

Chapter 13 - Who Are My Brothers and Sisters?

So with the strong convictions I have reached regarding the Catholic Church, do I now have less affection for other Christians? Absolutely not, they are my brothers and sisters; and as I stated earlier, that is the position of the Catholic Church. I have no less admiration or affection for them than I did when Jesus first touched me through the writings of Billy Graham and Dennis Bennett - or the experience of worship I had at Grace World Outreach. I find the image of the family ideal for considering the relationship between different Christian groups.

My siblings, Andy and Amanda, and I have the same set of parents. You could say that our parents' life adheres in us; any DNA test would show that we came from the same source. Now if my teenage sister was to strike out on her own – tell dad that she appreciated his advice over the years but could handle things on her own now; moved out of the house; stopped coming over for Sunday dinner; heck, even changed her last name – none of this would change the objective, biological fact that she is my sister. We would still have the same “life” of our parents within us. In fact, I bet she would unconsciously use a lot of Kapler phrases, mannerisms, and traditions. Oh, she may choose never to speak to my brother or I again; and yet, in a very real sense she could never be completely rid of us – our blood ties and common upbringing ensure it. We will always be family. What is true of the Kapler family (at least in this regard) is also true of God's Family, the Church.

There is only one Family of God, stretching from heaven down to earth. The heavenly branch of the Family is in perfect unity; the earthly has obviously not been as fortunate. What is common to *every* member of the Family is that we have the same Life of God adhering in our souls; each of us has been born from the same “imperishable seed” (1 Peter 1:23). People of every “tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9) are welcome in this Family, and for that reason it took the name “Catholic,” or universal. The Founder of the Family, enthroned in Heaven, has raised up the Pope as a visible source of unity - an older brother if you will, to image the Father's love and care for us. It is Jesus' and the Father's will that we love him as an older brother and respect and obey him in Jesus' physical absence. If one of God's children, or a group of them, decide to “move out of the

house” – no longer feel bound to the Pope’s decisions in disciplinary matters or doctrinal pronouncements, abstain from the Eucharist, change their name from Catholic (to Lutheran, Calvinist, Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, etc.) - that wouldn’t change the objective fact that we still draw our life from the same Heavenly Father. You might say that we have the same “spiritual DNA;” maybe we can’t confirm it in a laboratory, but I am sure angels and demons see the Family resemblance quite clearly. Nothing can erase this spiritual reality. And not only is there the connection on the level of the spirit, but so many who “moved out of the house” held onto a lot of the Family’s outward “characteristics”, or “habits” – the Bible, Sunday worship (for the most part), the early Ecumenical Councils’ statements on the Trinity and Jesus’ divine and human natures, baptism (albeit with different emphasis), and the order of worship (of many groups). There are other similarities,²³¹ but these are major ones which leap out at me.

Although my separated brothers and sisters may not agree, *I recognize them*, objectively/spiritually, as united to the Catholic Church. I believe that that is how the Lord Jesus views all of us. Oh the visible, or formal, unity may not be there – the same as if my sister cut off her ties with my parents and I - but the common origin and family characteristics remain.

Please don’t think I am devaluing the ministries of my “separated” brothers and sisters. I believe my story is testimony to how the Lord Jesus is at work through people of all denominations to further His Kingdom. Just because ministers of other denominations were not ordained by successors of the Apostles does not negate their function or value within the Body of Christ. Jesus has called people to a variety of ministries (Ephesians 4:11). The call is not limited to the popes, bishops, or presbyters (priests) and deacons united with them. It is true that by their ordination they participate in Jesus’ shepherding of the Church: presiding at the Eucharist, ab-

²³¹ Just an added tid-bit: A friend asked me why Catholics leave off the end of *The Lord’s Prayer*, “For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory now and forever.” The answer is surprising. It’s not that Catholics leave this off, it’s that most other Christians add it on. The earliest biblical manuscripts do not have those words at the end of the prayer (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4). They have become forever linked to *The Lord’s Prayer* though because they are the words which follow it *in the Mass*. At the time of the Reformation they were mistakenly retained by those separating from the Catholic Church as the ending to the prayer Jesus taught us.