

In Catholic circles we have guiding principles.

One such is *lex orandi lex credendi*: the way of prayer is the way of belief. How we address and listen to God forms our attitude, our understanding, our behaviors, our religion.

For many years that seemed to be settled before upheavals in the church changed the way of prayer and thus the ways of belief.

In former times, Catholics knew that the one true church is the Catholic Church founded by Christ.

In that Church Christ was present to His believers in word, sacrament, and charity, giving them grace, teaching them, transforming them into His divine image.

Jesus frees believers from sin for good works, from eternal death for eternal life, and from isolation to communion with Him and other believers in the communion of saints: the church triumphant in heaven, the church suffering in purgatory, the church militant here on earth as we work out our salvation “in fear and trembling.”

You receive articles from me that are important to me, that help my faith journey in Jesus. Once such was from Fr. Thomas Weinandy, OFM Cap.

In that article from *The Catholic Thing*, Fr. Weinandy used the story of Michaelangelo to whom is attributed in so many words, that the figures he sculpts are inside the stones. It is just that they have to be chiseled to be revealed.

One such sculpture that never was finished was called “Slaves Struggling to Be Free.”

I quote Fr. Weinandy here:

“Humankind is enslaved to Adam’s sin and bound by Adam’s death. Jesus, on the Cross, struggled, groaned in agony, to set himself free from Adam’s sin-deformed nature. And in his Resurrection, he awakened from the tomb as the new man – a man no longer enslaved by sin and wrapped in death. He is the fully alive new Adam; the father of the born-again human race.

We who come to faith and are baptized, become a new creation in Christ, and so come to share in his resurrection. However, we are yet to assume his full likeness. Thus, St. Paul makes the astounding statement that “we know that the whole of creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as

sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved.” (Romans 8:22-24)”

This image was very important to me. No one on earth is without sin (excepting Jesus and Mary in their earthly time). I wish to be free to live, to act, to think, to believe, to speak. I don't want to be bound, chained, limited, silenced, defeated, vanquished, held down. To do that, I must give up sin and cooperate with grace.

Jesus Christ is the one who frees me. There is NO other.

The Catholic Church through word, sacrament, and charity is Jesus' chosen way for me to be free. There is NO other.

Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus: Outside the church there is no salvation.

The alternative to the freedom offered by Jesus is Hell. It does exist. Jesus spoke of it. Souls will go there to join the demons if the souls are not saved by Jesus through His church.

This brings me to the second image from another article by Mark Creech which appeared on renewamerica.com. In it a Scottish man was the member of the Hell Club, a hedonistic group in which all passions were indulged freely and fully.

The man had a vision of hell where he saw some of the departed members fully engaging in all the passions they had indulged on earth. He thought it was great, and asked one of them who was indulging her passion for gambling for a tour of hell. She replied to him, “In hell there is NO REST.” Vipers were stinging her breast.

So this image of the fires of hell shows that if this be the choice a soul makes, he will do it for all eternity without any hope of rest from it.

It struck me with fear as it should.

The third article I offered was one by Fr. Paul Scalia where he wrote in *the Catholic Thing* on January 24, 2021,

“Sin is the construction of my own petty little kingdom. It might be a squalid, selfish, peevish place, but at least it's mine. Admission into the Kingdom of God requires that I repent and renounce this miserable rival kingdom.”

In it I showed Venn diagrams, ellipses that overlap: God's kingdom revealed by Jesus, my petty kingdom overlapping part of God's kingdom, and the squalid kingdom of others that I can allow or not allow to overlap

my kingdom thus trapping me in someone else's world view rather than that of Jesus.

Unfortunately for us in 2021, the church presents new ellipses which overlap the lives of Catholics.

I just finished Eric Sammon's book, Deadly Indifference: How the Church Lost Her Mission and How We Can Reclaim It.

1 Tim 2:4 "God wishes that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth that God is One and so one also with God is the man Jesus, the only mediator between God and man."

Acts 4:12 "There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved."

Acts 17:28 "In him we live and move and have our being."

1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 "God has destined us to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we wake or sleep we might live with him."

Jesus saves us from sin for good works in cooperation with God's plan and grace; from eternal death for eternal life with Him beginning now and extending forever into heaven; from isolation to communion with God and the saints on earth, in purgatory, in heaven.

2 Cor 3:18 All of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being **transformed** into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord who is the Spirit.

For Jews God promised 1) freedom from slavery to Pharaoh, 2) safety through the desert, 3) living in the land and being secure if the commandments are followed.

For Muslims Reward for Steadfastness and Patience, Provision of Blessings, Getting Allah's Guidance, Protection from Satan, Return for Every Rightful Effort, Entrance into Jannah (Paradise).

In *Nostra Aetate*, the Vatican II document on non Christian religions, it states:

3. The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all- powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth,(5) who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgment when God will render their deserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

I am not sure that the God whom they claim to worship is the same God or if they do indeed worship the same God, Moslems just do not know Him as Jesus has revealed Him. If they did know Him as we do, I do not believe there would be such hostility to Christians.

For other religions you can look them up yourselves.

Only Jesus promises **transformation** into His divine image and that He is the Way, the Truth, the Life, and no one comes through the Father except through “me”.

Jesus says in John 3:5 “Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.” Baptism is essential for salvation.

In John 6:53-58 Jesus says, “Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever.”

In John 14:23, Jesus says, “Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him.”

Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus: Outside the Church there is no salvation. If Jesus is the only way to salvation, and if Jesus is united to His church, then this holds true.

The “how” Jesus with his church will save those who are not united fully is not explained by the Lord.

Before 1960 the Catholic Church was considered as THE church of Jesus Christ. Since then it says that the fullness subsists in the church but elements of truth are found in other faiths.

People were considered in schism or in heresy if they were not fully in communion with the Catholic Church.

Protestants were sought out to present them the errors of their ways and for a return to the church, while non Christians were presented with the errors of their beliefs and the truth and baptism by water in the trinitarian formula.

The initial documents of the council were scrapped in favor of ambiguities.

The position on salvation outlined by Sammons are:

Absolutist: Water Baptism only

Exclusivist: Water Baptism the ordinary way of salvation with baptism of desire and blood also valid. The possibility of extraordinary ways might exist, but they are not emphasized.

Inclusivist: Restrictive, Moderate, Expansive which speak in ever greater degree of the extraordinary ways one might be saved.

Pluralist: The many ways of salvation outside Jesus and the church.

Universalist: All are going to be saved.

After 1960 the church changed from Proclamation of the gospel: Mt 28:19-20 :19 *Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”*

The new way was dialogue which supposedly presumed proclamation of the Catholic teaching on Jesus, salvation, and baptism while hearing others’ ideas be the others non Catholic Christians or non believers.

The stronger language of schismatic or heretic was dropped in favor of “separated brethren” and “seekers of God”.

Dialogue left behind proclamation in favor of a shift toward what is mutually agreed, which most of the time are social issues to make the world a better place.

Sammons argues that most Catholics today are “pluralists”, many paths toward God and salvation. It is why Laudato Si and Tutti Fratelli speak of common brotherhood and ways to attain a better world here without proclaiming Jesus and the after life.

He argues that the only way back is to return to the “exclusivist” position that proclaims salvation in Jesus through water baptism (desire, blood and perhaps extraordinary ways without focusing on them) and lived faith in Jesus.

Practically speaking, the church has made a giant lurch in a direction toward worldly things.

We will suffer its consequences until we return to the proclamation in Jesus.

This brings me back to Fr. Scalia’s “petty kingdom” example. While I am trying to be free of my own, I will not enter into the “kingdom” of another even if that person be the pope or bishop. If the proclamation of the gospel is sidelined for another gospel of earthly brotherhood, prosperity, climate theory, critical race theory, carbon emissions, LGBTQ acceptance, and on, I cannot enter into that kingdom.

The proclamation of the gospel that Jesus is the only and One Savior of the world, that we enter into the kingdom through baptism, are fed and transformed into the image of Jesus through word and Eucharist and in personal charity rather than some corporate NGO, is the way to follow Jesus.

If this is not preached, Catholics will continue to leave the church because they will not find it necessary for salvation since we’re all going to heaven anyway. Missionaries will not go to the word because there is no need according to the pluralist and universalist way.

Hold fast to Jesus and the great commission.