*free from the possibility of ever being wrong*”. However, if the Catholic Church ever made two “Infallible” pronouncements that contradicted each other, then one must be wrong. If the Catholic Church was ever wrong, then they can’t be infallible.

So has the Catholic Church ever contradicted itself on an “infallible” doctrine?

Yes they have.

What Constitutes an “Infallible Doctrine”?

Before we can compare “infallible” doctrines of the Catholic Church, we must first define what an infallible doctrine is. I scoured the internet for a way to determine what Catholic doctrines are considered infallible and which are not. I finally found it in one of the Catholic Church’s Ecumenical Councils, specifically Vatican II.

(Note: for those who don’t know, an “ecumenical council” is an official gathering of the leadership of the Catholic church, specifically to explain or clarify doctrine. Typically, this is done in response to heresies that have become popular and thus require clarification. The Catholics would say the first ecumenical council was the Jerusalem council in Acts chapter 15.)

One of the Vatican II documents (*Lumen Gentium*, chapter 3, section 25, paragraph 2) explains how to know if a doctrine is “infallible”. The [full text of Lumen Gentium is on the Vatican’s official website](#), but the relevant paragraph is copy/pasted below.

Although the individual bishops do not enjoy the prerogative of infallibility, **they nevertheless proclaim Christ’s doctrine infallibly whenever**, even though dispersed through the world, but still maintaining the bond of communion among themselves and with the successor of Peter, and **authentically teaching matters of faith and morals, they are in agreement on one position as definitively to be held. This is even more clearly verified when, gathered together in an ecumenical council**, they are teachers and judges of faith and morals for the universal Church, whose definitions must be adhered to with the submission of faith.

There are several things you need to notice about this highly illuminating paragraph.

First, the use of the word “whenever”. So at any point in time, when the bishops and Pope (*successor of Peter*) are in agreement on one doctrinal position “in matters of faith and morals”, then it appears to automatically become infallible. The “automatic” part is arguable – and many Catholics have argued it – but the plain text seems clear.

Second, is the: “this is “even more clearly verified” when they gather together in an ecumenical council. So, it seems clear that what the Church declares in an Ecumenical council – by their own definition – constitutes an “infallible” pronouncement.

So, we will be looking for places where one ecumenical council contradicts another.

Sidebar: Is The Catechism “infallible”?

The vast majority of Catholics I’ve asked say no. The vast majority of internet articles on the Catechism – even from fairly official sources – say no. However, there’s a decent case that – by the Catholic Church’s own test – it should be considered “infallible” to Catholics.

Why?

Because the Pope at the time (*John Paul II*) invoked his “apostolic authority” and was in complete agreement with the “*whole Episcopate (priesthood) of the Catholic Church*”. Below are several excerpts from “[Fidei Depositum](#)” (*the deposit of faith*) written by Pope John Paul II. It was written specifically about the Catechism:

The project was the object of extensive consultation among **all Catholic Bishops, their Episcopal Conferences or Synods, and of theological and catechetical institutes**. As a whole, it received a broadly favourable acceptance on the part of the Episcopate. **It can be said that this catechism is the result of the collaboration of the whole Episcopate of the Catholic Church**, who generously accepted my invitation to share responsibility for an enterprise which directly concerns the life of the Church.

...

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which I approved 25 June last and the publication of which **I today order by virtue of my Apostolic Authority, is a statement of the Church’s faith and of Catholic doctrine**, attested to or illumined by Sacred Scripture, Apostolic Tradition and the Church’s Magisterium. **I declare it to be a valid and legitimate instrument for ecclesial communion and a sure norm for teaching the faith.**

That seems to meet the requirements that:

1. All the bishops and the “successor of Peter” (*the Pope*) be “*in agreement on one position as definitively to be held.*”
2. And that they be: “*authentically teaching matters of faith and morals*

" as Vatican II said.

1. The Pope even clearly invoked his "apostolic authority".

I'd say that meets the test according to the plain language of Vatican II. I'm not a lawyer, but the plain reading seems clear.

Take that as you will.

Contradiction #1: Can non-Catholics be saved?

Throughout most of the Catholic Church's history, they maintained that non-Catholics couldn't be saved. Ever. [This webpage](#) has many quotes indicating this, but right now we only care about what the ecumenical councils say.

Let's look.

The Council of Florence (*mid 1400s*)

"It firmly believes, professes and preaches that **all those who are outside the catholic church, not only pagans but also Jews or heretics and schismatics, cannot share in eternal life** and will go into the everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels, **unless they are joined to the catholic church before the end of their lives**; that the unity of the ecclesiastical body is of such importance that only for those who abide in it do the church's sacraments contribute to salvation and do fasts, almsgiving and other works of piety and practices of the Christian militia produce eternal rewards; and **that nobody can be saved, no matter how much he has given away in alms and even if he has shed his blood in the name of Christ**, unless he has persevered in the bosom and the unity of the catholic church."

([Source](#))

I would like to point out the use of the word "schismatics" in that pronouncement. Schismatics are by definition those who had a schism (*they split off*) from the Catholic church. According to Catholics, that's every other Christian denomination because Catholic theology claims that they are the true church. Certainly every protestant denomination is a schismatic from the Catholic church.

Clearly, non-Catholics – including non-Catholic Christians – can't be saved according to the "infallible" pronouncement of the Catholic's Church's own Council of Florence...

Or can they?

The Second Vatican Council (*mid 1900s*), Lumen Gentium, Chapter 2, section 16.

Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church

, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. **Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life.**

([Source](#))

The Catholic Church's position has obviously softened on who can be saved. It has arguably softened to the point that you don't even need to the gospel to be saved. Obviously, there are major issues with salvation apart from Christ, but that's not the point here.

The point is the doctrine changed.

An "infallible" pronouncement made ~600 years ago contradicts another "infallible" pronouncement made ~60 years ago.

They can't both be true.

Either:

- non-Catholics can be saved,
- **OR**
- non-Catholics can't be saved.

You can't have it both ways.

And just in case you think I'm misinterpreting the Catholic Church's position, we can look at the Catechism. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) affirms that non-Catholics can be saved multiple times.

CCC 847 This affirmation is not aimed at those who, through no fault of their own, do not know Christ and his Church:

Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience – those too may achieve eternal salvation.

CCC 1260 "Since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partakers, in a way known to God, of the Paschal mystery." **Every man who is ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and of his Church, but seeks the truth and does the will of God in accordance with his understanding of it, can be saved.** It may be supposed that such persons would have desired Baptism explicitly if they had known its necessity.

CCC 1281 **Those who die for the faith, those who are catechumens, and all those who, without knowing of the Church but acting under the inspiration of grace, seek God**

sincerely and strive to fulfill his will, can be saved even if they have not been baptized.

My point is not that the Catechism is infallible (*because most Catholics argue it isn't*). My point is that the official “infallible” position of the Catholic Church conflicts with another of its own “infallible” ecumenical councils. Since the Catholic Church has two “infallible” positions that contradict each other, then the Catholic Church isn't – and can't be – infallible.

Having one contradiction alone is enough to disprove infallibility. However, there's one more that's worth looking at. It's not quite a clash of two “infallible” pronouncements. However, it does show the Catholic Church's position has changed on the requirements for salvation, and illustrates two other important things...

Let's take a look.

Contradiction #2: Is baptism (*with water*) necessary for Salvation

The Council of Trent says the following in the 7th session, in the section on the canons of baptism (*there are multiple canon sections in the 7th session*)

CANON V. – If any one saith, that baptism is free, that is, **not necessary unto salvation**; let him be anathema.

So according to Trent, if you aren't baptized, you can't be saved. Period. Full stop. End of story.

Further, it's says that water (*H2O*) is necessary for baptism.

CANON II. – **If any one saith, that true and natural water is not of necessity for baptism**, and, on that account, wrests, to some sort of metaphor, those words of our Lord Jesus Christ; Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost; **let him be anathema**.

Here's the sticking point.

I would argue that “true and natural water” means actual water, aka H2O. So if you take Canon V and Canon II together, you must be baptized with water (*H2O*) to be saved.

EDIT: Some say that the Council of Trent actually teaches “Baptism of Desire” in Session 6, chapter 4. However, that Trent clearly repudiated “Baptism of Desire” can be confirmed for us by a Doctor of the Catholic Church who actually attended the Council of Trent, and even spoke during it. Let me repeat that: **A doctor of the Catholic faith who attended and spoke at the Council of Trent says that Trent doesn't allow for baptism of desire.**

No, I'm not kidding

I would explain it, but it'll probably be more meaningful coming from someone who's a committed and devoted Catholic who clearly spent a lot of time devoted to proving this.

To be clear: **I disagree entirely with the theology in the following video.** I'm only embedding it here to establish the official Catholic position according to both councils and history.

The information presented makes it clear that Trent — even Session 6, chapter 4 — did not promote Baptism of Desire. The cannons do indeed mean what they say and “Baptism of Desire” is a heresy according to the official dogma of the Catholic Church.

If you are unconvinced, [this video](#) by the same fellow goes into much greater detail with far more information.

Now, the official dogma of the Catholic Church as established in the Council of Trent — that a man can't be saved unless he has been baptized with water (H₂O) — is directly contradicted by the Catechism. (*which may or may not be “infallible”*)

CCC 1258 The Church has always held the firm conviction that **those who suffer death for the sake of the faith without having received Baptism are baptized by their death for and with Christ.** This Baptism of blood, like the desire for Baptism, **brings about the fruits of Baptism without being a sacrament.**

CCC 1259 **For catechumens who die before their Baptism,** their explicit desire to receive it, together with repentance for their sins, and charity, **assures them the salvation that they were not able to receive through the sacrament.**

CCC 1281 Those who die for the faith, those who are catechumens, and all those who, without knowing of the Church but acting under the inspiration of grace, seek God sincerely and strive to fulfill his will, **can be saved even if they have not been baptized.**

Or to quote from the much older Baltimore Catechism:

644. How many kinds of Baptism are there?

A. There are three kinds of Baptism: Baptism of water, of desire, and of blood.

653. Is Baptism of desire or of blood sufficient to produce the effects of Baptism of water?

A. Baptism of desire or of blood is sufficient to produce the effects of the Baptism of water, if it is impossible to receive the Baptism of water

See the problem?

1. The Council of Trent explicitly says that baptism is necessary for salvation. But the Catechism says baptism isn't necessary for salvation (*in some cases*).
2. The Council of Trent explicitly says that water **is** necessary for baptism. But the Catechism says water **isn't** necessary for some baptisms.

This isn't to prove a contradiction; it's to show two related points.

Point #1 How Can You Know?

Let's say – for the sake of argument – that the Catholic Church truly is “*infallible in matters of faith and morals*”. Let's further say that the Catechism isn't infallible, and only the canons of the official ecumenical councils count toward “infallible” doctrines.

Does that even matter?

I ask because the modern Catholic Church is teaching at least one doctrine that's definitely wrong according to their own Council of Trent. (*Baptism doesn't always require water/h₂O*). Even if the Catholic Church is infallible, how would you know you're getting accurate teaching at a parish level? If they're teaching such grievous error in the Catechism – the official “deposit of faith” for the whole Catholic Church – then why should you trust anything but the ecumenical councils?

Virtually everyone in the entire Catholic Church – Pope, bishops, and priests alike – are all teaching something condemned as heresy ~500 years ago. How can you know whoever is teaching you is teaching proper, “infallible” Catholic doctrine? (*Unless they only teach from the ecumenical Councils and the Bible*)

It's a problem worth considering, but leads to an even greater problem.

Point #2 Baptism of Blood/Desire = No Legitimate Clergy?

Let's look at the canon of Trent again:

CANON II. – If any one saith, that true and natural water is not of necessity for baptism, and, on that account, wrests, to some sort of metaphor, those words of our Lord Jesus Christ; Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost; **let him be anathema.**

Anathema.

If “anathema” sounds serious, that’s because it is. It’s the most serious form of excommunication, which actually separates a person from the Catholic church. (*which prevented them from being saved for the vast majority of Catholic history*).

But don’t take my word for it.

Here’s the [New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia on the topic of Anathema](#):

(*And for Catholics, In 1907 it was given a Nihil Obstat by a Doctor of Sacred Theology, and an Imprimatur by an Archbishop. These certify that it’s free from doctrinal error and has the Catholic Church’s official seal of approval, though it’s not considered infallible.*)

At an early date the Church adopted the word anathema to signify the exclusion of a sinner from the society of the faithful; but the anathema was pronounced chiefly against heretics. All the councils, from the Council of Nicæa to that of the Vatican, have worded their dogmatic canons: “If any one says . . . let him be anathema”. Nevertheless, although during the first centuries the anathema did not seem to differ from the sentence of excommunication, beginning with the sixth century a distinction was made between the two. A Council of Tours desires that after three warnings there be recited in chorus Psalm cviii against the usurper of the goods of the Church, that he may fall into the curse of Judas, and “that he may be not only excommunicated, but anathematized, and that he may be stricken by the sword of Heaven”. This distinction was introduced into the canons of the Church, as is proved by the letter of John VIII (872-82) found in the Decree of Gratian (c. III, q. V, c. XII): “Know that Engeltrude is not only under the ban of excommunication, which separates her from the society of the brethren, but under the anathema, which separates from the body of Christ, which is the Church.”

Let’s make this connection.

- **If** you teach that “true and natural water” (H₂O) isn’t necessary for Baptism, then you are under the penalty of Anathem...
- **And If** “Anathema” means you are cut off/excommunicated from the Catholic Church and are essentially declared to be a non-Catholic...
- **Then** all the Priests and Bishops who teach Baptism of Blood and Baptism of Desire are (*or should be*) put under Anathema, and kicked out of the Catholic Church.

Here’s the problem: that’s virtually ALL of them.

The doctrines of Baptism of Blood and Baptism of Desire (*which don't require water*) are in the Catechism. Further, they're not only in the modern Catechism, they're also in the much older Baltimore Catechism. In America, the Baltimore Catechism was the standard Catholic school text from 1885 up until the middle of the last century. Since no one objected to it, the doctrine must've had the approval of the Catholic church.

So for at least 150 years, nearly every Catholic was taught a doctrine that – according to Trent – should place them under Anathema.

And priest were taught this.

Further, they taught it to others.

If you abide by the “infallible” canons of the Council of Trent, there aren't any legitimate, non-Anathema-worthy Catholic Priests/Bishops left!

the Catholics claim the privilege of “infallibility in matters of faith and morals” based on what they call “apostolic succession”. They believe Peter was the first Pope, and that he had a legitimate successor which inherited the authority Jesus gave to Peter. They believe this authority was handed down from Pope to Pope in an unbroken line over the last ~2000 years, to the current Pope.

But what if this line was broken?

What if virtually every single priest and bishop for 150+ years has been teaching doctrines that made them worthy of Anathema? Wouldn't the “line of apostolic succession” have been broken? Where does the Catholic Church get its authority if this line has been broken?

It's a problem.

A huge one.

Conclusion

The Catholic Church “infallibly” declared that non-Catholics can't be saved, then later changed its mind and “infallibly” declared that non-Catholics can be saved. Both can't be true, and since they contradict each other the Catholic Church can't be infallible.

Because the Council of Trent put under Anathema anyone who believes in “baptism of blood” and “baptism of desire” (*which don't require water*), all current Catholics who believe this way are – or should be – put under Anathema. This would break the line of “apostolic succession” from which the Catholic Church claims to derive its power of infallibility.

So no, they aren't infallible.

However, that doesn't necessarily prove anything *else* they believe is wrong. Their other doctrines must be examined piecemeal, one at a time, to see if they line up with scripture.

Some do, some don't.

(Again, the modern Catholic Church does more for the poor than most other denominations. They certainly understand how to live out [The Greatest Commandment](#) in that way.)

If you are a Catholic reading this, I urge you as a fellow brother in Christ to become like the Bereans, after whom this website was named:

Acts 17:10-11

10 And immediately, the brothers sent away both Paul and Silas by night to Berea, who – when they arrived – went into the synagogue of the Jews.

11 Now, these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica. They received the word with all eagerness; examining the scriptures every day to see if these things were so.

(The 66 books of scripture, not the expanded 73-book Catholic Bible. There's an article on this website entitled: [The Bible: 66 books vs 73 and Why \(the "Apocrypha" Explained\)](#))