

Christ, the Beato



THIS WRITER MAKES NO CLAIM to be an authority on the Catholic—that is, uppercase “C” Catholic—church. Born and raised a protestant (though my father’s father was probably of Jewish heritage) I am privy to only dribs and drabs of its economy, theology, customs and practices. Beyond having a fundamental level of respect for its pope, the bishop of Rome, I don’t normally give Catholicism a lot of thought.

This writer is, however, a student and practitioner of words, and when a leader or spokesperson for the Catholic church is being interviewed (as many were during the recent conclave of cardinals to elect their next pope) he invariably, to my ears at least, chooses a discordant *order* of words. By this order, the Catholic spokesperson invariably places the authority of “the church” before Christ. Take, as just one example, what Cardinal Donald Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington, D. C., said recently during an interview with Chris Wallace on *Fox News Sunday*. When asked how the leaders of the Catholic church work with gay Catholics, he answered,

The goal is to hold them as close to the church, and to Christ, and the sacraments as possible.



My quarrel is not so much with what these respected leaders are saying, but the *order* in which they are saying it. The church—even the catholic (that is lowercase “c,” universal church)—is not over Christ Jesus, but Christ is its *head*.

He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

Colossians 1:17-18

As if seen “through a glass darkly,” the earthly church is the faint reflection of the community of saints gathered around the throne of heaven. That eternal congregation does not look to itself, but to Christ seated upon His throne and, on His left, Father God.

This is what should set Christians apart from the rest of the world: We have a *Lord*, a Head, a King. We, even as a group, do not tell *Him* what to do; He tells *us* what to do. And when explaining the priorities of faith, we place Jesus Christ first. My allegiance is not to my church; my allegiance is to my Lord Jesus Christ. If in any point the two part company, I will go with my Lord, not the church.

Protestants, too, can fall into this habit with their choice of words. Someone who has strayed from a life of faith, when convicted by the Holy Spirit to return, may say something like, “I need to get back to church.” But what they really need, first and foremost, is to get back to Christ Jesus! The church is the group that will support them, love them, nurture them in their return, but *Christ* is the one from whom they have strayed—and He is the one who has longed for His child to return to Him.

We dare not confuse earthly institutions—even those sanctioned and created by God—with God Himself.

Our faith is not in the church. Our faith is in eternal, holy God.

We do not pray to the church. We pray to God.

We do not worship the church. We worship God the Father and God the Son.

The church did not give itself for our sins. Jesus Christ is the one who hung upon that cross—and *He* is the one due our devotion and trust and faith.

For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is *but one* God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.

1 Corinthians 8:5-6