



An Invitation to Explore Catholicism Freely as a Modern Catholic Christian

Dear fellow Catholic explorer of God's love,

Ave Maria!

“Grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord” (II Peter 1:2, NRSVCE). These words of St. Peter, who is often honored as the first bishop of Rome, remind us our calling, as Catholics, includes the blessing and encouragement, of our faith ancestors, to pursue knowledge and understanding of God. A healthy and honest exploration of your Christian faith will help you “present yourself to God as one approved by him...rightly explaining the word of truth” (II Tim. 2:15). I offer you this wise saying from St. Nectarios of Aegina, 1846-1920, a Greek Orthodox bishop: “Love should never be sacrificed for the sake of some dogmatic difference.” St. Nectarios, who ordained women to the diaconate despite the norms of his day, reminds us that walking in God's merciful love must be our first priority, and, only then, can we begin to understand the great mystery of our Catholic faith and its dogma.

Attached you will find several sources to begin an independent study of Catholicism and its many expressions. Most categories of suggested readings come from one of the many branches, jurisdictions, or expressions of the “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.” Catholic, in Greek, means “according to the whole” or “universal.” Each of these expressions of Catholic Christianity can trace their heritage and foundational beliefs to the earliest days of the Church and the living Tradition and lineage of the Apostles (Apostolic Succession). Each of these vines or branches of Catholicism also celebrate the Holy Mass, or Divine Liturgy, beseeching the Holy Spirit to transform gifts of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, a sacrifice of thanksgiving (Eucharist).

Christianity is inherently a diverse religion as St. Paul tells us: “Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many” (I Cor. 12:12). Therefore, it is not surprising that over the last two millennia the Body of Christ, in the Church Catholic, has often emphasized different aspects of the faith and related concerns, based on its context, location, scientific understanding (or lack thereof), trials of life, fears, triumphs, and surrounding politics. Nevertheless, all Catholics find their united faith in the person of Jesus Christ and his sacramental action on Earth. Simply put, to be Catholic is

to universally declare “Christ is Lord,” (1 Cor. 1:2; 12:3) and to follow in the sacramental tradition and Biblical writing of Jesus’ earliest followers and apostles (II Thess. 2:15, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #78, 80).

As you study the great diversity of thought within Catholicism, keep in mind that any catechism or instructional text is a human attempt to explain the unexplainable. The Church, her theologians, and each of us “now...see in a mirror, dimly” (1 Cor. 13:12). Hence, we should approach the study of our faith with humility and an openness to discern “what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (Rev. 2:29), accepting that our insight is always limited by our context and experience. We must also be careful to judge all theological discourse against the Greatest Commandment of Jesus Christ, as first explicated in the Old Testament, to love God, self, and neighbor (Matt. 22:35-40, Deut. 6:4-5, Lev. 19:17-18).

Contrary to what many presuppose, Catholicism isn’t a tidy package of absolute beliefs and a fool-proof, or error-free, method to practice Christianity. Instead, to be faithfully Catholic is to allow yourself to discern the voice of God and act, to the best of your ability and well-formed conscience, within the commands of Christ and the tradition of the Church in order to more fully encourage, make room for, and participate in God’s kingdom “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10).

In fact, the Roman Catholic published *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 25, states: “The whole concern of doctrine and its teaching must be directed to the love that never ends.” Divine Love, in the person of Jesus Christ, shared freely with the world must be of our primary concern in relation to our doctrinal beliefs. Any less is to discredit the inclusive, salvific work of Christ, in our world, and to exalt ourselves above the Holy One who taught us: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn. 15:3). Our doctrinal beliefs should lead the universal Church toward humility, inclusivity, and extravagant love for “there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

Chiefly, the majority of all Catholics, whether Orthodox, Roman, Old, Independent, or other autocephalous (independently governed) jurisdictions, agree on one timeless doctrinal statement: the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (325 & 381AD). The Creed is included as a reminder that our pursuit of doctrine should never come at the expense of our core faith values found in the creative work of God through Earth’s creation, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Church. The Creed is the foundational document of the Church, predating the authoritative canonical listing of Scripture. Hence, all doctrinal exploration is built upon the person of Jesus Christ as understood in the Creed. In our pursuit of diverse and inclusive Catholicism, let us cherish the Creed and find common ground to work together!

Vatican II (1962-65), a Roman Catholic general council but largely ecumenical in scope, fittingly proclaimed in the document *Dignitatis Humanae*: “[Humanity] has the right to act in conscience and in freedom so as personally to make moral decisions. He must not be forced to act

contrary to his conscience. Nor must he be prevented from acting according to his conscience, especially in religious matters” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1782). Thanks be to God for our freedom in Christ (II Cor. 3:17). As you study Catholicism and its varied perspective and beliefs, both positive and negative, never lose sight of the Creed’s core liberating belief: *Jesus is Lord!*

Remember, no matter our differences in theological opinion: all Catholics are truly united by our Baptism and shared Eucharistic Bread (I Cor. 10:17), the Body and Blood of Christ, offered upon sacramental altars around the world. Our love of Christ, the Church, and others compels us to freely give the Blessed Sacrament to all who wish to “taste and see the Lord is good” (Ps. 34:8). May we never forget to see Christ, the Head of the Church, in each person we meet, including our Catholic brothers and sisters whom we may sometimes disagree with, in order “that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another” (I Cor. 12:25).

There is no room in our Catholic journey for a lack of compassion for others. We must never sacrifice love of one another or care for the least of these because of doctrinal differences found within Catholicism (Jam. 1:27). Let us heed the instruction of St. Nectarios and remember these Scriptural words of warning from St. John, the Theologian: “Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love” (I Jn. 4:8).

You servant and brother in Christ,

The Reverend Father Daniel C. Storrs, MA, SoM
priest@holynamemary.org

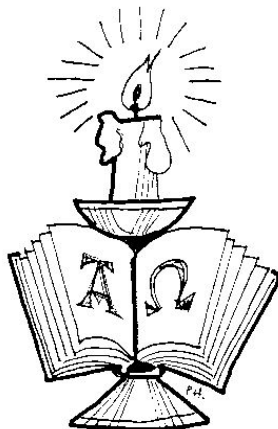
Holy Name of Mary Catholic Chapel, Austin, Texas, Pastor

**“In order that they may fulfill their function,
let it be recognized that all the faithful,
whether clerics or laity,
possess a lawful freedom of inquiry,
freedom of thought and of expressing their mind
with humility and fortitude
in those matters on which they enjoy competence.”**

Vatican II, Gaudium et spes: the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 62

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Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, Roman Missal, Third Edition

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]*,
who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

* There are differences in opinion between the Roman Catholic, Old Catholic, and Orthodox Church regarding the verbiage of the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Godhead.

The phrase in brackets isn't traditionally used in the Eastern Church or most segments of Old Catholicism. Learn more about the Roman & Orthodox perspective of this phrase (the filioque) in *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #246-248.

FAQ Regarding Sources

How much am I supposed to read?!

The choice is yours! The sources are not offered as a must to read in their entirety. Each offers a different vein, or expression, of Catholic thought and experience. For example, the suggested *Catechism of the Catholic Church* would be pretty difficult to read straight through unless you enjoy such a long, theological, academic writing. Instead, use such sources to ‘look up’ your current topic of interest and then continue your exploration from there.

What happens if I have more questions?

You should! Exploring the Catholic faith isn’t something accomplished in a season, but is truly a lifelong pursuit. After all, isn’t our faith a daily choice of walking in Christ’s love? It is also a choice to continue to dive deeper into what we believe and how we understand the activity of God in our world. If you have more questions, you must be doing something right! The best pursuit of knowledge can never be contained by a few books, a month of study, or a single catechism.

Why Roman Catholic sources? Why Old Catholic sources?

Why not? One of the greatest dangers for independent Catholics is the idea that the Church can somehow become immediately flawless and that “our” Catholic jurisdiction is the best and most faithful to God. Our Roman and Old Catholic siblings have much to offer us, just as all ancient Catholic expressions have so much beauty to share if we will have the eyes to see and ears to hear.

What if I don’t agree with everything I read?

Good! If you did agree with every word, you may not be honoring your own God-given sacred conscience. In addition, you will find some of these sources to even contradict themselves. Why? Because God cannot be contained in anyone’s box and the moment we begin to articulate theological positions we inevitably put limitations on God which may falter. Remember, our Catholic faith is universal, reflecting so many diverse experiences, and there is room for all God’s children who wish to partake of the Bread of Heaven.

Wait a second...if something is Catholic doesn’t that mean there is only one way to understand?

Nope! Consider for a moment all the great saints, theologians, patriarchs or popes, bishops, priests, deacons, mystics, and lay teachers over the centuries. Each offering to the Church a different emphasis, focus, or lens with which to experience Christ and the Sacraments. Recall the diverse multitude in Revelation 7:9-10 representing all God’s children. Diversity is a hallmark of our Creator God and our faith. Just as Jesus “increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor” (Lk. 2:52), the Church is called to grow in wisdom and understanding in each generation.

So I will eventually know the absolute truth after my study of Catholicism?

Doubtful! You could believe you will but the Scripture has a little something to say on the subject: “Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to

be wiser than you are” (Rom. 12:16). Remember love and humility lead toward God because God is love and divine humility is what paved the way for the Incarnation (birth) of Christ. We do not study in order to demand our beliefs of others, or to necessarily be “right.” We study in order to grow closer to Jesus, the founder of our Church, and better understand His world-changing ways.

Why bother if I will still have questions and not understand everything?

Because of love! We develop relationships with those around us and seek to learn how they understand life in order that our love for one another may grow. Granted, we may never fully understand our spouse, children, friends and family, or our priest. It’s the same with God, at least till the other side! We thirst after knowledge of God, through our relationship with the Holy Trinity and our journey in the Church, in order that our knowledge and experience of love may grow. Consider Philippians 1:9, “And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight.”

Why are there sources by Protestants?

Why wouldn’t there be? Philippians 2:3 warns us: “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.” It is very easy, as humans, for us to become so engulfed in our context that we forget outside opinions, arguments, and positions. Our Protestant brothers and sisters, who dared to become officially independent of Rome long before most of us dared to consider Catholicism apart from Roman authority, have much to offer the us about their loving experiences with Jesus. Without doubt, we believe the ancient Catholic Church to have most purposefully handed down the deposit of faith (Tradition) of the early Church, but this does not negate other voices of love.

Okay, I will give it a try. Where do I start?

That is up to you! No, seriously. This is a reading list, not an official catechism nor a definitive list of books. Consider some of your questions and then browse the descriptions of sources below. You will find background information on each source offering the likely audience, the context, the author(s), content, and other pertinent information that will help you discern and use your God-given conscience as you explore. If you discover other helpful sources along the way, do tell!

Anything else I should know?

Do not forget community! The best way to explore your Catholic faith is in the midst of the pilgrim people of God, at a local Catholic parish or a Eucharistic community, where you are embraced and the freedom of Christ is present. Hebrews 10:25 encourages us to not allow “forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.” Join together with the Blessed Mother, the Apostles, and all the Saints, reposed and living, as you pursue knowledge of “the breadth and length and height and depth [of God], and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:18-19).



**The Churches which,
while not existing in perfect communion
with the [Roman] Catholic Church,
remain united to her
by means of the closest bonds,
that is, by apostolic succession
and a valid Eucharist,
are true particular Churches.**

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Roman Catholic Church, Dominus Iesus, 17

Reading Sources to Begin Your Journey

*For your convenience, if a source is available online, free of cost, the internet link has been included.
The majority of published books are currently in print and can be found on Amazon or ordered at Barnes & Nobles.*

ROMAN CATHOLIC SOURCES

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Ratzinger, Joseph Cardinal. *Catechism of the Catholic Church: with Modifications from the Editio Typica*. Doubleday, 1997.
Available Online: <http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/INDEX.HTM>

This catechism was compiled by Roman Catholic hierarchy and published by the Holy See under Pope John Paul II. As such, its purpose is to namely convey Roman Catholic perspectives of doctrine, religious and secular history, and Biblical exegesis (scholarly interpretation). Nevertheless, the catechism is a fairly exhaustive work including theological discourse and spiritual insight from both the Eastern and Western branches of the Church and a variety of theologians considered orthodox (correct belief). Today's modern Catholic will find this work to be very helpful as a "jumping off" place for a topic of interest. However, the reader should also be aware the catechism tends to enforce archaic understandings of sexuality, personal relationships, and reproductive matters often based on ancient fears or scientific falsehoods rather than modern day cultural insight, healthy psychology, and scientific fact. On the other hand, you may be pleasantly surprised to discover the radical Catholic view of God's gender (or lack thereof), see #370. The Catechism includes a table of contents and cross references to aid in your exploration. Consider reading the footnotes as they may offer further resources or an individual, likely a historical theologian, to investigate. As previously mentioned, be careful not to exalt this catechism, or the opinions of its theologians, above the person and nature of Christ, the universal Creed, and the Christian call to sacrificial love.

Special Note: I personally cherish this catechism in my study of Catholic faith. I use it almost daily. However, I can do so because I do not receive it as a binding document ordering every step of the Church or my personal life. Instead, I find it to be an open-ended ongoing conversation demonstrating over 2,000 years of Catholic history, evolving and living dogma, Scriptural commentary, and the theological insights of saints and sinners alike. I am then given the opportunity to learn, critique, agree, disagree, and add my voice and conscience as a Catholic Christian and priest. The doctrine of the Church is always being further understood by all the faithful in every generation, add your voice as a member of the "chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (1 Pet. 2:9)! Lastly, this is but one of hundreds of catechisms published by various Catholics.

Conscience & Catholic Faith

Marinelli, Anthony J. *Conscience and Catholic Faith: Love and Fidelity*. Paulist Press, 1991.

This book is a terrific beginner's guide to the freedom of conscience within the Catholic faith system. Before Old Catholicism, Vatican II, and a growth of independent Catholic communities, most individuals presumed they must accept and obey the totality of the Church's teaching without question. Today, we know the majority of American Catholics ignore certain catechetical statements, such as the nonsensical 'sin' of certain birth control methods. Mr. Marinelli, a longtime Roman Catholic educator, offers the subtle invitation to remain faithfully Catholic while consciously not agreeing with, nor participating in, certain dogmas or practices of the Roman Church. Granted, the source is consistently Roman Catholic, but a valuable resource for the modern Catholic, regardless of jurisdiction, who wants to make sense of personal and communal conscience.

Special Note: I would recommend reading this early on in your exploration. I have found it helpful when certain catechetical statements, Biblical commentary, or Church practices were harmful for my well being and I needed to find the freedom to move ahead. The work is published by Paulist Press, a more open-minded Catholic publishing house that often allows for progressive ideals.

Catholic Customs & Traditions: A Popular Guide

Dues, Greg. *Catholic Customs & Traditions: A Popular Guide*. Twenty-Third Publications, 2009.

Experiencing our Catholic faith shouldn't just be studying Mariology (study of Mary), soteriology (study of salvation), or theodicy (why evil exists when God is good), to name a few. Part of the beauty of the Catholic Church is its use of the tangible devices, sense-invoking liturgies, and endless prayers and rituals to help us connect to the Holy Trinity and the saints. *Catholic Customs & Traditions* is an easy-to-read exciting book for any Catholic who is new to the faith or been around since childhood. You will learn why we worship the way we do, why we use incense and bread and wine, fasting traditions, and why some people wear a little piece of cloth called a scapular. The Sacraments are discussed, the Church year is explained, and you will get a crash course in the belief of the communion of the saints. Even purgatory and indulgences gets a few pages from a Vatican II perspective. (It should be noted that Old Catholicism and Orthodoxy affirm prayers for the dead and believe there may be a time of purification after death, in order to grow in love, but it isn't formulated as precisely as the doctrine of purgatory.) Professor Dues, a faculty member of Loyola University New Orleans, a Jesuit institution, invites you to not only be a Catholic in mind and heart, but in body, as you consider practicing some of the Catholic customs that help focus our faith.

Special Note: The Roman Catholic author offers honest glimpses into history regarding the formation of rituals and traditions. He doesn't hide some of the contradictions or the possible non-Christian heritage of certain rituals. I love the author's honesty that the Catholic Church has often had a problem with sex! He never discusses LGBT issues, but there is a sense in the book that Catholicism is truly for anybody seeking God. You will find yourself captivated, possibly horrified, illuminated,

and smiling at all the beautiful diversity that is Catholicism. For some, this synopsis-style book might be the best place to start cultivating your Catholic side.

Saint Joseph Confirmation Book

Lovasik, Lawrence G. *Saint Joseph Confirmation Book*. Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1986.

Sometimes simple is best! This classic, hardbound, compact Confirmation Book is hard to beat if you are looking for a handy guide including highlights of the Gospels and New Testament, a minimalist catechism, several classic Catholic prayers, the text of the Holy Mass (Second Edition), and a beautiful guide to the Sacrament of Confirmation. The Roman Catholic priest-author, for the most part, reflects the open-minded spirit of Vatican II in his commentary and the majority of the text will be welcomed by all Catholics. The book is a great gift for anyone who is preparing to be Confirmed or is already Confirmed and ready to dig a little deeper into what the Sacrament means.

Special Note: As a former Orthodox cleric, where the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and First Communion) have always been conferred together, by the priest, upon reception into the Church, I appreciate the author's transparency concerning the minister of the Sacrament of Confirmation. Fr. Lovasik states: “The bishop of the diocese or one of his auxiliaries was the ordinary minister of confirmation and the priest rarely administered the sacrament. Already before Vatican II, however, priests were authorized to confirm under certain restricted circumstances. Since the Council, this authorization has been greatly extended.” The Old Catholic Church has typically followed the ancient Orthodox tradition regarding Confirmation practices. The Confirmation minister among independent Catholics may vary by jurisdiction, location, circumstance, and pastoral wisdom. Most important is the servant role of all Catholic clergy. Pope Francis teaches clergy, regardless of order or rank, to be “shepherds living with the smell of the sheep” (Holy Thursday, 2013). Jesus, the High Priest, tells us: “I lay down my life for the sheep” (Jn. 10:15).

The Practice of the Presence of God

Brother Lawrence. *The Practice of the Presence of God*. Whitaker House, 1982.

This is a classic for those seeking to grow in their prayer life and become sensitive to God’s abiding presence in our daily moment-to-moment lives and tasks. Brother Lawrence (1614-1691) was a lay brother in a Carmelite order who lived a humble life and was an inspiration for many during his life and countless others, after his death, through his cherished writing. This book is a favorite of both Catholics and Protestants and offers a reprieve from more academically-based religious writing. You will find yourself transported to a different time and place as you journey with Brother Lawrence reading his letters and meditations. If you complete the journey, you may just find yourself praying without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17).

Special Note: I would recommend using this book as a devotional and inspirational device. Read just a section or two each day and consider how you can implement the wisdom of Brother Lawrence in

your spiritual practice. Be sure to remember that Brother Lawrence lived in a very different time, circumstance, and setting than we do, but the spirit of his journey can benefit each of us. Catholics can sometimes fall into the trap of becoming obsessed with the outward movements and traditions, Brother Lawrence reminds us to cultivate our spirit, our soul, with God's presence.

Praying the Rosary with Pope Francis

USCCB, and Pope Francis. *Praying the Rosary with Pope Francis*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2014.

Similar to *The Practice of the Presence of God*, this book is for individuals and prayer groups seeking to grow in their spirituality and prayer relationship with the Triune God and the Virgin Mary. This practical guide includes how to pray the Rosary, the Roman Catholic understanding of the benefits of this ancient tradition, and various Marian prayers written by Pope Francis. The Rosary is a beneficial way to contemplate and learn the entire Christian mystery including key moments in the life of Jesus Christ and his Blessed Mother. Catholics may find it easy to be distracted while praying the Rosary, Therefore, the included commentary from Pope Francis and Scripture quotations will help you to focus more meaningfully on each mystery. A beautiful tradition among Catholic families is to pray the Rosary together as a means to foster love, grow closer to God, pray for peace, and participate in the divine stories of our faith.

Special Note: The text includes a mechanical discourse on indulgences in relation to the Rosary. Keep in mind this is the Roman Catholic perspective and has no bearing on the valuable commentary of Pope Francis. The practice of indulgences, in general, is not a component of Old Catholicism, but may be found in some independent Catholic circles. Indulgences may serve as an encouragement for an individual to develop a prayer life, but indulgences should not be viewed as a magical means to the forgiveness of sins or an avenue to force the hand of God. In the history of the Roman Church, indulgences have been an issue of monetary abuse and attributed to the Protestant Reformation.

The Paulist Biblical Commentary

Chiu, Jose Enrique, Editor. *The Paulist Biblical Commentary*. Paulist Press, 2018.

This new, Vatican II-based, biblical commentary from Paulist Press is marketed as: "A one-volume commentary on the books of the Bible designed for a wide variety of Bible readers, especially those engaged in pastoral ministry. The volume consists of a commentary on each of the seventy-three books of the Catholic canon of the Bible along with twelve general articles. While based on classical approaches to Scripture, the commentaries and articles are not limited to historical-literary issues, but draw upon relevant theological and pastoral ideas found in the text. The Commentary brings together the collaboration of more than seventy international biblical scholars, each with expertise in their area of study drawn from their experience and interest in pastoral or spiritual ministry."

Special Note: This is a personal favorite of mine to glance over before preparing my homily! It's a great addition to any Scripture-loving Catholic home.



So then you are no longer
strangers and aliens,
you are citizens
with the saints
and also members
of the household of God,
built upon the foundation
of the apostles and prophets,
with Christ Jesus himself
as the cornerstone.
In him the whole structure
is joined together
and grows into a holy temple
in the Lord.

Ephesians 2:19-21, NRSVCE

INDEPENDENT CATHOLIC & AMERICAN OLD CATHOLIC SOURCES

These sources are from independent Catholics and non-Roman Catholics who may associate with Old Catholicism in some manner.

Our Faith: A Catechism for Old Catholics

Published by the Old Catholic Confederation (United States): <https://www.occus.org>

Direct Link: [https://www.occus.org/Our%20Faith%20A%20Catechism%20for%20Old%20Catholics%20\(Draft\)-3.pdf](https://www.occus.org/Our%20Faith%20A%20Catechism%20for%20Old%20Catholics%20(Draft)-3.pdf)

The Old Catholic Confederation, or the Old Catholic Church in the United States, is one of several Catholic jurisdictions identifying with Old Catholicism outside of Europe. Their catechism, available online, is a beautiful work of Catholic theology. The relatively brief work covers topics such as: the nature of the Church, the revelation of God and Scripture, doctrines of the Trinity, Christ, Virgin Mary, sacramental belief, the study of salvation, eternal life, and the culmination of the world (eschatology).

Special Note: The catechism is filled with Scripture, important dates, and historical data that will help to expand your knowledge of Catholic belief. Understandably, there is an emphasis on Old Catholic theology as taught in Utrecht, which may prove helpful for the modern Catholic seeking new possibilities. The document also makes use of joint Old Catholic and Orthodox discussions on theology. If the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is simply overwhelming in scope and size, you may want to try this work first! *(The text appears to be a constant work in progress, if the direct link above doesn't work, simply visit the main site to find the current edition.)*

The Word Made Alive: The Pastoral Writings of Bishop Peter Hickman

Hickman, Peter. *The Word Made Alive*. ABM Publications, 2014.

Bishop Peter Hickman offers several years of his own pastoral writings in one unique volume filled with theological insight, pastoral wisdom, and glimpses into the history of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion movement. Bishop Hickman writes in an accessible, explorative format that all Catholics will enjoy. You will find yourself joining the bishop as he formulates the values and beliefs of independent Catholicism in his context and experience. The book may prove helpful in discovering your own shared Catholic values and includes a great primer in Old and independent Catholic history. Topics covered include sexuality, marriage, divorce, division in the Church, prayer, Mariology, Scripture, religious authority including the papacy, and liturgical seasons of the Church.

Special Note: I personally know the author and can vouch that he is a faithful, educated, loving servant of God. The chapters on sexuality and divorce are a healing and liberating gift for many.

From Her Conception to The Conception: The Early Life of the Virgin Mary as an Icon of Progressive Advancement for the Modern Catholic Christian

Storrs, Daniel. *From Her Conception to The Conception*. Chicago Theological Seminary, 2018.

If finances are a difficulty, please contact Fr. Storrs for a complimentary PDF edition. Available on Amazon.

The Virgin Mary is revered among Catholic Christians. However, her stories and choices are frequently relegated to ancient interpretation, which may enforce patriarchal dogma and, at times, assert religious authority over individuals to their personal and spiritual detriment. Therefore, Father Daniel Storrs has primarily investigated the ancient stories surrounding Mary's early life, as contained within the revered *Protoevangelium of James*, suggesting a modern lens of interpretation which is mutually faithful to her narrative, the core values and catechetical truths of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and the canonical Scripture. In considering Mary's narrative, the author has discovered the Virgin is truly an icon, or an example, of progressive advancement, new possibility, and motherly support for the faithful modern Catholic Christian who is willing to heed the call beyond certain traditional religious boundaries.

Special Note: This is my Masters thesis completed at Chicago Theological Seminary. If you are looking for a crash course in the life of Mary, especially her often-hidden early years, through a specifically modern, but faithfully Catholic, lens, this is for you. Learn about the development of doctrine, the oldest recorded Marian prayer, St. Joseph, Mary's likely step-children, and how to use Mary's life as a guide to set your own holy course. Don't skip the footnotes if you want the most helpful and scholarly reading experience.

Online Video Resources from Independent Catholics

Holy Family Catholic Church of Austin, Texas

Fr. Jayme Mathias, Pastor

Parish Website: <http://www.holyfamilyacc.org>

YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6LZHOB1WJ2ppDOKUtASsxw>

Holy Family is an independent Catholic Church with connections to several jurisdictions, including the American Catholic Church. Father Jayme Mathias offers several engaging videos filled with history, theology, and Catholic teaching. You will also find several recorded homilies from the diverse clergy team at Holy Family.

The liturgy is the work of the whole Christ, head and body.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1187

OLD CATHOLIC (UNION OF UTRECHT) SOURCES

*These sources are specifically Utrecht Old Catholic (European) in origin. For a quick primer in Old Catholicism, try Wikipedia!
Each of these works is relatively short and is available online using the Google Drive link. Contact Fr. Storrs if you have issues accessing.*

To Life: The Old Catholic Way of the Church

https://drive.google.com/file/d/16eXGGmFF1Sf5IkGDQNP2owUISNS_mVhd/view?usp=sharing

A transcribed lecture by Fr. Günter Esser, Old Catholic Studies chair of University of Bonn, delivered to the Old Catholic Church, Province of the United States, in September 2011. Topics covered include: Old Catholic mission, ecclesiology (structure of the Church), nature of the Church, the importance of ecumenical relations, and Eucharistic theology. This document is a must for anyone desiring a foundational knowledge of Old Catholicism. Translated and edited by the Most Rev. Robert Fuentes, 2012.

Thoughts about Systematic Theology in Old Catholic Perspective

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aWq8xVJqWZesgwmE-KGgIctTJf6k11ZO/view?usp=sharing>

This brief overview of theology from the Reverend Dr. Mattijis Ploeger, a professor and lecturer in the Utrecht Old Catholic Summer School, offers the reader a quick synopsis of how Old Catholics view their faith. Topics include: Scripture, why Old Catholicism is ‘orthodox’ not ‘liberal,’ and how the Church is biblically based but not fundamentalist in doctrine. Lastly, a review of theological ethics will help any Catholic explorer begin to formulate their own ethics and conscience concerning faith and doctrine.

Catholic, Apostolicity, the Trinity and the Eucharist in Old Catholic Ecclesiology

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bC8_pPtF51gNQ_r0KYN1nYxRiSRY3Fa5/view?usp=sharing

A lengthier academic paper by Dr. Mattijis Ploeger further explicates the Old Catholic perspective of what it means to be Catholic, the understanding of Apostolic Succession, the relation of the Trinity to the structure of the Church, and how the Eucharist can aid in our understanding of the Church.

Special Note: It should be noted that Old Catholicism tends to consider the vital importance and role of the Bishop in relation to the entire Church as paramount. Opinions among independent Catholics vary regarding the Office of the Bishop in relation to the priesthood and the local community. I encourage you to explore different understanding of the Episcopacy (bishops) and the nature of the Sacred Priesthood from diverse Catholic traditions, catechisms, and the early Scriptural understanding of church leadership. Above all, let no one forget: “The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated to be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #784).

The Declaration of Utrecht (1889)

https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Declaration_of_Utrecht

In September 1889, Old Catholic bishops gathered together to sign their names to a document that, once and for all, made it clear that Old Catholics were Catholic, yet non-Roman. As with any document, it was partly reactionary, but also came from an earnest desire to offer the Good News to all. The brief proclamation includes Old Catholic ideals such as the equality of bishops, the necessity for the Church to proclaim doctrines in unity, Eucharistic belief, and the canon of Scripture.

Special Note: Some readers may be confused why Old Catholicism doesn't unequivocally affirm the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception (of Mary) or Our Lady's Assumption (Dormition) into heaven. This has more to do with conciliar concerns and power dynamics than the actual belief of the faithful. These doctrines were both officially promulgated by the Roman Church alone in the 19th and 20th centuries. Old Catholics (and Orthodox) believe such decisions should only be made in general consensus with the entirety of the Church. Nevertheless, Old Catholics and Orthodox Christians have always affirmed the God-given immaculate nature of Mary, in some fashion, and celebrated her transference to heaven, after her earthly life, through liturgical feast days. Additionally, it may be of interest, many Catholic jurisdictions have different canons of Scripture. There are differences found among Old Catholics, Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and Oriental Orthodox Churches. Remember, the Biblical text and canon was an evolving outgrowth of the tradition of the universal Church!

The Fourteen Theses of the Old Catholic Union Conference at Bonn (1874)

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tKa-Ap6XxyDDsBfPwg3h2ecN_-aI_XmC/view?usp=sharing

Have you ever heard of Martin Luther and his 95 theses nailed to the door at Castle Church in Wittenberg in 1517? In 1874, the Old Catholic Churches of Europe came together and declared 14 theses or clarifications they wished to declare regarding Catholic doctrine and practice. Today's independent Catholic may cherish many of these theological positions, but take issue with others. This is a helpful document to understand some of the greatest differences between Roman and Old Catholicism. As Old Catholicism essentially opened the door for independent Catholicism, we should appreciate the strong voice of our faith ancestors and consider what we believe needs reforming in the Church today. You may notice some of the theses in this document were closely aligned to the beliefs of Protestants, while in other cases, Old Catholics defended ancient Catholic belief and ritual that most Protestants found unacceptable.

Additional Online Articles & Official Sources from the Union of Utrecht Churches

<http://www.utrechter-union.org>

History: <http://www.utrechter-union.org/page/24/history>

Theology: <http://www.utrechter-union.org/page/154/theology>

Ecumenism: <http://www.utrechter-union.org/page/155/oecumenism>

Various Statutes, Documents, & Communiqués: <http://www.utrechter-union.org/page/140/ibc>



**Consecration not only means changing
the elements of bread and wine
into the Body and Blood of Christ,
but also, and most importantly,
a change of the faithful
through the encounter with Christ,
who is giving Himself
in these signs of bread and wine,
which are a vivid remembrance
of His Death and His Resurrection.**

The Reverend Gunter Esser, Old Catholic Church, Utrecht Union, University of Bonn

PROTESTANT ACADEMIC SOURCES

If you are interested in deeper understandings of Christology or Liturgy, I recommend these titles.

Heresies and How to Avoid Them: Why it Matters what Christians Believe

Quash, Ben & Michael Ward. *Heresies and How to Avoid Them: Why It Matters What Christians Believe*. Baker Academic, 2012.

Are you ready for an accessible graduate school experience concerning Christological doctrines? Do you want to know how the Church decided just who Jesus was and is? Check out this description:

“What don't Christians believe? Is Jesus really divine? Is Jesus really human? Can God suffer? Can people be saved by their own efforts? The early church puzzled over these questions, ruling in some beliefs and ruling out others. *Heresies and How to Avoid Them* explains the principal ancient heresies and shows why contemporary Christians still need to know about them. These famous detours in Christian believing seemed plausible and attractive to many people in the past, and most can still be found in modern-day guises. By learning what it is that Christians don't believe--and why--believers today can gain a deeper, truer understanding of their faith.”

Special Note: I appreciate this title because it demonstrates again and again how orthodox Catholic doctrine is shockingly more progressive and inclusive than many of the heresies that appear so very tempting. Granted, you may not agree with every argument, but the text will give you a solid foundation to understand the role of Christ in our salvation and in the Church. Take your time, if you venture into this book. The book is written by Anglo-Catholics, but receives lofty praise from the Roman Catholic Dominican Order. It is not written to demonize or belittle those who disagree with the Church, and that makes it a valuable tool for any reader.

A Brief History of Christian Worship

White, James F. *A Brief History of Christian Worship*. Abingdon Press, 1997.

Description: “Most histories of Christian worship are written as if nothing significant in liturgical history ever happened in North America, as if cultural diversities were insignificant in the development of worship, and as if most of what mattered were words the priest or minister addressed to God. This book is a revisionist work, attempting to give new direction to liturgical history by treating the experience of worship of the people in the pews as the primary liturgical document. It means liturgical history written facing the other way--that is, looking into the chancel rather than out of it. Relishing the liturgical diversity of recent centuries as firm evidence of Christianity's ability to adapt to a wide variety of peoples and places, Professor White shows that this tendency has been apparent in Christian worship since its inception in the New Testament churches. Instead of imposing one tradition's criteria on worship, he tries to give a balanced and comprehensive approach to the development of the dozen or more traditions surviving in the modern world.”

Special Note: This scholarly and accessible work by the late Reverend James F. White, Methodist minister and professor of liturgy at the University of Notre Dame, is helpful to absorb the basics of Christian liturgical history. As an exploring Catholic, you will likely find the first three chapters canvassing worship history from the early Church to the Middle Ages most beneficial and eye opening. Of course, the author is not writing from a Catholic perspective, but the historical information, in general, is balanced with a slight nod toward Protestant doctrines.



**Without any doubt,
the mystery of our religion is great:**

**[Jesus]
was revealed in flesh,
vindicated in spirit,
seen by angels,
proclaimed among Gentiles,
believed in throughout the world,
taken up in glory.**

1 Timothy 3:16, NRSVCE

ACADEMIC SOURCES ON THE INDEPENDENT SACRAMENTAL MOVEMENT

Please note these sources are primarily not concerned with catechetical belief. Instead, they are distinctively academic works explaining the evolution of independent Catholicism and sacramental movements in Utrecht and in the North American context.

I have only included the marketing descriptions with a personal note for these volumes.

The Other Catholics: Remaking America's Largest Religion

Byrne, Julie. *The Other Catholics: Remaking America's Largest Religion*. Columbia University Press, 2016.

“Independent Catholics are not formally connected to the pope in Rome. They practice apostolic succession, seven sacraments, and devotion to the saints. But without a pope, they can change quickly and experiment freely, with some affirming communion for the divorced, women's ordination, clerical marriage, and same-sex marriage. From their early modern origins in the Netherlands to their contemporary proliferation in the United States, these "other Catholics" represent an unusually liberal, mobile, and creative version of America's largest religion.

In *The Other Catholics*, Julie Byrne shares the remarkable history and current activity of independent Catholics, who number at least two hundred communities and a million members across the United States. She focuses in particular on the Church of Antioch, one of the first Catholic groups to ordain women in modern times. Through archival documents and interviews, Byrne tells the story of the unforgettable leaders and surprising influence of these understudied churches, which, when included in Catholic history, change the narrative arc and total shape of modern Catholicism. As Pope Francis fights to soften Roman doctrines with a pastoral touch and his fellow Roman bishops push back with equal passion, independent Catholics continue to leap ahead of Roman reform, keeping key Catholic traditions but adding a progressive difference.”

Special Note: This honest and authentic work by Julie Byrne, professor of religion at Hofstra University, will be most enjoyed by those individuals who have spent time and study in the independent Catholic movement. The author focuses her study on one particular jurisdiction, which gives a somewhat limited view of the overall movement.

The Many Paths of the Independent Sacramental Movement

Plummer, John. *The Many Paths of the Independent Sacramental Movement*. Apocryphile Press, 2005.

“The Catholic Church is much more than the Roman Catholics. The Orthodox Church is more than the sects from Greece, Russia, Africa, and Syria. What are these independent churches? Explore the independent denominations and their adherents, who long for the sacraments but have been alienated by intransigent dogma and cookie-cutter churches. In this book, Dr. John Plummer explores the sacramental churches that are beyond and above and below the mainstream. Some are arch-conservative, while others are completely New Age. In this rich tapestry of churches you will find mystical schools, esoteric, and occult teachings. You will meet gay priests and bishops, and female priests and bishops. These paths less walked include liturgies reminiscent of simpler times,

and a few that blow right past any limit or tradition. Each offers hope and worship, not for a "melting pot" of mass-market religion, but for those who hold fast to their individuality."

Special Note: Dr. John Plummer offers an excellent academic critique and overview of independent sacramentalism in his published PhD dissertation submitted to The Graduate Theological Foundation. While Bishop Plummer is a creedal Catholic Christian, he allows us to venture into some of the less typical, or possibly unorthodox, independent sacramental movements. Please see *Additional Independent & Old Catholic Sources* for practical works by this author.



**For not as common bread
nor common drink
do we receive these;
but since Jesus Christ our Savior
was made incarnate by the word of God
and had both flesh and blood for our salvation,
so too, as we have been taught,
the food which has been made into the Eucharist
by the Eucharistic Prayer set down by Him,
and by the change
of which our blood and flesh is nourished,
is both the Flesh and the Blood
of that Incarnated Jesus.**

St. Justin Martyr (100-165 A.D.), First Apology, 66

ADDITIONAL INDEPENDENT & OLD CATHOLIC SOURCES

The following sources have been recommended by fellow bishops, priest, deacons, and lay leaders in various Catholic jurisdictions.

I have not personally read these works, to date, and can make no comment as to their content or intent.

All descriptions are taken directly from the publisher.

Most of these titles are available on Amazon and several directly through Apocryphile Press.

Moss, C. B. ***The Old Catholic Movement: Its Origins and History.*** Apocryphile Press, 2005.

“The Old Catholic movement is the best kept secret in Christendom. The fact that there is a valid (if “illicit”) form of catholicism that is independent of Rome and that values local control seems scandalous to some and a cause for delight or even relief to others. The Old Catholic churches have branches—both official and unofficial—all over the world. They constitute one of the most interesting and diverse movements in Christian history, a movement worthy of greater visibility and academic attention. Here is the story of this unlikely legacy, from its beginnings in the fourteenth century through 1977—now back in print after twenty-eight years from Apocryphile Press.”

Caruso, Robert W. ***The Old Catholic Church: Understanding the Origin, Essence, and Theology of a Church That Is Unknown and Misunderstood by Many in North America.*** Apocryphile Press, 2009.

“The Old Catholic Church aims at informing and inspiring its readers to reflect and entertain the theological richness of the Old Catholic churches of the Union of Utrecht, a Catholic tradition that is unknown and misunderstood by many in North America. Caruso presents much more than a mere history book about Old Catholicism by focusing on its historical origins to better explain the eucharistic nature of the local catholic Church; to which he simultaneously highlights some of the real struggles faced by Independent Old Catholics in North America with regard to this trinitarian and eucharistic understanding of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.”

Brandreth, Henry R. T. ***Episcopi Vagantes and the Anglican Church.*** Apocryphile Press, 2006.

“The Episocpi vagantes of the present day are grouped into four main streams of succession...each present peculiar features and problems of their own, and not only this, but their representatives are men who differ widely from each other. The independent Catholic movement has branches—both official and unofficial—all over the world. They constitute one of the most interesting phenomena in Christian history, a movement worthy of greater visibility and academic attention. This is the book that made the first attempt at chronicling this disparate movement, from an Anglican perspective, now back in print for the first time in decades from Apocryphile Press.”

Jarvis, Edward. *God, Land & Freedom: The True Story of I.C.A.B.: The Brazilian Catholic Apostolic Church: Its History, Theology, Branches, and Worldwide Offshoots*. Apocryphile Press, 2018.

“Two decades before The Second Vatican Council, a section of the Catholic Church decided to enact sweeping reforms of its own. The Brazilian Catholic Apostolic Church, or I.C.A.B., abolished Latin, celibacy and Confessions, embraced religious freedom, and redefined the pope as just another bishop. I.C.A.B. became the renegade church within a church. With over half a million members in Brazil, and up to four million in a complex worldwide network, I.C.A.B.'s offshoots are at the center of the hottest and most controversial clashes between Catholics and their hierarchy. Independent Catholicism, progressive Catholicism, women's ordination, celibacy, homosexuality, and church reform in general, can not be fully understood without understanding I.C.A.B. Whether sect or schism, I.C.A.B. represents the most extraordinary attempt in modern times to defy the Vatican and reform the Catholic Church from below. God, Land and Freedom, The True Story of I.C.A.B., tells this remarkable story as it has never been told before. Much archival material has been translated for the first time. I.C.A.B.'s alleged links to Freemasonry, Communism, the Occult, and the far right are investigated. I.C.A.B.'s theology is explained, and the exploits of I.C.A.B.'s founders are revealed. It is a story that can no longer be ignored.”

Sweeley, John. *Independent Catholics: A Guide to the Sojourner*. Ascension Alliance Community/CreateSpace, 2015.

“*Independent Catholics: A Guide to the Sojourner* sets a new standard for literature on the Independent Catholic Sacramental Movement. Monsignor Sweeley, with his usual flair for detail and explanation, makes an intricate and scholarly case for the validity of non-Roman Catholic Catholicism in language easily understood by all. Most importantly for the reader, the book is a fair and honest assessment of the teachings of the Church Catholic in Sweeley’s typical “no holds barred” style. While the book was originally conceived as a guide to those seeking the Sacrament of Confirmation it is much, much, more than that. It is first-rate scholarship about Catholicism with exciting material about Independent Catholicism.”

Thériault Serge A. *Msgr. René Vilatte: Community Organizer of Religion, 1854-1929*. Apocryphile Press, 2006.

“Msgr. Rene Vilatte is a fascinating personage who influenced many individuals and groups in the Independent (Old) Catholic and Community Church movements. He remains a reference for many Christians that have broken free from the restrictive denominations and their policies. In this book, Bishop Theriault recalls the different phases of Bishop Vilatte’s ministry in Canada, the United States, and Europe. He puts in evidence, while leaning on historical documents, the determining role that he played in the development of a new concept of the purpose of organized religion, a new idea of Christianity, the Church, and its mission. Intermixed in the course of events appear collaborative forces from which he benefited, and also the numerous difficulties arising from powers opposed to

his ministry—frightening difficulties, capable of shaking the strongest soul, which he surmounted because of his faith, in pursuit of the goal inscribed upon his episcopal coat of arms: To God alone honor and glory.”

Plummer, John Paul, and John R. Mabry. *Who Are the Independent Catholics? An Introduction to the Independent and Old Catholic Churches*. Apocryphile Press, 2006.

“Independent Catholics are the fastest-growing variety of Catholic in the West. They are found in every city of every state in the U.S. and Mexico, every province of Canada, and throughout Australia, Europe, and South America. This book arises out of a need in the Independent Catholic community for a compact and concise introduction to the movement. This is intended to be a book that can introduce interested people to the movement in a friendly, easy-to-read style that will not tax their patience or their wallets. The Independent Catholic movement is wonderfully diverse, and it is not possible to adequately cover the full spectrum within an introductory volume of this size. Rather, this book focuses on the most common varieties of Independent Catholicism in hopes of providing a short, useful orientation to the newcomer.”

Jones, Bob Angus. *Independent Sacramental Bishops: Ordination, Authority, Lineage, and Validity*. Apocryphile Press, 2010.

“In this book Rob Angus Jones takes an honest look at “the bogeyman of validity”—the central question of the authenticity of ISM episcopacy and ISM communities. Jones brings welcome new insight as he untangles the three critical issues that historically have been lumped into this “validity” conversation, reflecting on each issue in turn: the validity of ISM ordinations (the ability to be bishops); the commissioning of ISM leadership (the authority to be bishops); and the phenomena of post-ordination episcopal consecrations and the gifts of lineages of tradition they convey. With this book Jones hopes to spark a new conversation within the ISM and with other Christians about what it means to be Independent Sacramental Christians, cherishing our rich heritage while remaining open to the leadings of the Holy Spirit for a new day.”

Plummer, John Paul. *Living Mysteries: A Practical Handbook for the Independent Priest*. Apocryphile Press, 2010.

“An extended reflection on the spirituality, theology—and indeed, mystery—of Christian priesthood, deftly presented without sectarian or technical jargon. A rewarding read both for aspirants to the path of the priest, and long-time clergy.”

Saint, Rick. *A Short Catechism of the Old Catholic Church*. St. Hildegard's Press, 2007.

“Borrowing from a variety of historic church resources, A Short Catechism of the Old Catholic Church provides everything a parish priest needs to provide basic instruction in the faith. This is an excellent resource for teaching baptismal or confirmation classes.”

Queen, Andre J.W.. *Credo: The Catechism Of The Old Catholic Church*. iUniverse, Inc., 2004.

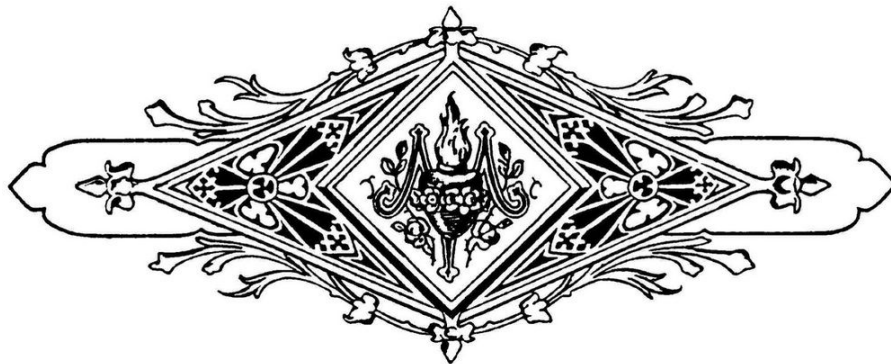
“The Old Catholic Church of the United States is a Catholic Family of Faith, based within the United States. As inheritors of Apostolic Succession from the Western Latin (Catholic) Church, the Ancient Oriental Churches and the Eastern Byzantine (Orthodox) Churches, we possess a rich theological heritage. We are a sacramental church, embracing the fullness of Christianity as expressed within Catholic understanding. We stand, holding fast to the teachings of the ancient faith, in a modern society that is often hostile, towards Christians in general and Catholics in particular, and choose to obey the timeless message of Christ rather than yield to the ‘Spirit of the Age.’”

Horton, Victor James. *The Old Catholic Church*. lulu.com, 2010, originally published 1941.

“Fr. Victor James Horton's 1941 work on the history of the Old Catholic Church. A detailed overview of the beginnings of the Old Catholic Movement is provided, as well as the history of the church in America.”

Theriault, Serge A. *Pastoral Letters and Instructions, Sermons, Statements and Circulars of Mgrs. Rene Vilatte 1892-1925*. Apocryphile Press, 2017.

“Bishop Serge A. Theriault, editor, is General Superintendent for Canada, International Council of Community Churches (I.C.C.C.). He is also Ordinary of the I.C.C.C. Christian Catholic Rite and rector of the Parish of St. Bernard and St. Gregory in the Capital area (Ottawa-Gatineau).”



WOMEN AND INCLUSIVE CATHOLICISM SOURCES

The following sources and websites are from Catholic ministries that are inclusive and progressive.

Catholic Women Speak Network, editor. *Catholic Women Speak Bringing Our Gifts to the Table*. Paulist Press, 2015.

“This unique anthology brings together forty-four contributors from around the world, including well-known Catholic women theologians and up-and-coming theological voices from the global South, with a number of reflections from women telling their personal stories of faith and struggle. Contributors include Anne Arabome, Tina Beattie, Agnes Brazal, Margaret Farley, Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, Cristina Lledo Gomez, Nontando Hadebe, Elizabeth Johnson, Ursula King, Sara Maitland, Cettina Militello, Jean Porter, Carolina del Río, Lucetta Scaraffia, Janet Martin Soskice, Ana Lourdes Suárez, and many more. At a time when the Church is seeking to address issues related to family in the Church and in the contemporary world, the contributors believe that women have a vital contribution to make to these discussions. In Catholic Women Speak they offer theological insights and personal reflections as a resource for others considering these important topics. While dealing with complex and contested issues concerning relationships, marriage and divorce, family life, motherhood, sexuality and reproduction, poverty, and marginalization, all the essays in the book are relatively short and written for the widest possible readership.”

Meehan, Bridget Mary. *A Brief Overview of Womenpriests in the History of the Roman Catholic Church*. Roman Catholic Womenpriests.

http://romancatholicwomenpriests.org/RCWP_Resource.pdf. (Suggested bibliography included.)

Wijngaards Institute. *Women Can Be Priests*. <http://www.womenpriests.org/>. (Informational site.)

**I feel in me the vocation of priest;
with what love
I would carry you in my hands
when, at my words
you would descend from Heaven.**

St Thérèse of Lisieux, the Little Flower (1873-1897)

EARLY CATHOLIC CHURCH SOURCES

These sources are from the first centuries of Christianity. They help to give us a glimpse of early Church practices and beliefs. However, we should also remember that the Church is constantly called to move forward, or advance, as the Pilgrim People of God.

The Didache

An early Catechism and manual for the Church explicating Christian belief and ritual, composed 50-120 A.D.

<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/didache.html>

The Writings of St. Ignatius of Antioch

An early Church Bishop describing the Eucharist and ecclesiology, composed 105-115 A.D.

<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/ignatius.html>

The Writings of St. Justin Martyr

An early Church apologist arguing for the validity of Catholic faith and its worship rituals, composed 150-160 A.D.

<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/justin.html>

The Martyrdom of Polycarp

Recounts the story of St. Polycarp's martyrdom, an early Church Bishop, composed 150-160 A.D.

The text acknowledges the ancient Catholic veneration of relics: "Thus we, having afterwards taken up his bones, more valuable than precious stones, laid them where it was suitable (Chapter 18)."

<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/martyrdompolycarp.html>

Apostolic Constitutions (Constitution of the Holy Apostles)

An ancient collection of Church beliefs, discipline, and worship attributed to the original Apostles, likely composed by an unknown author around 375-380 A.D.

<https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf07.ix.html>

**On the Lord's Day
of the Lord come together,
break bread and hold Eucharist,
after confessing your transgressions
that your sacrifice may be pure.**

The Didache, 14

*With what shall I come before the Lord,
and bow myself before God on high?*

*He [God] has told you, O mortal,
what is good;
and what does the Lord
require of you
but to do justice,
and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly
with your God?*

The Prophet Micah 6:6,8