

Fr. Perozich comments —

This series of 3 articles from LifeSite.com by Matthew McCusker provide traditional Catholic teaching on the necessity of membership in the church, that it is acquired through baptism, and that membership is maintained in this visible society through obedience to authority from Christ through those who truly represent Him in teaching, guiding, and sanctifying.

It is long, so take it in sections. It will bring up many questions for those who have not studied theology or who have had bad theological formation.

At the end is appended an article by Eric Sammons showing the deterioration of evangelization to dialogue and the abandonment of baptism.

Catholic theology on the visibility of the Church provides crucial answers in the current crisis

Heartbroken Catholics are asking: what is going on? Have Christ's promises to the Church failed? Is there a solution? The answers to these questions come from the traditional teaching of the Catholic Church.



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Matthew McCusker

(LifeSiteNews) – No honest observer can doubt that today the Catholic Church is in crisis.

Those who appear to hold the highest offices in the Church are promoting gravely sinful lifestyles and spreading doctrines that faithful Catholics recognize as incompatible with the faith.

Heartbroken Catholics are asking: what is going on? How can this be explained? Have Christ's promises to the Church failed? Is there a solution? What can be done?

At present it may seem that there are few answers. Many voices are raised, and many different solutions are proposed. But how do we know which to follow, and how can we assess which voices are trustworthy?

One thing is certain: the right answers to these questions will come from no other source than the traditional teaching of the Catholic Church as formulated by her infallible magisterium, and explained by the consensus of her faithful theologians, whose labor spans 20 centuries.

In this new series LifeSiteNews will present five papers exploring issues of crucial importance for understanding this crisis and how to present it. We will learn about how the Church understands her own nature, and we will see how, despite everything, she remains the one visible ark of salvation.

The paper below discusses the Church's perpetual visibility and its relationship to the question "who is a member of the Catholic Church?"

The Catholic Church is necessary for salvation

The Catholic Church was founded by Our Lord for the salvation of mankind.

The redemption of mankind was "personally wrought by Our Lord for all time" when "He offered Himself on the Cross for our redemption and therefore merited for us every grace."¹ However, "the merits of Christ's suffering and death must be applied to individual souls through all the centuries."²

As Our Lord was not to remain personally present on the earth in his resurrected body, but rather to ascend into heaven, "the Church was established to perpetuate the work of Redemption by applying it to the souls of men. In a word, the Church was instituted to save all men."³

The Catholic Church is "the only means established by Christ to teach His doctrines, to inculcate His moral precepts, to administer the Sacraments, and to regulate and direct divine worship."⁴ Therefore, "no one can practice the Christian religion otherwise than as Christ Himself has ordained; whoever would be His disciple and embrace His religion must submit to the

authority of His Church, be taught and ruled by it, and receive through it all the means of salvation.”⁵

The Catholic Church is necessary for salvation. This necessity is twofold; it is a necessity of *precept* and a necessity of *means*.⁶ Membership of the Church is a necessity of *precept*, because God has commanded it. Membership of the Church is a necessity of *means*, because only the Catholic Church has the means of salvation, namely true doctrine, true sacraments, and the apostolic hierarchy with the power to teach and sanctify.

Outside the Catholic Church there is no salvation:

“It must, of course, be held as a matter of faith that outside the apostolic, Roman Church no one can be saved, that the Church is the only ark of salvation, and that whoever does not enter will perish in the flood.”⁷

A necessary Church must be recognizable to all

If the Church is necessary for salvation, and if her mission is the salvation of the whole human race, she must be easily recognizable by all people of good will.

Aelred Graham O.S.B. expressed this doctrine well:

“Just as all men of good will who came into contact with Our Lord were able to know him for what he was, the Son of the living God, so it must be equally possible for them to recognize his Church as a divine institution. For the claims of the Church upon the world’s attention are no less imperative than those of Christ himself. Indeed, it is the Church’s boast that she is, in her very constitution, ‘a perpetual motive of credibility and unassailable witness to her own divine mission.’ [Vatican Council I]. Whence it follows that she must be a society visible to all as an unmistakable concrete fact.”⁸

The imperative claims of the Church were made clear by Our Lord:

“All authority in heaven and on earth, he said, has been given to me; you, therefore, must go out, making disciples of all nations, and baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all the commandments which I have given you. And behold I am with you all through the days that are coming, until the consummation of the world.” (Mt 28:18-20), and

“Go out all over the world and preach the gospel to the whole of creation; he who believes and is baptized will be saved; he who refuses belief will be condemned.” (Mk 16:16)

If the means of salvation are to be found only in the Catholic Church – and if all who do not believe are to be condemned – then it must be reasonably easy for all men and women, in all places and at all times, to identify the Church. If this were not so Our Lord would have laid on our shoulders a burden too heavy to bear, yet he has assured us of the contrary:

“At that time Jesus said openly, Father, who art Lord of heaven and earth, I give thee praise that thou hast hidden all this from the wise and the prudent, and revealed it to little children. Be it so, Father, since this finds favor in thy sight...

“Come to me, all you that labor and are burdened; I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon yourselves, and learn from me; I am gentle and humble of heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Mt 11:25-30)

Therefore, we may be assured that it is possible for all men and women of good will to recognize the true Church of Christ, without the need for any special abilities or circumstances on their part.

How can the Church be recognized?

In order to be recognizable, the true Church must have certain identifiable factors that are discernible by the senses of the average man or woman. Hence, we say that the Church is “visible.”

Theologian Father E. Sylvester Berry explained:

“Visibility primarily signifies the capability of being perceived by the sense of sight; then, by extension, it refers to the capability of being perceived by any of the five senses. Finally, it means the capability of an object being perceived or known by the intellect because of the sensible qualities adhering in that object.”

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Visibility can be both *material* and *formal*. A thing is **materially** visible in those qualities which can be perceived directly by the senses. Thus, a man has skin, hair, a particular shape, a particular kind of voice, and so on. A thing is **formally** visible when it can be recognized as having a certain nature i.e. through the above sensible qualities one determines that the creature is a man.

It follows that:

“When we say that the Church of Christ is visible, we mean primarily, that it is a society of men with external rites and ceremonies and all the external machinery of government by which it can easily be recognized as a true society. But we further maintain that the Church of Christ also has certain marks by which it may be recognized as the one true Church founded by Christ when He commissioned the Apostles to convert all nations. In other words, we maintain that the Church of Christ is formally visible, not only as a society known as a Christian Church, but also as the one true Church of Christ.”¹⁰

The First Vatican Council taught that:

“[T]o enable us to fulfill the obligation to embrace the true faith and to persistently persevere in it, God has instituted the Church through his only-begotten Son, and has bestowed on it manifest marks of that institution, that it may be recognized by all men as the guardian and teacher of the revealed Word”.¹¹

These marks are:

- Unity

- Sanctity
- Catholicity
- Apostolicity

Hence, we refer to the true Church of Christ as “the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.” *The Church is necessarily One*, that is, she is always united in faith, worship, and government. *The Church is necessarily Holy*, that is, she perpetually possesses the doctrine and sacraments that sanctify, and she brings forth heroic virtue in numerous souls in every age. *The Church is necessarily Catholic*, that is, she is ever dispersed across the world and is never restricted to any particular race or nation. *The Church is necessarily Apostolic*, that is, she is perpetually governed by bishops who have received both the power of orders and the power of jurisdiction in direct succession from the Apostles.

The Church of Christ always possesses these marks and will never lose them. They are the perpetual means of recognizing her. Any organized body of men which claims to be the Catholic Church, but does not possess all four of these marks, can thereby be clearly identified as being a false Church.

The visible nature of the Church is yet another evidence of God’s love and mercy:

“Man is a sense-bound creature and the appeal of sense is continuous. Our Lord has taken our nature into consideration. The merely invisible we can accept on his authority. **But he has given us a visible Church, with recognizable rules and laws and doctrines and means of sanctification, in which man is at home.** We accept Our Lord’s gift to us with gratitude and strive to avail ourselves of its visible and invisible character. He has willed that as individuals we should be united to him by sanctifying grace, and that at the same time we should be united to one another with a unique collectivity, an unparalleled solidarity, which is the reality designated as the Mystical Body of

Christ. And he has further willed that all the members of that Mystical Body should be members of the visible, organized hierarchical society to which he has given the power of teaching, ruling and sanctifying. The visible Church is to be the unique indefectible Church which is to last until the end of time, and in its unity to extend all over the world.”¹²

However, the obvious nature of the marks does not lead to the conversion of all, as Berry states starkly:

“those blinded by passion and prejudice can no more recognize the true Church than the Pharisees of old could recognize its Divine Founder. The man who closes his eyes cannot even see the sun in its noonday splendor.”¹³

The relationship between visibility of the Church and membership of the Church

In the sections above we have seen that the Catholic Church is a visible society that can be easily identified by all men and women of good will, through the marks of unity, sanctity, catholicity, and apostolicity.

By these marks we can identify the Church, and her members. In order to know that we are receiving the true doctrine and the true sacraments which are necessary for our salvation we must be able to attain moral certainty as to where the Church is, and this means being able to recognize who is a member and who is not.

A state of doubt on this question would not be compatible with Our Lord’s command that all enter the Church as an absolute requirement for salvation. We could hardly call the Church visible if her members could not be generally identified by the application of reasonable diligence.

For this reason, the Church teaches us very clearly that the members of the Church are those who:

- are baptized
- publicly profess the Catholic faith
- and are in lawful union with the hierarchy of the Church (that is, are not separated by schism or excluded by sentence of major excommunication).

This doctrine, which has been consistently taught by the Church through many centuries, received an authoritative formulation by Pope Pius XII in his encyclical letter *Mystici Corporis Christi*:

“Actually, only those are to be included as members of the Church who have been baptized and profess the true faith, and who have not been so unfortunate as to separate themselves from the unity of the Body, or been excluded by legitimate authority for grave faults committed. ‘For in one spirit’ says the Apostle, ‘were we all baptized into one Body, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether bond or free.’ As therefore in the true Christian community there is only one Body, one Spirit, one Lord, and one Baptism, so there can be only one faith. And therefore, if a man refuse to hear the Church, let him be considered – so the Lord commands – as a heathen and a publican. It follows that those who are divided in faith or government cannot be living in the unity of such a Body, nor can they be living the life of its one Divine Spirit.”¹⁴

These three conditions of membership are in fact reflected in the definition of the visible Church, as in this formulation taken from a standard theological text:

“The Church may be defined as follows: The society of men who, by their profession of the same faith, and by their partaking of the same sacraments, make up, under the rule of apostolic pastors and their head, the kingdom of Christ on earth.”¹⁵

There is an intimate connection between the conditions of membership and the existence of the Church as a visible society:

“It is due to the institution of Christ Himself that the Church is visible... Proof: 1. From the threefold bond which Christ Himself imposed. It was indicated above how Our Lord founded the Church by enjoining on His disciples the profession of the same faith, participation in the same rites, and obedience to the same authority. It is by these bonds that the Church is drawn into unity and held together; without them there simply is no Church of Christ. Now, since these bonds are external things which people can see, they necessarily make the Church an external, visible society. One can discern, using one’s external senses, which men profess the same doctrine, frequent the same sacraments, and obey the same rulers.”¹⁶

Each and every human being who fulfills all three of these criteria – baptism, profession of the faith, lawful union with the hierarchy – is a member of the Catholic Church. Nobody else is. Neither the unbaptized, nor the public heretic, nor the public schismatic, can ever be considered a member of the visible body of Christ’s Church.

In the next paper “Membership of the Church: Authority” the question of the relationship between membership and the submission due to ecclesiastical authority will be examined in more detail, in light of its profound importance for understanding the crisis facing the Church today.

Footnotes:

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2 Berry, *Church of Christ*, p21.

3 Berry, *Church of Christ*, p22.

4 Berry, *Church of Christ*, p22.

5 Berry, *Church of Christ*, p22-3.

6 Joachim Salaverri S.J., *Sacrae Theologiae Summa IB*, (1956; translated by Kenneth Baker S.J., 2015), p441.

- 7 Pope Pius IX, *Singulari Quadem*, (1854).
- 8 Aelred Graham O.S.B, “The Church on Earth”,*The Teaching of the Catholic Church*,ed. Canon George Smith, (2nd edition, London, 1952), p701.
- 9 Berry,*Church of Christ*,p36.
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- 11 First Vatican Council, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith”, 24 April 1870.
- 12 Mgr Canon E. Myers, “The Mystical Body of Christ”,*The Teaching of the Catholic Church*,ed. Canon George Smith, (2nd edition, London, 1952), p662.
- 13 Berry,*Church of Christ*,p37.
- 14 Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi* (1943), No. 22.
- 15 Mgr G.Van Noort,*Dogmatic Theology Volume II: Christ’s Church*,No. 2.
- 16 Van Noort,*Christ’s Church*,No. 12.

Why every Catholic must be subject to Christ as Priest, Prophet, and King

There is a threefold authority in the Church – that of sanctifying, teaching, and governing. Members of the Church must be subject to this threefold authority of Jesus Christ in order to become, and remain, members of the Catholic Church.

[This includes bishops and the pope – rp]



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Matthew McCusker

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*(LifeSiteNews) — Below is Part II in a series on exploring issues of crucial importance for understanding the crisis in the Catholic Church and how to present it. **Part I** can be read [here](#).*

Membership of the Church, Part II: Authority

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY The members of the Church

- Members of the Church are those who (i) have received the sacrament of baptism, (ii) publicly profess the Catholic faith and, (iii) are subject to the lawful authority of the Church.

The relationship between membership and authority

- Baptism incorporates a person as a member the Church. To understand why public heresy and schism cause a person to lose this membership, while other grave sins do not, it is necessary to understand the nature of authority in the Church.
- Every society, wrote Aristotle, “is established with a view to some good; for mankind always acts in order to obtain that which they think good.”¹
- The Church was established for the common good of all mankind, with reference to man’s supernatural end.
- Every society consists of (i) its members – the material element, and (ii) the union of their wills to a common end – the formal element.²
- Without members, no society would exist. Equally, if members did not share a common end, they would not be a society but a disparate collection of individuals.
- Authority is necessary to direct members of society towards their common end. Therefore, all members must obey the authority that governs their society.

Authority: the formal element of membership of the Church

- Jesus Christ, through the Roman Pontiff and the college of bishops, exercises a threefold ministry. As Priest he offers public worship, especially the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and celebrates the other sacraments; as Prophet he teaches infallibly the true doctrine of the Church, and as King he

exercises jurisdiction over the baptized in order to lead them to Heaven.

- There is therefore a threefold authority in the Church – that of sanctifying, teaching, and governing.
- Members of the Church must be subject to this threefold authority of Jesus Christ in order to become, and remain, members of the Catholic Church.
- This threefold submission consists of (i) receiving the sacrament of baptism, (ii) publicly professing the Catholic faith, and (iii) publicly submitting to the lawful authority of the Church.
- Those who refuse this threefold submission are not members of the Catholic Church.

FULL TEXT

Agreement and union of minds is the necessary foundation of this perfect concord amongst men, from which concurrence of wills and similarity of action are the natural results. Wherefore, in His divine wisdom, He ordained in His Church Unity of Faith; a virtue which is the first of those bonds which unite man to God, and whence we receive the name of the faithful- “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph. iv., 5). That is, as there is one Lord and one baptism, so should all Christians, without exception, have but one faith. – Pope Leo XIII, *Satis Cognitum*, No. 6.

The members of the Church

Members of the Church **are** those who:

1. Have received the sacrament of baptism
2. Publicly profess the Catholic faith
3. Are subject to the lawful authority of the Church.

The following are therefore **not** members of the Church:

1. The non-baptized
2. Public heretics
3. Public schismatics or those subject to perfect excommunication.

In his encyclical letter *Mystici Corporis Christi*, Pope Pius XII summarized this doctrine as follows:

Actually, only those are to be included as members of the Church who have been baptized and profess the true faith, and who have not been so unfortunate as to separate themselves from the unity of the Body, or been excluded by legitimate authority for grave faults committed.³

The Catechism of the Council of Trent expressed the same doctrine in these terms:

Hence there are but three classes of persons excluded from the Church's pale: infidels, heretics and schismatics, and excommunicated persons.

Infidels are outside the Church because they never belonged to, and never knew the Church, and were never made partakers of any of her Sacraments.

Heretics and schismatics are excluded from the Church, because they have separated from her and belong to her only as deserters belong to the army from which they have deserted. It is not, however, to be denied that they are still subject to the jurisdiction of the Church, inasmuch as they may be called before her tribunals, punished and anathematized.

Finally, **excommunicated** persons are not members of the Church, because they have been cut off by her sentence from the number of her children and belong not to her communion until they repent.⁴

The nature and ends of a society

The Catholic Church is:

“The society of men who, by their profession of the same faith, and by their partaking of the same sacraments, make up, under the rule of apostolic pastors and their head, the kingdom of Christ on earth.”⁵

It is **baptism** which, as the Council of Florence taught, **“holds the first place among all the sacraments, for it is the gate of the spiritual life; through it we become members of Christ and of the body of the church.”⁶**

Baptism incorporates a person as a member of the Church, but, as stated above, **this membership can be lost by public heresy and public schism.** In this paper we will consider the relationship between these conditions of membership and the nature of authority in the Church. Then, in the papers that follow, we will proceed to examine each of the conditions of membership in turn.

To understand why public heresy and public schism separate a person from membership of the Church we must first ascertain the true nature of a society. This will provide us with the correct framework within which we can understand why public heresy and public schism are incompatible with membership of the Catholic Church, while other grave sins are not.

Every society, wrote Aristotle, “is established with a view to some good; for mankind always acts in order to obtain that which they think good.”⁷

For example, the family has as its end the procreation and education of children; a hospital, the care of the sick; a seminary, the formation of priests; and so on.

There are two, and only two, perfect societies, which possess all the means necessary to guide their members to their common end. These are the Church and the State.

The State acts for the common good of its particular community, with reference to man’s natural end. **The Church acts for the common good of all mankind, with reference to man’s **supernatural** end.**

Every society consists of (i) its members – the material element, and (ii) the union of their wills to a common end – the formal element.⁸

Clearly without members, no society would have existence, but it should be equally clear that without a shared end members would not form one society together, rather they would be a disparate group of individuals. Therefore, no one who rejects the formal element – the common end of a society – can form part of the material element – i.e., be a member of that society.

To achieve its purpose a society must be directed towards its common end by those in authority. Without authority to direct its common efforts a society would soon disintegrate into anarchy and chaos.

Therefore, in all societies there is a division between those who exercise authority, and those who obey authority. And in all societies beyond the extremely simple there are those who both command inferiors while obeying their own superiors i.e. there is a hierarchy.

It should be clear therefore that it is authority that directs the wills of the members (the material element) towards their common end (the formal element), therefore “practically speaking, authority is the formal element of every society since it is **authority that preserves and strengthens all the bonds by which members are held together.**”⁹

Therefore, a member must submit to be directed towards the common end of a society by **legitimate authority** if they are to remain members of a given society.

As theologian Father Sylvester Berry explained:

Every member of a society must accept its end and aims according to his ability, and he must strive, at least in some degree, to realize those aims. He that rejects the purposes of a society thereby rejects the society itself; he can neither become a member, nor remain one if already received into the society.¹⁰

This can be applied to the perfect society that is the Catholic Church as follows:

The members of the Church constitute its material cause; the authority by which their union into a society is preserved and directed, may be considered the formal cause. The material cause of a society is either proximate or remote: the former consists of **those who actually compose the society**; the latter, **those eligible for membership. The whole human race constitutes the remote matter for the Church, since it was established for the salvation of all men, regardless of race, color or condition.** The proximate matter of the Church consists of those who fulfil; the necessary conditions of membership and thereby become constituent parts of her organization.¹¹

Authority: the formal element of membership of the Church

In the section above it has been explained that authority is a necessary constituting element of the Catholic Church, in order that members of the Church can be directed towards their final end, which is the salvation of their souls.

Since Pentecost Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Divine Head of the Church, has through His Vicar, the Roman Pontiff, and through the college of bishops in union with him, exercised the threefold ministry of Priest, Prophet, and King. As **Priest** he offers public worship, especially the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and celebrates the other sacraments; as **Prophet** he teaches infallibly the true doctrine of the Church, and as **King** he exercises jurisdiction over the baptized in order to lead them to Heaven.

Members of the Church must be subject to this threefold authority of Jesus Christ – exercised by the ecclesiastical

hierarchy – in order to become, and remain, members of the Catholic Church.

Dr. Ludwig Ott explained:

According to [the encyclical letter *Mystics Corporis Christi*] **three conditions are required for membership of the Church: a) The valid reception of the Sacrament of Baptism. b) The profession of the true Faith. c) Participation in the Communion of the Church.** By the fulfillment of these three conditions one subjects oneself to the threefold office of the Church, the sacerdotal office (Baptism), the teaching office (Confession of Faith), and the pastoral office (obedience to Church authority).¹²

He continued:

As the three powers perpetuated in these offices... constitute the unity and the visibility of the Church, subjection to each and all of these powers, is a condition for membership of the Church.¹³

And with reference to the condition of profession of the true faith he stated:

The Confession of the true Faith and the adherence to the communion of the Church are for adults the subjective conditions for the achievement and the unhindered perpetuation of their membership of the Church which is initiated by baptism.¹⁴

And he continues by affirming:

That those who dissociate themselves from the Faith and from the communion of the Church, cease to be members of the Church, is the general conviction of Tradition.¹⁵

And in the same manner Fr. Berry writes:

The practice of the Christian religion, which consists in the external profession of Christian faith, is the proximate end to be obtained in the Church. Therefore, external profession of faith is an essential condition for membership. Moreover, the Church must be one in the external profession of faith, consequently he

that severs this bond of unity is separated from the body of the Church, i.e. he ceases to be a member.¹⁶

This is because:

The very existence of a society depends upon the subjection of its members to authority; therefore he that rejects the authority of a society, rejects the society itself and ceases to be a member. Neither can the end of a society be realized unless the members be directed by its authority in their common endeavors to that end. Therefore, rejecting the authority of a society is tantamount to rejecting its ends and aims, which is to reject the society itself. Consequently no one can be a member of any society unless he submits to its authority according to his ability. Furthermore, in regard to the Church, there must be unity in the external profession of the true faith, which Christ committed to the teaching office of the Church. Therefore, the profession of faith necessary for membership in the Church practically resolves itself into submission to her teaching authority.¹⁷

In summary:

1. The formal cause of membership of the Catholic Church is the authority of the ecclesiastical hierarchy
2. There is a threefold authority in the Church – that of teaching, sanctifying, and governing
3. Submission to this threefold teaching authority of the Church is a necessary condition for membership
4. This threefold submission consists of (i) receiving the sacrament of baptism, (ii) publicly professing the Catholic faith, and (iii) publicly submitting to the lawful authority of the Church
5. Those who refuse this threefold submission are not members of the Catholic Church.

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6. Mgr G. Van Noort, Dogmatic Theology Volume II: Christ's Church, (6th edition, 1957, trans. Castelot & Murphy), p xxvi.
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9. Berry, Church of Christ, p6.
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11. Berry, Church of Christ, p125-26.
12. Berry, Church of Christ, p120.
13. Dr Ludwig Ott, The Fundamentals of the Catholic Dogma, p309-11.
14. Ott, Fundamentals, p309-11.
15. Ott, Fundamentals, p309-11.
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17. Berry, Church of Christ, p126.
18. Berry, Church of Christ, p126.

Why baptism is necessary to be a true member of the Catholic Church

Those who appear to hold the highest offices in the Church are openly spreading heresy and promoting grave sin. Catholics are asking how this is possible. It is only by examining the authentic teachings that we will find the answers.



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Matthew McCusker

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*(LifeSiteNews) — This is the third part of our series on membership of the Church. It examines who the members of the Church are, and who they are not. **Part I** can be read [here](#) and **Part II** can be read [here](#).*

Why is this question so important today?

Because the Catholic Church is in crisis.

Those who appear to hold the highest offices in the Church — including the papacy itself — are openly spreading heresy and promoting grave sin.

Catholics are asking how this is possible.

It is only by examining the authentic teachings of the Catholic Church that we will find the answers.

One approach is to ask “who are the members of the Church?” and “when does somebody cease to be a Catholic?”

This series presents the answers to these questions as they are found in the standard works of Catholic theologians working under the guidance and supervision of the teaching authority of the Church.

We offer it as a step towards the resolution of the crisis in the Catholic Church but, most of all, as an act of love for the Church, so that she may be vindicated by the clarity of her own doctrine.

We show that there is no need for doubt or despair. However dark the times may be, when we turn to the treasures of the Church’s theological tradition, we will find the answers that we need. There is never a need to doubt the divine credentials of the Catholic Church:

Does she not show as glorious in our sight as a creature, as her God does as the Creator?... Has she not notes far more than sufficient for the purpose of convincing you? She takes her rise from the very coming of Christ, and receives her charter, as also her very form and mission, from His mouth. ‘Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father who is in heaven. And I say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it... Coming to you then from the very time of the Apostles, spreading out into all lands, triumphing over a thousand revolutions, exhibiting so awful a unity, glorying in so mysterious a vitality, so majestic, so imperturbable, so bold, so saintly, so sublime, so beautiful, O ye sons of men, can ye doubt that she is the Divine Messenger for whom you seek?’ [1]

May this series make the undivided unity of the Catholic Church clear for all to see!

Part I discusses the perpetual visibility of the Church

Part II examines the threefold authority exercised by her Divine Head, Jesus Christ

In this third part we examine the sacrament of baptism, which is the gateway to membership of the Church and to eternal life.

Membership of the Church III: Baptism

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The members of the Church

Members of the Church are those who:

1. Have received the sacrament of baptism
2. Publicly profess the Catholic faith
3. Are subject to the lawful authority of the Church.

Condition 1 – Baptism

Baptism is the external visible rite by which a person is incorporated into the Catholic Church. A visible body must have a visible rite by which membership can be visibly ascertained.

This initiatory rite of baptism is in and of itself both *necessary* and *sufficient* to constitute a person a member of the Catholic Church. [2]

After a person has validly received the sacrament of baptism they are a member of the Catholic Church for as long “the bonds of union with the Church have not been broken either by heresy or schism or excommunication.”[3]

A distinction must be drawn between those who are *members* of the Church, those who are *subject* to her, and those who are neither members nor subjects but are rather *bound* to join her.

All members of the Church are also subjects of the Church. However, not all subjects of the Church are members.

Those are subjects without being members of the Church who, after becoming members through baptism, departed from her visible unity through public heresy or public schism or were excluded from her unity by sentence of perfect excommunication by legitimate ecclesiastical authority.

The necessity of being able to discern who are members of the visible Church is such that some theologians have posited that even those who are invalidly baptized ought to be considered members, if the fact of invalidity were due to the secret withholding of the proper intention by the priest.

Membership of the Church III: Baptism

FULL TEXT

“For as the body is one, and hath many members; and all the members of the body, whereas they are many, yet are one body, so also is Christ. For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether bond or free; and in one Spirit we have all been made to drink.” (1 Cor 12: 12-13)

The members of the Church

Members of the Church **are** those who:

1. Have received the sacrament of baptism
2. Publicly profess the Catholic faith
3. Are subject to the lawful authority of the Church.

The following are therefore **not** members of the Church:

1. The non-baptized
2. Public heretics
3. Public schismatics or those subject to perfect excommunication.

In his encyclical letter *Mystici Corporis Christi*, Pope Pius XII summarized this doctrine as follows:

Actually, only those are to be included as members of the Church who have been baptized and profess the true faith, and who have not been so unfortunate as to separate themselves from the unity of the Body, or been excluded by legitimate authority for grave faults committed.[4]

The Catechism of the Council of Trent expressed the same doctrine in these terms:

Hence there are but three classes of persons excluded from the Church's pale: infidels, heretics and schismatics, and excommunicated persons.

Infidels are outside the Church because they never belonged to, and never knew the Church, and were never made partakers of any of her Sacraments.

Heretics and schismatics are excluded from the Church, because they have separated from her and belong to her only as deserters belong to the army from which they have deserted. It is not, however, to be denied that they are still subject to the jurisdiction of the Church, inasmuch as they may be called before her tribunals, punished and anathematized.

Finally, excommunicated persons are not members of the Church, because they have been cut off by her sentence from the number of her children and belong not to her communion until they repent.[5]

In this paper we consider the first of these conditions, namely, the reception of baptism.

Condition 1: Baptism

Baptism is one of the seven sacraments. It is “the outward washing of the body done together with the prescribed form of words.”

The *Catechism of the Council of Trent* outlines the following effects of baptism:

- remission of sin, both original and actual
- remission of all temporal punishment due to sin
- infusion of sanctifying grace
- infusion of the gifts of the Holy Ghost
- reception of an indelible character
- incorporation into the Catholic Church
- opening the gates of heaven, which had been closed by original sin.

In this paper we will focus on the effect of incorporation of the baptized person into the Catholic Church.

The Council of Florence taught:

Holy baptism holds the first place among all the sacraments, for it is the gate of the spiritual life; through it we become members of Christ and of the body of the church.[6]

St. Thomas Aquinas reflected:

By Baptism man is born again unto the spiritual life, which is proper to the faithful of Christ, as the Apostle says (Galatians 2:20): ‘And that I live now in the flesh; I live in the faith of the Son of God.’ Now life is only in those members that are united to the head, from which they derive sense and movement. And therefore it follows of necessity that by Baptism man is incorporated in Christ, as one of His members. Again, just as the members derive sense and movement from the material head, so from their spiritual Head, i.e. Christ, do His members derive spiritual sense consisting in the knowledge of truth, and spiritual movement which results from the instinct of grace.[7]

In his encyclical letter *Mystici Corporis Christi*, Pope Pius XII affirmed:

The Savior of mankind out of His infinite goodness has provided in a wonderful way for His Mystical Body, endowing it with the Sacraments, so that, as though by an uninterrupted series of graces, its members should be sustained from birth to death, and that generous provision might be made for the social needs of the Church. Through the waters of Baptism those who are born into this world dead in sin are not only born again and made members of the Church but being stamped with a spiritual seal they become able and fit to receive the other sacraments.[8]

When Our Lord founded the Church:

He determined that through Baptism those who should believe would be incorporated in the Body of the Church.[9]

Baptism – an external rite of initiation into a visible society

The Catholic Church is a visible society. She is always identifiable by men of good will through her four marks of unity, sanctity, catholicity and apostolicity. These marks are discernible by the senses. If the Church is a visible society then her members too must be visible. A Church whose members could not be generally discerned, after the use of reasonable diligence, could not be called visible. This is explained in more detail in the first paper in this series.

Baptism is the external visible rite by which a person is incorporated into the visible body which is the Catholic Church.

As theologian Father Francisco Sola, S.J. explained:

The Church is a visible society. But in every visible society (especially religious) there is customarily some external rite (taken at least in a broad sense) to manifest one's admission and entrance into that society. Therefore it was necessary that Christ

also, when he instituted his visible religious society, should establish some external rite, to make clear one's entrance into his society.[10]

This initiatory rite of baptism is in and of itself both *necessary* and *sufficient* to constitute a person a member of the Catholic Church.[11]

After a person has validly received the sacrament of baptism they are a member of the Catholic Church for as long as “the bonds of union with the Church have not been broken either by heresy or schism or excommunication.”[12]

Here we must make a very important distinction between being a *subject of the Church* and a *member of the Church*.

The theologian Joachim Salaverri, in the *Sacrae Theologiae Summa*, defines the terms as follows:

A *subject* is said to be someone who is under the social power of another.

A *member* is... that which is united to some organic body as an integral part of it.[13]

Furthermore, we can distinguish a third category: those who are neither subjects or members of a society, but are bound to become such.

When applied to the Catholic Church we can divide mankind into three categories:

1. **“Those bound to enter the Church are those on whom Christ has placed an obligation to join his Church; such are all men on earth”[14]**
2. **“Subjects of the Church are those who are under the social power of the Church... Therefore, subjects of the Church are thought to be all those who have been baptized, even if they are heretics or schismatics or excommunicated persons who are to be shunned”[15]**

3. **“Members of the Church are those who are united to the body of the Church as an integral part.”[16]**

All members of the Church are also subjects of the Church. However, not all subjects of the Church are members.

Those are subjects without being members who, after becoming members of the Church through baptism, then departed from her visible unity through public heresy or public schism or were excluded from her unity by sentence of major excommunication by legitimate ecclesiastical authority.

In the succeeding papers of this series, we will examine in more detail the manner in which a person can depart from membership of the Church through public heresy or public schism.

However, to conclude this paper we will draw attention to an interesting theological debate which emphasizes the important relationship between the doctrine of perpetual visibility and the Church’s teaching on membership.

A further illustration of the relationship between visibility and membership

There have been theologians – including St. Robert Bellarmine – who put forward the argument that those who have received baptism invalidly due to a defect of intention should be considered as members of the Church. That is, in a situation where the visible rite of the Church was properly celebrated, but the minister, known only to himself, withheld the proper intention.

The contrary opinion, that valid baptism is essential for membership, has come to be considered a *conclusion certain in theology* or at least *more probable*. [17]

Salaverri explains that “by an invalid Baptism, although properly conferred, [i.e. invalid due only to defect of intention] persons can be constituted members of the Church only putatively and apparently, but not effectively and really.”[18]

This is because:

[I]n order to constitute members of the Church in reality... that Baptism is required whereby persons are rendered capable of participating in the specific and principal social goods of the Church, which are the Sacraments. But only by a valid Baptism are persons rendered capable of participating in such social goods. [19]

Furthermore:

[I]n order to constitute members of the Body of the Church really what is required, according to Scripture and the understanding of the Church, is that Baptism, whereby really the regeneration and rebirth take place by which persons truly are united with Christ and are incorporated into him as the Head of Body of the Church. Therefore **valid Baptism is required in order really to constitute members of the Body of the Church.**[20]

However, some theologians held the contrary view because of the necessity of the members of the Church being generally visible. They were prepared to consider the possibility that a person on whom the baptismal rite had been visibly but invalidly conferred (due to deliberate intention of the minister) might be a member of the Church because the external rite had visibly taken place and it was impossible for other members of the Church to know that this person was not actually baptized.

In other words, they took the position that a person who appeared in every external respect (apparent baptism, public profession of the faith and lawful obedience to the hierarchy) to be a member of the Catholic Church, must of necessity actually be a member of that same Church.

Though the opinion may be false, the debate itself is instructive because it draws attention to the importance of external visible characteristics, rather than internal dispositions, for the identification of the members of the Catholic Church.

This is of crucial importance when considering the status of public heretics and public schismatics, as we will see in the final two papers.

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The Grave Consequences of the Church's Great "Emphasis Shift"

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Deadly Indifference: How the Church Lost Her Mission, and How We Can Reclaim It

By Eric Sammons

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Extra ecclesiam nulla salus. “Outside of the Church there is no salvation.” The vast majority of ordinary Catholics today have never heard this and, if they were to, they would likely reject it and the idea behind it. Yet this phrase, first attributed to St. Cyprian of Carthage, a third-century Church Father, has been a governing principle of the Church from the very beginning. Many Church Fathers and theologians have taught the idea over the centuries, and it has been enshrined in Church councils (“**There is indeed one universal church of the faithful, outside of which nobody at all is saved,**” *Lateran IV, 1215*), papal teachings (“It is a perfectly well known Catholic dogma that no one can be saved outside the Catholic Church,” Pope Pius IX, *Quanto Conficiamur Moerore*, 1863), and Church statements (“Among those things which the Church has always preached and will never cease to preach is contained also in that infallible statement by which we are taught that there is no salvation outside the Church,” Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, *Suprema Haec Sacra*, 1949). How did we get from clarity and certainty on this central point to the muddledness that prevails today, and what are the consequences of this change?

The answer is found in the very title of Eric Sammons’s *Deadly Indifference*. Following in the footsteps of earlier works on the subject, from Ralph Martin’s *Will Many Be Saved?* (2012) to Bishop Athanasius Schneider’s *Christus Vincet* (2019), Sammons offers an excellent examination of the consequences of the Church’s recent teaching about salvation. In short: It has led to widespread

religious indifference among the faithful, the notion that all religions are equally capable of leading people to Heaven.

While many bishops and priests talk about how “vibrant” and “dynamic” their dioceses and parishes are, no one who is reading this can seriously believe them. Sammons, editor-in-chief of CrisisMagazine.com, opens his book with statistic after statistic, all of which point to decline rather than growth. When the second-largest religious group in America is “former Catholics,” it should be obvious that things are bad and getting worse. What happened to put us here? There are many reasons, but for Sammons, one of the major ones is the way the Church has chosen to downplay the doctrine of extra ecclesiam nulla salus from the era of the Second Vatican Council to the present. In this timeframe, **a sense of religious pluralism has arisen within the Church, leading Catholics to think there is no one true Church, that many or all religions are equally valid, and that there are numerous paths to attaining eternal salvation. The result is a widespread sense of religious indifference. If all religions are the same, why be Catholic? Indeed, why be anything at all?**

The problem with the religious indifference spawned by religious toleration is that it is both non-scriptural and ahistorical. Sammons reminds readers that a main theme of the Old Testament is the Jews’ failure to adhere to the First Commandment. When things go wrong for the Jews in the Bible, it is due to their

failure to worship Yahweh alone. Similarly, a main theme of the New Testament is Jesus' message that He is the only way to salvation. Religious pluralism is most emphatically not endorsed by either the Old or New Testament, nor was it endorsed by the Church through the ages.

True, the Church has taught that there are other ways to salvation besides sacramental Baptism; there is also baptism of blood and baptism of desire. The Church rightly condemned the mid-20th-century followers of Fr. Leonard Feeney, who insisted that anyone who was not formally baptized in the Church could not be saved. And from the days of St. Thomas Aquinas onward, the Church has insisted that those who suffer “invincible ignorance” of the faith can still be saved, as long as they obey the precepts of the natural law, follow God, and lead virtuous lives. However, Sammons notes that the Church has also always taught that “although it is possible for a non-Catholic to be saved, Catholics are discouraged from believing it is probable that non-Catholics will be saved. Living a virtuous and dutiful life and keeping the precepts of the natural law is incredibly difficult for a Catholic who has access to the sacraments; how much more so for the pagan who does not!”

So, what happened? Sammons uses the term “**Emphasis Shift**” to describe it. **The Church hasn't actually changed her teaching, but she has changed its emphasis.** For Sammons, the chief culprit was Vatican II, or rather, the way in which the ideas of certain theologians like Karl Rahner, who advanced the

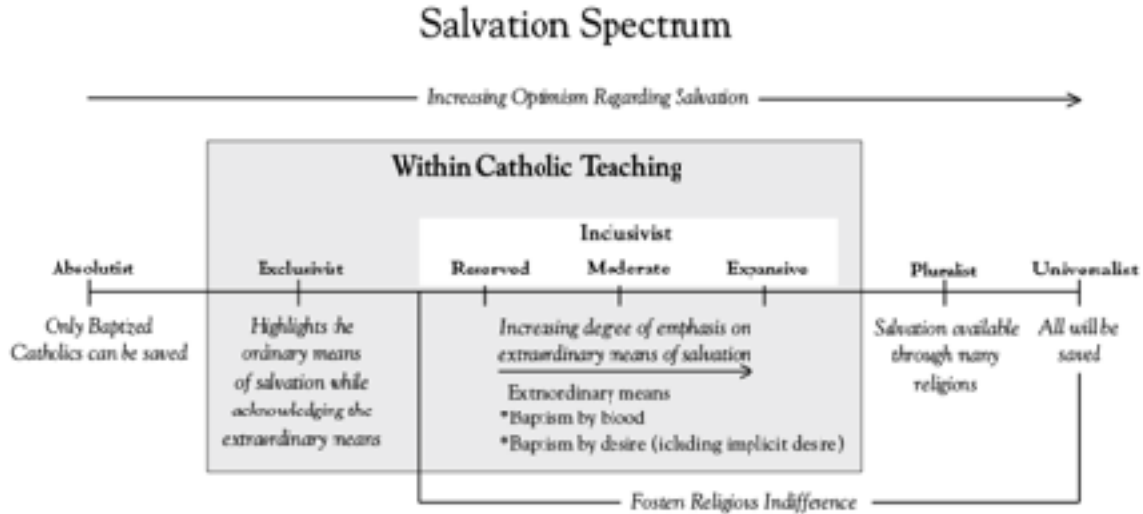
notion of the “anonymous Christian” (i.e., a person who could obtain the grace of God and attain salvation outside formal Christianity), were introduced into the Council documents. The result was a concerted program of de-emphasizing the uniqueness and catholicity of the Church, in hopes of making her more appealing to non-Catholics. **Whereas the Church once engaged in proclaiming Christ and His message, now she engages in “dialogue.” From stressing her uniqueness, she now acts as if she were just one of many other churches. And she has gone from warning against errors in other religions to promoting her commonalities with them.** Whereas the Church used to condemn ecumenism as error, after Vatican II she created formal offices devoted to it.

Unfortunately for all concerned, this great Emphasis Shift had other unintended consequences: the collapse of mission work, **the widespread exodus of members from the Church, apathy among those who remain, and the triumph of what Sammons calls “the Church of Beige,” a bland, lowest-common-denominator Catholicism that strives to be attractive by not being distinctive or controversial.** The motivating factor for the past few popes to lead us down this road was laudable enough: the experience of the destructive wars of the 20th century and a concomitant desire for world peace. But the consequences have been to stress peace over everything else, which means that the Church has become obsessively focused on a this-worldly goal (peace), rather than an otherworldly goal (salvation).

The Church has thus lost sight of her primary mission and become too worldly — and too beige.

As a way of understanding all this, Sammons has created a handy chart he calls the “Salvation Spectrum,” which shows the range of beliefs on salvation. It goes from **Absolutist (believes only baptized Catholics can be saved)** to **Exclusivist (admits to extraordinary means of salvation but only focuses on ordinary ones)** to **Inclusivist (increasingly focuses on extraordinary means of salvation)** to **Pluralist (believes salvation is possible through many religions)** and, finally, to **Universalist (believes all human beings are saved)**. Of these, only the **Exclusivist and Inclusivist are actually Catholic; the other three are not.**

Of the two that are Catholic, the Exclusivist view prevailed in the Church until Vatican II, with the Inclusivist position prevailing ever since. Sammons notes that there are gradations within the Inclusivist view, which he attempts to clarify. For example, he categorizes Pope Benedict XVI as a **Reserved Inclusivist**; Pope St. John Paul II, with his strong praise of other religions and the Assisi World Day of Prayer, as a **Moderate Inclusivist**; and Pope Francis, with his effusive praise of other religions and signing of the Abu Dhabi declaration in 2019, as an **Expansive Inclusivist**. The problem with Inclusivism is that it shades imperceptibly into Pluralism and even Universalism, no matter what its adherents intend. As a result, while our most recent popes are not actually Pluralists, a



Source: "Deadly Indifference" by Eric Sammons

misunderstanding of their teachings has caused countless Catholics to deviate into **Pluralism**. And **Pluralism, as we have seen, leads to indifference.**

Even the much-touted New Evangelization of John Paul II is a product, not a repudiation, of the great Emphasis Shift, stressing as it does a non-confrontational approach, focusing on fallen-away Catholics rather than other Christians (let alone non-Christians), and **downplaying eternal consequences like salvation and damnation. The New Evangelization has, frankly, been mostly a failure.** Although appreciating his efforts, Sammons is not sparing in his critique of Bishop Robert Barron, perhaps the most visible American face of the New Evangelization. Sammons cites a couple videos in which Barron seems to go out of his way not to encourage a Protestant and a Jew to become Catholic! When the doyen of the New Evangelization can't provide

reasons for people to convert to Catholicism, we have a real problem.

What is to be done? In Sammons's estimation, **we should admit that what we have been doing isn't working and go back to what does work. That means doing three things.**

First, we need to recover the proper Catholic teaching on the nature of salvation, abandon Inclusivism, and return to the traditional position of Exclusivism. One of the most important ways of doing this is to focus not on possibilities but on realities. We shouldn't focus on what God might or might not do to save nonbelievers, but instead focus on the basics of what God has commanded us believers to do. Sammons's words on the matter are worth reproducing here in full:

So the important question is not, "Can God save non-Catholics?" The important question is, "What has God asked us to do to be saved?" He has commanded us to be baptized by water and be members of His Church in order to be saved. Therefore, we need to obey His command and leave the extraordinary means to His divine mercy and judgment. **Let's shift the emphasis back to the ordinary means and stop treating the extraordinary means as ordinary.**

In other words, **we need another Emphasis Shift back to what the Church traditionally believed.** Those who feel queasy about such a prospect, with visions of the Spanish Inquisition dancing in their heads, must remember that returning to Exclusivism does not mean being religiously intolerant. Religious toleration has long

been a part of Catholic teaching. But all religions are not equal and should not be treated as such, and toleration does not equate to promotion. The ultimate goal is not toleration but evangelization and conversion.

Second, we need to acknowledge that the New Evangelization has failed and we need to return to the Old Evangelization. (Not coincidentally, Sammons, who has a long background and extensive experience in parish and diocesan evangelization, wrote an earlier book on this very subject.) **We need to proclaim the Gospel and abandon the fruitless practice of incessant, endless dialogue.** What have decades of dialogue achieved, anyway? What is the goal of all this dialogue? There doesn't seem to be one.

When it comes to ecumenical efforts, the ultimate goal of the Catholic Church is a shared life in the sacraments. Sadly, the only non-Catholic group with whom we share that goal is Orthodoxy, so dialogue with the Orthodox is possible. But there is no way there can be a meaningful union of Catholicism and, say, Methodism. It is far better for the Church to abandon vain hopes of union with Methodism and instead focus on converting individual Methodists. This does not mean abandoning contact with other Christian groups or other religions. But it is instructive to consider that far more substantive results have come from Christians working together in something like the pro-life movement than from any official Church-sponsored ecumenical effort. Indeed, it was Sammons's experiences as a Protestant working in the pro-life

movement that brought him into contact with committed, zealous Catholics and led to his conversion.

Third, we need a renewal of parish life. Parishes do a lot of different things these days — in Sammons’s estimation, perhaps too much. If a parish-sponsored softball league leads to parents skipping Mass on Sundays to get their kids to the games, that’s a problem. As with the Church as a whole, each parish needs to consider its primary mission: the salvation of souls. Parish resources are finite, and **every parish needs to evaluate its activities and ask itself, “Does this contribute to the salvation of souls?”** If the answer is “no,” the parish should quit doing it. Along with this approach goes the idea of not soft-pedaling the hard teachings of the Church, like the existence of Hell and the possibility of eternal damnation. Moreover, the very “vibe” of parishes needs to change, to get us away from the Church of Beige and back to being the Catholic Church. Having priests celebrate Mass ad orientem would be a good start, as would abandoning the glut of wretched music that is not even Christian, let alone Catholic. Also, there ought to be more occasions for silence during worship.

Sammons’s proposals would no doubt be welcomed by most readers of this magazine. All the same, putting his proposals into practice would mean opposing aspects of the Second Vatican Council, as well as some of the teachings of John Paul II, Benedict XVI, Francis, and Bishop Barron. Good luck with that.

A number of perceptive people have concluded that the Church is in the middle of one of the epochal crises she faces every 500 years or so, a mess as bad as the one at the time of the Protestant Reformation. It is worth noting that the primary impetus for reform back then was not the hierarchy but the laity, with popes and bishops among the last to realize a serious problem was afoot. That situation does not seem all that different from the one we are in today.