

## History of Ecumenical Catholic movement - Part 1/4

Let's start at the beginning. Regardless of our denominational background, most who have been raised in our cultural time and place have come to believe several things:

- 1) there is only one Catholic church -- the Roman Catholic church;
- 2) other expressions of Catholicism are unacceptable, invalid, heretical, or schismatic. (Some Roman Catholics even believe that if they participate in these alternative expressions of Catholicism, they commit mortal sin, risk excommunication and eternal damnation. Some Roman Catholic priests have, erroneously, publicly stated as much); and
- 3) that the leader of the Roman Catholic church, the pope, speaks with infallible authority, as if he were speaking directly from and for God. (In the minds of many, this is traced back to the passage, Matthew 16:18, wherein Jesus says to Peter: "you are rock, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it").

Perhaps we might ask, then, is 'Catholic' synonymous with 'Roman Catholic'? An objective, cursory review of history clearly leads to the conclusion, NO! 'Catholic' is not synonymous with 'Roman Catholic.' Two brief points make this clear. First, the word 'Catholic' comes from the Greek, and means 'universal,' or 'of the whole.' The very word 'catholic' assumes and implies a meaning beyond the particular. Rather than identifying one particular group (e.g., Roman Catholics), it has historically been used to refer to the universal group, that is 'all of the Christians,' or 'all who believe.' To be identified as Catholic is to be connected with the universal body of Christ followers.

Second, although this may be somewhat of a surprise to those raised in our day and time as Roman Catholic, many other denominational groups currently consider themselves just as authentically catholic as do Roman Catholics. For example, the Eastern Orthodox, Anglicans, Lutherans, and some Methodists all believe that their churches are "Catholic" in the sense that they are in continuity with the original universal church founded by the Apostles. We might simply refer to this as the Church Universal.

The Ecumenical Catholic Communion is a compassionate, inclusive, contemporary, expression of Catholicism. We stand in the long tradition of the Church Universal; our core theology is essentially the same as the Roman Catholic church and other expressions of the Church Universal; we celebrate the same seven sacraments that have long been celebrated by the Roman Catholic church and other expressions of the Church Universal. Yet we differ from the Roman Catholic church in some of our 'disciplines' -- i.e., our structure, governance, and some of our practices.

In subsequent parts of this series, we will delve into greater detail about the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, our history, our structure, our beliefs and our practices. We will try to highlight how we are similar and how we are different than other denominations.