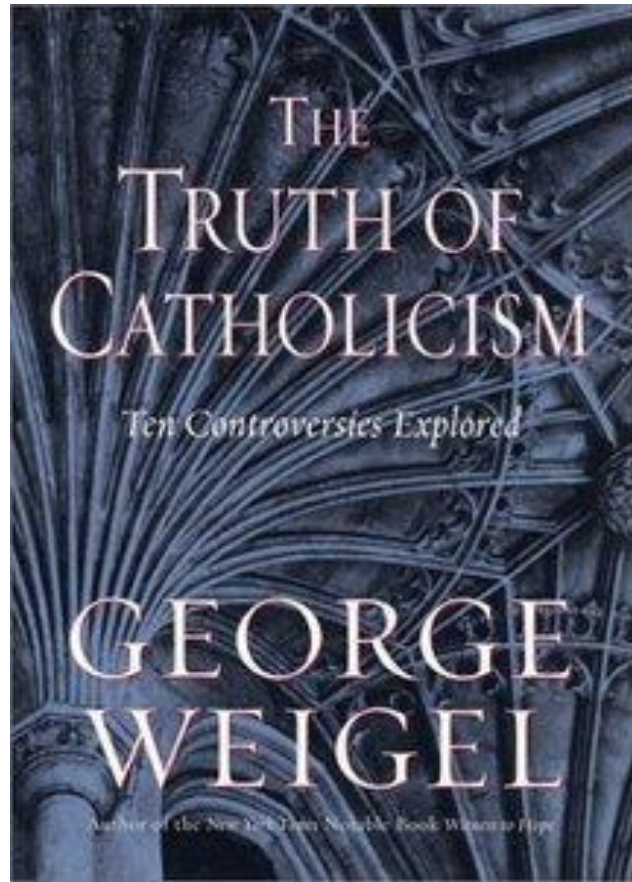


A Summary of *The Truth of Catholicism* by George Weigel



Summary on *The Truth of Catholicism: Ten Controversies Explored* by George Weigel

New York: Cliff Street Books, 2001

ISBN: 0-06-6213304

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[You can purchase the full text at Amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

About the Author

George Weigel is a theologian who focuses on important issues relevant to today's world. He has written and edited a total of 17 books, the most popular is *Witness To Hope*, the biography of John Paul II, which was eventually published in a least eleven different languages. Mr. Weigel has also written countless articles and columns for major newspapers and magazines.

General Overview

The Truth of Catholicism provides a basic outlook on the views of the Catholic Church that are either willfully or unintentionally misconstrued. Topics that are covered include whether Jesus Christ is the only savior of the world and whether or not salvation can only be found through the Catholic Church. Weigel discusses how a belief in an all-powerful God does not demean man but raises him to another level. The pros and cons of calling different sects within the Church either conservative or liberal are discussed as well as issues concerning the liturgy. Weigel further provides guidelines as to how one ought to live and love. Explanations are given as to why man is allowed to suffer and how that does not deny the existence of God or show that God does not care for His creatures. The book discusses the Catholic Church in view of the many other denominations that have been formed over the years. The issues of the Church and ideas of democracy are carefully looked at and explained. The personal call to holiness is a final consideration.

Chapter One: Is Jesus the Only Savior: Christ and the Conquest of Our Fears

In 2000 a controversy arose after the issuing of the doctrinal document, *Dominus Iesus*. The controversy centered on the Catholic Church's assertion that she is the only source of salvation through Jesus Christ. The God that is revealed to us through Jesus Christ is not a detached God, but one who loves His people as a father. He loves us all so much, as exemplified in the parable of the Prodigal son.

John Paul II said that we cannot live without love; we need love in order for our lives to have meaning. Jesus reveals to us this great truth, that humans actually need love, and that it is not some sort of psychological condition.

Jesus reveals to us that we are special and that we have a destination that we are traveling towards. Because of Christ's incarnation we have dignity as human beings. Our future is not left to chance. We have a divine destiny. We should live in anticipation of the Kingdom of God. We do not have to wait to be in communion with Jesus Christ, but the relationship can take place now. Because of this we can live a positive life because we know that good will triumph in the end.

The message that the Catholic Church teaches about the dignity of humanity is a very different proposal in today's world. The Catholic Church asserts that we do not fulfill ourselves by making ourselves the center of the universe, but we do so by giving ourselves in service to others. Self-assertion led to the fall in Eden; self-giving is the only way to happiness. We find ourselves by giving of ourselves.

With the entrance of original sin into the world, humanity forgot its story. When Christ came into the world, He reclaimed that story and made it His own. The center of this story is Christ Himself. In light of the story of Christ, all of our individual stories begin to make sense. By saying that the story of Christ is the only story, the Catholic Church is not allowing itself to have a narrow mind or prejudice view of the world.

The Catholic Church is not intolerant. In Roman times the freedom the Church offered to women and to oppressed people was astounding and unheard of. Mother Theresa was the least intolerant person in the world,

and her God was none other than Jesus Christ – her faith was that of Roman Catholicism. The Catholic Church demands the respect that everyone deserves.

Chapter Two: Does Belief in God Demean Us? Liberation and the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus

Does belief in God somehow limit and demean a person by making him dependent on someone? Some people do not believe in God simply because they are skeptical of God's existence. But a new kind of atheism has arisen that is not connected with skepticism. Rather it comes about with an "ideology and program for remaking the world," an atheistic humanism.

These ideologies went against the God we see in the Old Testament. This God created people and then let them have free rule over the world He had created. A connection with God through prayer and worship allowed the human to continue to be free, and not subject to any demonic forces that might wreak havoc on their lives. Atheistic humanism does not see this relationship with God as something that frees a person, but something that demeans a person; therefore, God needs to be removed entirely.

There are things in our everyday life that point to the supernatural such as the need for order and the experience of play. A man feels that he will live on even after he has died for a friend, and we all are outraged by crimes that "cry to heaven."

John Paul II stresses to us the great mercy that God shows to His People. Look for a moment at the parable of the Prodigal Son. There God is a merciful, loving, fatherly God. God keeps our lives from being meaningless. To seek God out as our Father and to recognize His mercy is a sign of maturity and freedom.

God the Father begets God the Son, and from the love that flows between the two of them proceeds the Holy Spirit. The fact that Jesus became incarnate is a result of God's great love and desire to give to His people. God became incarnate so that He might be with us and we might be with Him one day in Heaven.

Chapter Three: Liberal Church? Conservative Church? Why Catholicism is Not a Denomination and What that Means

John XXIII called Vatican II not to reform any heresy that was attacking the Church at the time, but rather to urge the Church to move forward in an evangelical movement. Unfortunately, after the council people began to divide the Church into two parties: the liberal and the conservative. The idea of liberal or conservative Catholicism has encouraged some to look on the Church as merely another denomination.

A Christian denomination in and of itself does not have a distinct form. It is the Catholic Church that gives form to a denomination according to what it should be like. But Catholicism was established by Jesus Christ who gave it its form that no one can change. The Church cannot change at the will of the people – in fact it cannot change at all; therefore, it cannot be considered a denomination

The Church is described as a communion because the believers are in union with God and the saints. In a communion, all the members are a part of and connected to each other in a very special way.

Buried under St. Peter's are the bones of St. Peter himself. This is an actual, historical fact that attests to the existence of Simon Peter as a real person. His experiences with Christ and the other apostles were real.

Part of the Petrine Office is to safeguard doctrine that is passed down through the ages. Sacred doctrine is not something that is dead and stale, but full of life. Sacred Scripture, the Sacraments and Pastoral Authority are not intended to make life dull and boring for the Christian but to give him the energy and dynamics he needs.

Chapter Four: Where Do We Find the “Real World?” Liturgy and the Extraordinary Ordinary

There are two controversies that frequently arise today. First, the question of liturgy and all that it entails, and, secondly, the argument as to whether or not women can be priests. It is under these two issues that one can most readily see the split between liberal and conservative Catholics. However, it is important to remember that these are theological and not political questions.

The Sacraments of the Catholic Church are rooted in the rituals of the Hebrew Bible. The rituals of the Jews were not shallow celebrations of seasonal events. Nor were they an attempt to please pagan gods. Rather, these rituals called to mind and made present again miraculous experiences. Such are the Sacraments of the Catholic Church, and through them grace is conferred upon us in a very real way.

The average Catholic who has not read the documents of the Second Vatican Council will likely suggest that Vatican II only changed the Mass. The changes brought about in the Mass were intended to allow the laity to more fully participate in the Mass as a “priestly people.” However, it is important to remember the liturgy does not belong to the people, but to God.

Sometimes we allow ourselves to be put before God within the liturgy, just as the Israelites worshiped the golden calf. The golden calf was an attempt to represent that which could not be represented. God made us in His image; we cannot make Him into one of our own. It is false worship to put ourselves before God. The Mass was intended to worship God and God alone. When the Mass becomes some kind of affirmation of self, or focus on the self and not God, it is false worship.

The priest is not just some person who gets things done within the Catholic Church as a sort of drone or slave. Rather he is a representative or icon of the high priest, Jesus Christ. Through our baptism, we all participate in the divine priesthood of Jesus Christ. However, an ordained priest is a symbol of Christ’s presence among His people.

No one has a right to be a priest, neither man nor woman. A man is called to the priesthood by God alone. Equality comes from being created in the image and likeness of God. Being either male or female is uniquely tied up with the nature of God.

According to tradition, Christ’s relationship with the Church has been seen as the love between a husband and a wife. The priest, who is a representative of Christ (masculine), gives himself to the Church who is portrayed as the feminine counterpart. Therefore, the priest must be male because he is a representative of Christ and the spouse of the Church.

Prayer is our response to God’s thirst for us. By lifting ourselves in prayer to God we can share in the love of God – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Chapter Five: How Should We Live: The Moral Life and the Laws that Liberate

The Church has never ignored moral absolutes, even though most people in the modern world have. Many view the moral life of the Church from a negative perspective, seeing that morality means not doing what is prohibited. Rather the moral life should be seen positively and induce one to be self-giving, centering himself

on love. The whole purpose of the moral life is to prepare us to live with God forever. The Beatitudes show us that our moral actions have consequences when we reach Heaven.

We need to understand that freedom is not doing “what I want to do.” This simply means that we have the freedom to choose what we want to do. This does not point to our dignity as human beings in any extraordinary way. Rather, freedom is being able to live by the rules. A pianist cannot make music unless he abides by the rules of music. By living life morally, we are free to be satisfied and happy.

The Ten Commandments that God gave to the people of Israel were liberating, not hindering. These commandments kept the people of Israel from becoming slaves once again. John Paul II recognized the liberation that the Ten Commandments give through obedience to them. Obedience to God’s commandments helps to save men from so many problems and difficulties if he just lives by them.

Today many people misunderstand the meaning of compassion. It is not affirming someone in their lifestyle because they chose it, regardless whether or not it is a moral lifestyle. Rather, compassion should be understood as leading others to healing.

Chapter Six: How Should We Love: Celebrating the Gift of Sex

Sex is the complete gift of self to another and can only take place within the context of marriage, for only within marriage is there the commitment that is required in order to give oneself totally to another. Sex outside of marriage makes the other person an object to gratify some sexual desire and does not take the whole person into account.

Through the sexuality of man and woman, one can come to a better understanding of God. The complete gift of self is a God-like act. Man and woman are made in the image and likeness of God. In the sexual act, man and woman give themselves to each other without losing their own identity. This giving of self to the other is very much like the Holy Trinity, which is a continual gift of self to the other and the reception by the other of this gift.

Pre-marital sex, rape, pornography, and masturbation all take sex out of the context in which it was rightfully to be understood. In these instances a person is no longer giving himself to another with the love being reciprocated. Rather, the person either makes himself an object for his own pleasure or uses another to gratify himself.

Contraception disrupts the sexual act because it no longer recognized the whole gift of self, including the gift of fertility. Catholics are called to responsibly have and raise children. They may avoid pregnancy only if they have a good reason to do so and then they must respect the body by using its natural cycle to prevent a pregnancy. No artificial methods are permissible because they turn the person in to an object.

Divorce has never been allowed in the Catholic Church. An annulment is not a divorce, but rather it investigates to see if a sacramental marriage took place. If no sacramental marriage took place, the couple may separate because there was no marriage from the beginning.

Homosexual acts are never permissible because they do not allow self-gift, nor do they allow the person to receive the gift that is given. Homosexuals need to live chaste lives just as single heterosexuals are expected to live chaste lives. The Catholic Church should be a source of support for a chaste life to the homosexual.

Chapter Seven: Why Do We Suffer? Redeeming the World and Its Pain

One of the hardest things to understand in this world is suffering. It is so hard to understand that it, in fact, can be thought of as a sort of mystery. It is true that animals can feel pain, but only humans can suffer. Suffering is very much connected with humanity. When Jesus came to earth He did not rid the world of suffering, but showed man how to embrace it.

It cannot be denied that John Paul II had his share of sufferings. From the early death of his family, to intense physical pain, John Paul II understood suffering. The Pope pointed out that humans can feel a suffering that is beyond physical pain, a “moral suffering.” Moral suffering points to the fact that man has a soul. Through suffering we can come to know God.

Suffering is caused by evil, which is a deprivation of the good. One cannot possibly come to understand the sufferings that Christ felt while on the cross. Yet Christ embraced the suffering in an act of love for mankind. When we love in spite of suffering we become more closely united to God through suffering.

For the Christian, suffering should be seen as a vocation. One can serve others through suffering through a gift of self out of love for another. Through participation in the “treasure” of suffering, the Christian can participate in the redemption of others.

Chapter Eight: What About the Rest of the World: Other Christians, Other Religions

Today many believe that as long as someone sincerely believes a thing to be true, it is. Truth is equal and relative to each person. How then are ecumenism and interreligious dialogue to take place if one believes that there is only one truth, the truth of the Catholic Church?

The Catholic Church teaches that there can only be one Church because there is only one Christ. Unity does not come from the Church, but rather it comes from Jesus Christ. The unity that Jesus Christ gives to the Church is a gift that He has never withdrawn; nor will He ever take away this gift. Ecumenically, the Church is to bring the unity that it has from Christ to others. Catholics recognize that they have many brothers and sisters in Christ through baptism. Prayer between Catholics and their separated brethren is encouraged. The Papacy shows Christ’s will for the Church. Christians should be urged to see the papacy as trying to serve their needs and not hinder them.

The Jews were the first people to whom God revealed Himself. John Paul II feels that Catholics have an obligation to try to bring them to the Church.

God wishes that all be saved. The only way to salvation is through the Catholic Church. Some kind of relationship with the Church is needed in order for anyone to be saved.

By spreading the good news, Catholics fulfill the commandment to love their neighbors as themselves. All truth, even though it might not be the whole truth, points to the truth that we are all destined for God who created us.

Chapter Nine: Is Catholicism Safe for Democracy? Living Freedom for Excellence in Public

It is false to say that the Catholic Church is anti-democracy. Those who suggest this simply do not understand what the Church teaches about democracy.

Through the Gospel, the Church forms a culture and a people that will be capable of running a good government that will lead to humanity's flourishing. For the Church, democracy is a part of a political community. A democracy needs people to run it, and it takes a very special kind of people to correctly run a democracy. Clearly there needs to be absolute truth and morals for a democracy to function correctly.

There are those who erroneously suggest that truth should be relative in a democracy. If there are no binding moral norms in a democracy, then in times of disagreement the only way to solve the problem is through force. In a monarchy only the king needs to be virtuous in order for there to be a virtuous government, but in a democracy, the entire people need to be virtuous.

The Church's public teaching on abortion and end of life issues has been hotly contested by democratic politics. The Catholic Church's teaching on the immorality of abortion rests on the fact that the Church holds the killing of innocent life to be immoral. An unborn baby is a human being and this fact cannot be altered. The Church understands that sometimes there are unwanted and unplanned pregnancies, which is why she supports and encourages numerous ways to support mothers and their unborn children.

The issue of the right to life is one of justice and not an insincere attempt to condemn sexual immorality. The Church has always publically argued against the evils of abortion. When the old and the unborn are placed outside of legal protection, the democratic idea of liberty and justice for all no longer exists. The choice to keep an unborn baby is not a private choice as it affects the whole world.

Chapter Ten: What Will Become of Us? Saints and the Human Future

We often ask the question "what will become of us," when we think of the future. The only answer we can know for sure is that we must try to become saints. A saint is a person who lives out the vocation of their lives to the fullest extent and ultimately reaches heaven. They do what God intended for them to do without complaint. One needs to find his vocation and give himself completely to it.

The Catholic Church does not "make" saints. Rather, through a long process the Church recognizes those men and women whom God has made saints.

Saints help guide us to heaven by making things here on earth clearer to us.

In order for the Church to recognize a person as a saint, the Church needs some kind of sign or a miracle. This miracle needs to go beyond what is naturally possible in order to be recognized as a miracle. The miracle needs to be attributed to divine power.

John Paul II reminds us that the Church is here on earth to make us holy. Catholicism tells us that we are "intended for greatness, that greatness is demanded of us" and that the Catholic Church helps us achieve that greatness.