

ANTITHESIS

A Review of Contemporary Christian Thought and Culture

INSIDE:

The Waning of NATO, the Waxing of Illiteracy, and Critical Reflections on Roman Catholicism

"No one relying on his own judgment shall... presume to interpret the Holy Scriptures contrary to that sense which the holy mother Church, to whom it belongs to judge of their true sense and interpretation, has held and holds.... Those who act contrary to this shall be...punished in accordance with the penalties prescribed by law."

The Council of Trent
1546

"The Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the scripture."

The Westminster Confession of Faith
1647

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ANTITHESIS

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Observing the Current...

Why Reflect on Roman Catholicism?

Antithesis doesn't usually devote a large segment of any issue to one particular topic. We generally attempt to address diverse areas of life in each issue. So why focus on Roman Catholicism?

One reason is the somewhat bizarre trend (at least to Protestants) of numerous evangelicals converting to Roman Catholicism. The trend is by no means new, though it does appear to have accelerated in the latter half of the 1980's. The reasons given for these conversions are worthy of reflection in and of themselves, since they serve to challenge and remind evangelicals about their most treasured theological priorities.

A second reason for focusing on Roman Catholicism is the dearth of recent interaction between orthodox Protestants and Roman Catholics. Though we have not attempted to provide definitive work in any of the essays in this issue, we do hope to be

one starting point to encourage further discussion.

We are very cognizant of and grateful for the fact that in our current era evangelicals and Roman Catholics often gladly end up on the same side of numerous social issues. Though we hope this cooperation continues to grow, we ought not ignore the great theological chasm that remains fixed between us. The chasm cannot be ignored, for the theological commitments go right to the hearts of our faiths. As the articles in this issue hopefully demonstrate, evangelicals and Roman Catholics continue to worship at diametrically opposed altars. Evangelicals and Roman Catholics are committed to antithetical authorities, practice antithetical rites, and, in fact, bow before antithetical Christs. For each others' sake, neither side ought to remain silent.

Though many Catholic friends have directly and indirectly aided us

in this issue, I would especially like to thank Karl Keating and his colleagues at *Catholic Answers*. I have yet to find a more amiable, gracious, and humorous group of gentlemen with whom I share so many strong disagreements.

Finally, though a large portion of this issue focuses on Roman Catholicism, the two opening essays, respectively by Ronald Nash and Doug Bandow, are not part of that discussion. Life goes on, and we found these two essays particularly timely and relevant to our situation. Regular readers will also notice that we have temporarily taken leave of several recurring features, namely, extended editorials (we have only one), Tony Curto's continuing series on Scottish Presbyterianism, and our collection of "Novelty, Nonsense, and Non-Sequiturs." We will return to each of these in our next issue.

DMJ

Where Judgment Must Begin

The modern American gospel of abject tolerance, sad to say, has writhed its way into most Protestant churches, resulting in scandalous lives which shame the name of Christ. While many in the Protestant camp rightly challenge the doctrinal deficiencies of the Roman Catholic church, at least the Roman Catholic church has recently demonstrated its desire for Christian principle by harnessing wayward members, particularly by putting out from its midst those who practice or advocate abortion.

To name just a few examples, the Roman Catholic church has, in recent years, excommunicated a director of Planned Parenthood in Providence, Rhode Island, as well as an abortuary director and abortion-performing obstetrician in Corpus Christi, Texas. And just a while ago, Cardinal O'Connor, the Archbishop of New York, warned Roman Catholic politicians that they will be excommunicated if they continue to support "abortion rights." O'Connor quite clearly had politicians such as Mario "I-am-personally-pro-life-but-publicly-pro-choice" Cuomo in mind when he is-

sued his stern warning.

Predictably, pro-death Catholics (oxymoron?) have decried the Catholic church's ultimatums which, quite frankly, haven't left them too much room to backpedal. Having found themselves against one wall, they have appealed to yet another wall, the wall of separation between church and state. Such appeals to the separation of church and state, however, are misleading, since Scripture itself teaches that the keys (the church) and the sword (the state) belong to two distinct and separate institutions.

Most pro-death pundits, however, mean something completely different when they speak of the separation of church and state: the separation of God from politics. Implicit in this pro-death drivel is the assumption that politics is a religiously neutral something. Contrary to this naive myth of neutrality, politics is ultimately and inescapably religious. Since Christ is Lord of all, His Lordship, by definition, is total. The Lordship of Christ knows no sacred-secular distinction. Hence, the Catholic Church is well within its rights

to challenge those within its fold to choose this day whom they will serve, and by doing so, it in no way commingles the institutions of church and state.

Even more distressing than this separation rhetoric is the way some Protestant churches conveniently ignore Scripture's explicit commands to discipline those who continue to sin in an unabated and unrepentant fashion. It's as if such churches take scissors to Biblical passages which offend their modern American sense of libertine tolerance.

Isn't it time that Protestant churches learn that it is God who dictates what He will and will not tolerate? Isn't it time that Protestant churches shed the easy-believism that has wreaked havoc in the church and defamed the name of Christ? Isn't it time that Protestant churches improve on the Catholic cue and begin to discipline those in their midst who refuse to repent of sins like abortion?

It's time for Protestant churches to realize that judgment must begin in the household of God.

DGH

Dear Editor,

Just a short note to let you know what a great job you and your staff of editors are doing with *Antithesis*. The articles are scholarly; they are biblically based; they are solidly Reformed. Thank you for your labors in Christ's Kingdom. May God continue to bless your work.

Dr. W. Gary Crampton
Forest, Mississippi

Dear Editor,

I'm confident that God will use these clear editions of *Antithesis* in the application of His unchanging truth in the midst of change. My prayers are with you.

Jeff Kingswood
New Brunswick, Canada

Dear Editor,

Greetings from Switzerland....I heard that an upcoming issue is going to focus on "evaluating conversions to Catholicism." Recently I have been doing a deep study of Roman Catholicism and have been quite surprised by the conversions of several Protestant pastors in America and one in France.

Keith Andrew
Switzerland

Second Opinions

Dear Editor,

Your July/August 1990 issue indicated that we can look forward in the upcoming issues to read about Protestant conversions to Romanism. I really haven't heard of any in my area, but in your article entitled, "Victimized by Protestantism" [Novelty, Nonsense, and Non-Sequiturs], an example of just such a thing is cited, and that by a Baptist!

I guess Luther was right in saying that the Anabaptists and Romanists are really the same; two foxes tied together at the tails (see the preface to his commentary on Galatians). I know from reading Calvin and the Reformation, that during the Roman persecutions, there were many that remonstrated Protestantism, but I just do not see that today.

What seems more to be the case today, in my area anyhow, are converts from Protestantism to Eastern Orthodoxy. As a suggestion to your writing staff, therefore, I would recommend an article discussing this phenomenon.

Mike Burlingame
Langhorne, Pennsylvania

Dear Editor,

I am excited about *Antithesis*. May the Lord continue to bless it.

Byron Snapp
Cedar Bluff, Virginia

Dear Editor,

James Sauer's "An Act of Compassion" [July/August 1990] is a clever exercise in *reductio ad absurdum*; I liked it....And Mr. Hagopian's article, "The Rhetoric of Rescue" was excellent. The piece is one of the best organized and researched articles I've read.

Julie Yamamoto
Los Angeles, California

Dear Editor,

As a recipient of the first several issues of *Antithesis*, may I express my gratitude for what I have read thus far. The articles are indeed timely and addressing issues with which the Christian community must wrestle. I am already committed to using some of this material as "food for thought" for my seminary students in challenging them to think more critically. May the Lord bless and prosper you in this strategic endeavor which you have undertaken.

J. Daryl Charles
Catonsville, Maryland

Cross-Ex

I have been asked by colleagues to write a reply to Mr. David Hagopian's two articles concerning "Operation Rescue." My first inclination was to refuse. I am quite busy and the first article was quite long and involved and required diligent study in order to reply. But after a time of prayer and reflection, I agreed to do it for two reasons. First, I am deeply committed to life and the promotion and protection of it, and "Operation Rescue" provides a proper and vigorous expression of that attitude for me. Secondly, after wading through the first Hagopian article, I found it intellectually dishonest and scripturally inaccurate, which was offensive to me. On that basis, I

managed to churn out somewhere in the vicinity of 5000 words in detailed response to the first Hagopian article.

At that point, I was provided with the text of the second article. The second article, appearing in the July/August issue of *Antithesis*, is as long as the first, about 13,000 words, and moved me back to my original inclination, which was not to answer. If anything, it is more involved and of the same integrity level as the first article. Now again, after prayer and reflection, I am forced to modify that decision. For your consideration, I offer a fairly short and concise reply to what I consider the major errors of Mr. Hagopian's position. I also offer a short and pithy criticism of what I consider to be the major flaw in the theological position from which Mr. Hagopian seems to proceed. I am mindful that the works of God do not need my defense, for He is able to care

for Himself. The Gamaliel principle still operates. If you fight against God, you will be destroyed; if you try to defend God in your flesh, you waste your time and energy.

Point One: Rahab the harlot, civil disobedience, and God

(a) Rahab was clearly an inhabitant and a citizen of Jericho (Joshua 2:1).

(b) There is no indication that Rahab had any contact with or knowledge of the God of Israel before the encounter described in this passage of scripture.

(c) Rahab apparently hid the men before the king issued his order to turn them over (Joshua 2:4).

(d) Rahab lied to the king and his emissaries after she found out what he wanted her to do and continued to disobey him (Joshua 2:4-21).

(e) In James 2:25 we are told

that Rahab's conduct is considered righteous.

I should think that anyone could see where this takes us: Rahab's temporal allegiance *must* be to her king, yet she disobeyed him in a very important matter. She treasonously hid enemies to the state. She lied about hiding them. She snuck them out of town in direct disobedience to the lawful dictates of a lawful authority. There is no question that it was and is approved by God. It was approved by a God that Rahab only knew by recent reputation. I contend that where one act of civil disobedience is done and approved by God, then all acts of civil disobedience are open to scrutiny and the possible conclusion that they are not only approved by God but inspired by Him.

And I further claim that God is not necessarily interested in seeing if every other possible remedy has been exhausted and that every fainthearted believer has been satisfied before He moves. Sometimes God gets rough in a hurry before you and I are prepared for it.

Point Two: The example of breaking up the kingdom

(a) At the point of Solomon's death, there is no question that God was displeased with him and his reign. His lustful ways with women and the introduction of idolatry moved God to break up the kingdom of Israel. See I Kings 11 and 12.

(b) God forecast what He would do about breaking up the kingdom (I Kings 11:9-13).

(c) God raised up three rebellions against Solomon and his son Rehoboam. They are Hadad, the Edomite (I Kings 11:14), Rezon, the son of Eliada (I Kings 11:23), and Jeroboam, son of Nebat, who was an Israelite (I Kings 11:26).

(d) God gave ten tribes into the hands of Jeroboam and told him He was doing it (I Kings 11:31).

(e) After God did it, He announced it to all through the prophet Shemaiah (I Kings 12:22-24).

(f) Note carefully that the response of the ten tribes to Rehoboam's messenger was not in the Martin Luther King tradition; they killed him and would have killed the king too (I Kings 12:18).

So, I ask you Mr. Hagopian, where is your prohibition of civil disobedience now? God inspires it, God endorses it, God orchestrates it when He wants to and outright rebellion as well. The prohibitions against civil disobedience are in *your* mind, not God's. The prohibitions against violence are God's plan for *now*, not necessarily *forever*.

You and the rest of the modern day pharisees and judaizers have an agenda which, while decrying the status quo, goes to great lengths to protect it. You cry out for a return to biblical principle while ignoring the premier principle: "Our God is in heaven, He does whatever pleases Him" (Ps. 115:3). Your patronizing attitude and pseudo-intellectual convolutions do not completely hide the truth of the matter. You are a coward! And you represent, albeit eloquently, the viewpoint of cowardice, eminently displayed by your profession. What we have here is a two part 25,000 word exercise in self-protection and self-gratification. You have positions and wealth to protect. The only thing more disgusting than your resolute poltroonery as a member of the bar, is the pusillanimous poltroonery of the vast majority of pastors of the American Church who wallow in their 501C-3 status. Galatians 5:12 is fulfilled in you. "As for those agitators, I wish they would go all the way and castrate themselves!" I adjure you to check to see if this not be the case physically; it is certainly true spiritually.

You should be very sure that we, the people of "Operation Rescue" are far from perfect and our words and actions are likewise imperfect. But also be very sure that the movement is a movement of the *Very God of Gods*. It is a prophetic movement of God, and you will fight it at your peril, and you will account for your actions ultimately.

John Gill
Operations Director of
Operation Rescue of San
Diego, California -- He
has been associated with
Charismatic Renewal,
Marriage Encounter, and
Pro-Life action groups for
many years.

Mr. Hagopian Responds:

The editor of *Antithesis* and I have been known to enjoy a good prank every now and then — especially at each other's expense. Just a few weeks ago, for example, I submitted a brief article for publication that really took him by surprise, until he figured out that it was only a prank. I braced myself for the day when he would return my prank in kind.

With some embarrassment, I must now confess that when I first received Mr. Gill's letter, I thought it was the editor's long-awaited retaliation, especially since it so grossly caricatured both my person and position, oozed with logical fallacies, and violated almost every editorial convention *Antithesis* has adopted. Much to my surprise and horror, however, I later learned that the letter was no joke at all. Mr. Gill really was the Operations Director of Operation Rescue, San Diego, and the letter really was a serious albeit futile attempt to refute my two articles on O.R.

Although I believe that Mr. Gill's "criticism" is more pathetic than "pithy," I nonetheless offer the following brief remarks in response.

Rahab and the Hidden Spies

Mr. Gill criticizes my use of the example of Rahab¹ and argues that because Rahab's disobedience preceded the king's command and her specific knowledge of God, my appeal to Rahab was erroneous.² This

¹ To help readers place Mr. Gill's criticism in context, I claimed that Christians are obligated to disobey the State only when they satisfy two Biblical criteria, that is only (1) when they are commanded to sin (either by being commanded to do what God forbids or by being forbidden to do what God commands); and (2) when they have exhausted all available means of obeying God. To flesh out the first criterion, especially as concerns being commanded to do what God forbids, I appealed to the Hebrew midwives, Moses' parents, the Hebrew youths (Shadrach, Meschach, and Abed-nego), Rahab, and the magi.

² Mr. Gill thought that my appeal to Rahab was so erroneous that he had to restrain himself from accusing me of intellectual and spiritual dishonesty. I appreciate his restraint at this point, even though he chose not to exercise it in his opening and closing paragraphs.

argument, however, is fraught with error.

First, Mr. Gill assumes — without adducing any textual evidence — that Rahab's disobedience preceded the king's edict,³ and that Rahab knew God by reputation only.⁴

Second, Mr. Gill fallaciously moves from these suspect assumptions to the implied conclusion that the example of Rahab (1) disproves the Biblical criteria I articulated in my articles and (2) justifies O.R.'s rebellious and physically coercive tactics. However, until he explains what he means by "civil disobedience" and provides Biblical criteria for what constitutes justifiable civil disobedience, we have no way to assess whether O.R.'s actions are Biblical in general or are analogous to the example of Rahab in particular.

To make matters worse, he doesn't address the ways in which the example of Rahab is patently distinguishable from O.R.'s illegal and coercive tactics.⁵ Instead of reasoning

soundly from the example of Rahab, Mr. Gill simply leaps to the horrifying conclusion that believers are to presume that God approves and inspires *all* civil disobedience.⁶

Third, Mr. Gill again asserts, without adequate Biblical warrant, that God is not concerned about exhausting legal remedies before He "gets rough." Sadly, Mr. Gill begs the very questions he needs to prove: (1) that Christians can disobey the State even if they have legal means by which they can obey God,⁷ and (2) that O.R. is a prophetic movement inspired by God (i.e. that God is "getting rough" via O.R.). Since God does not do that which contradicts His Word, we must first faithfully resolve what His Word requires of us vis-a-vis O.R. Mr. Gill merely assumes that O.R.'s tactics are inspired by God.

Solomon and the Divided Kingdom

Mr. Gill then appeals to the divided kingdom and argues that because God inspired, endorsed, and orchestrated the divided kingdom, O.R.'s tactics are inspired, endorsed, and orchestrated by God.

First, we should reel in utter dismay that Mr. Gill appeals for his justification to the actions of a group that is the most arrogant, rebellious, idolatrous, and God-despised in all of Biblical history. But then again, it is not all too surprising that O.R. apologists mistakenly appeal to such precedents to bolster their own rather arrogant theology.

And this brings us to the real problem, namely, that Mr. Gill fallaciously assumes that what is the case ought necessarily to be the case. God can and often does raise people —

⁶ Contrary to Mr. Gill's flippant assertion, Scripture informs us that our operating presumption (i.e. the general duty or *prima facie* obligation) is that we are to obey the State unless the State commands us to sin and puts us in a position where we must choose between God and man. For those interested in the Biblical basis, see *Antithesis*, Vol. I, No. 3, pp. 10-14, 33.

⁷ Contrary to Mr. Gill's point blank assertion, I offered detailed arguments proving that Christian must disobey the State only if the command to sin puts them in a position of choosing between God or man. See *Antithesis*, Vol. I, No. 3, pp. 14, 33. I also argued that members of O.R. have legal means by which they can save life. *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

³ Even if true, Mr. Gill's appeal to silence fails to disprove the Biblical criteria I articulated. The only way this argument would refute my case would be if the prohibition of treason failed to contradict God's commands. Mr. Gill can't even prove the prohibition of treason, let alone demonstrate that the prohibition failed to contradict the Word of God. The bark of Mr. Gill's argument is far worse than its bite.

⁴ This assumption is unfounded for two reasons. First, even unbelievers who have never heard of God, nonetheless may obey Him, albeit formally (Rom. 2:12-16). So even assuming that Rahab knew nothing about God by means of special revelation, she could nevertheless have obeyed Him. Second, Scripture informs us that Rahab knew far more about God than mere reputation would allow: Rahab knew specifically that the God of Israel was the sovereign truth-telling Lord who was faithful to His covenant people (Josh. 2:9-13). Were Mr. Gill to read Joshua 2 in the light of Scripture as a whole, he would no doubt notice that the authors of Hebrews and James commend Rahab for evidencing true faith in God by what she did (Heb. 11:31; Js. 2:25). Thus Rahab's actions emanated from far more than mere reputation of God; they emanated from a well-spring of true faith in God.

⁵ Rahab, for example, harbored spies in her own house and did not trespass on the property of others. Moreover, she did not physically coerce others in Jericho to do that which was contrary to their will.

even wicked people — to accomplish His foreordained purposes. But this is not to suggest that what these people do is necessarily normative for us as believers. After all, God allowed the brothers of Joseph to sell him into slavery and the religious leaders and Roman soldiers to crucify Christ, to name only two Biblical examples. And although God foreordained these evil acts, divine foreordination didn't exonerate the wicked agents. What the brothers of Joseph and those who crucified Christ meant for evil, God meant for good (Gen. 45:5-9; 50:20; Acts 2:23). Thus, Mr. Gill cannot just assume that the division of the united kingdom normatively justification for O.R.'s rebellious and physically coercive tactics.

Second, Mr. Gill again arrogantly begs-the-question that God is the One who inspires, endorses, and orchestrates O.R.'s tactics such that O.R. is "a prophetic movement of God." Amazingly, though, Mr. Gill makes this prophetic claim after admitting that the people, words, and actions of O.R. are far from perfect. Even assuming that the gift of prophecy exists and can be attributed to mass movements, Scripture requires perfect accuracy of prophets and threatens death by stoning for those who speak presumptuously in the name of God. And speaking of stones....

Sticks and Stones: Mr. Gill and Mud-Slinging

After unsuccessfully attempting to "refute" my criticisms of O.R., Mr. Gill launches into a grotesque and pathetic example of personal assault by (1) calling me a pharisee, judaizer, and coward, (2) accusing me of engaging in pseudo-intellectual convolutions, acting out of self-protection, self-gratification, and poltroonery, (3) urging me to castrate myself (spiritually speaking of course!), and (4) questioning my ultimate spiritual destiny.

While name-calling and mud-slinging may be O.R.'s common practice to persuade the unwary, such uncharitable tactics fail to justify O.R. In the end, then, Mr. Gill only embarrasses himself and his cause. Mr. Gill demonstrates a fervent zeal. Unfortunately, though, it is a misdirected zeal which is "not in accordance with knowledge" (Rom. 10:2).Δ

The Three Kinds of Illiteracy

The restoration of functional, cultural, and moral literacy requires that we expose the ideologies and movements which have promulgated relativistic nonsense and moral bankruptcy

Ronald Nash

Education at all levels in the United States has reached the crisis stage. Of course, the situation didn't arise yesterday; it has developed over a period of decades. Nor is the crisis news to people who have been paying attention to what's been going on in the country.

This crisis of education is manifested in three levels of illiteracy: functional illiteracy, cultural illiteracy, and moral

illiteracy. Typically, to say that a person is illiterate means that the person cannot read or write. But the word does have other senses. It is sometimes used of someone who is ignorant of the fundamentals of a particular art or area of knowledge. It is this broader meaning that is in view when, for example, we say that a person is musically illiterate. The word can also be used to describe a person who falls short of some expected standard of competence regarding some skill or body of information. In this last sense, a person who falls short of our commonly expected standard of competence in mathematics can be described as illiterate, even if he or she is quite competent in language skills.

Functional Illiteracy

The United States Department of Education estimates that functional illiteracy, incompetence in such basic functions as reading, writing, and mathematics, plagues 24 million Americans. Thirteen percent of American seventeen-year-olds are illiterate, according to a recent issue of *Time*; the estimate for minority youth is an astonishing forty percent.¹ Every year, at least a million of these functional illiterates graduate from America's high schools, the proud owners of meaningless diplomas.

Writing in the monthly *Commentary*, Chester E. Finn, Jr., a professor at Vanderbilt University, cites the dismal findings of the National Assessment of Educational Progress. "Just five percent of seventeen-year-old high school students can read well enough to understand and use information found in technical materials, literary

essays, and historical documents."² Imagine then how hopeless it is to get the other 95 percent to read Plato or Dante — or the Bible. "Barely six percent of them," Finn continues, "can solve multi-step math problems and use basic algebra."³ We're not talking difficult math here but rather something as elementary as calculating simple interest on a loan.

Illiteracy this extensive is virtually unprecedented in America's history. Eighty years ago, in 1910, only 2.2 percent of American children between the ages of ten and fourteen could neither read nor write. It is important to remember that the illiteracy of 1910 reflected for the most part children who never had the advantage of schooling. The illiterates of today, however, are not people who never went to school; they are, for the most part, individuals who have spent eight to twelve years in public schools.

Clearly incompetence of this magnitude is not the result of accident. A large part of the blame rests with the educational establishment itself, the very people and institutions entrusted with the task of educating America's children.

There is a growing body of evidence that suggests that many of our public school teachers are themselves woefully under-educated. In 1983, for example, school teachers in Houston, Texas were required to take a competency test. More than 60 percent of the teachers failed the reading part of the test. Forty-six percent failed the math section while 26 percent could not pass the writing exam. As if this weren't bad enough, 763 of the more than 3,000 teachers taking the test cheated.

The major reason for this widespread incompetence is the departments and colleges of education that have been given the power to determine what future teachers will be taught. The professional educationists who staff these institutions have persuaded their states to dictate that no one can become a public school teacher in that state without taking an inordinate number of courses in professional education. This enormous overemphasis on such courses might not be so bad, except that most education students take the classes in place of content courses. While they may learn how to teach (a debatable claim), they end up having little or nothing to teach.

Cultural Illiteracy

Even when the students in our public schools and colleges manage to attain a degree of functional literacy, they often suffer from a different problem — cultural illiteracy. According to E.D. Hirsch, Jr., the author of *Cultural Illiteracy: What Every American Needs to Know*, "To be culturally literate is to possess the basic information needed to thrive in the modern world."⁴ As William J. Bennett explains, being culturally literate is

² Finn, Chester, "A Nation Still At Risk," *Commentary* 87 (May 1989) p. 18.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Hirsch, E.D., *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987) p. xiii.

¹ See *Time*, 14 August 1989.

a matter of building up a body of knowledge enabling us to make sense of the facts, names, and allusions cited by an author....For example, someone who is unsure who Grant and Lee were may have a hard time understanding a paragraph about the Civil War, no matter how well he reads.⁵

Cultural illiteracy is the burden of a recent book titled *What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know?* The book, co-authored by Diane Ravitch and Chester E. Finn, Jr., reports what has been learned from the first nation-wide academic assessment of American seventeen-year-olds. The national average of right answers for the history questions was 54.5 percent; the average for the literature questions was even lower, 51.8 percent. The authors point out that if we approach these percentages from the commonly accepted view that 60 percent is the line between passing and failing, American students are in deep trouble.

A few examples from the Ravitch and Finn book may help underscore how bad things really are. Take the matter of history, for example. An astonishing 31.9 percent of seventeen-year-olds do not know that Columbus discovered the New World before 1750. Almost 75 percent could not place Lincoln's presidency within the correct twenty-year span, and 43 percent did not know that World War I occurred during the first half of the twentieth century.

Things didn't get any better when the students surveyed in the Ravitch-Finn book were tested about geography. Almost one-third of them could not locate France on a map of Europe, while less than half could locate the state of New York on a map of the United States.

The test also examined seventeen-year-olds' familiarity with important literature. The results were equally depressing. Almost 35 percent did not know that "We hold these truths to be self-evident..." are words from the Declaration of Independence, and more than 40 percent did not know that Dicken's *Tale of Two Cities* described events occurring during the French Revolution. I suppose there is something fitting and prophetic about the fact that the last item on the literature test indicates that almost 87 percent of American seventeen-year-olds are ignorant of the content of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.

These are not difficult or trivial matters of information. This abysmal ignorance exists among American youth who have had eleven years of public school education, who are one year away from getting a high school diploma, and who soon will be college students. Just for the record, I ought to state that I asked several college-level classes I teach the same questions and found almost the same degree of ignorance.

Has anything been done to identify the causes of this cultural illiteracy? Hirsch knows where much of the blame rests. He writes,

The theories that have dominated American edu-

cation for the past fifty years stem ultimately from Jean Jacques Rousseau, who...thought that a child's intellectual and social skills would develop naturally without regard to the specific content of education. His content-neutral conception of educational development has long been triumphant in American schools of education and has long dominated the "developmental," content-neutral curriculum of our elementary schools.⁶

Ravitch and Finn agree with Hirsch that the thing most responsible for the widespread cultural illiteracy in America is an approach to education that eliminates culture from the curriculum and replaces it with an emphasis on learning skills. "There is a tendency," they write, "in the education profession to believe that *what* children learn is unimportant compared to *how* they learn; to believe that skills can be learned without regard to content; to believe that content is in fact irrelevant so long as the proper skills are developed and exercised."⁷ While the acquisition of skills has a place in our schools, it is only part of the total educational process.

While the older traditional approach to education had its faults, it contained something that is missing from the new developmental approach. From the old approach, as Ravitch and Finn say, one could learn "who we were as a people, what battles we had fought, what self-knowledge we had gained." In short, one acquired "a point of view that could be disputed, attacked, or controverted. What took its place was not a reformulated and modernized literary tradition that embraced the rich variety of our culture, revealing to us how we had changed during a critical period of our history. The old tradition was dead, but in its stead there was merely cafeteria-style literature, including the written equivalent of junk food."⁸

Moral Illiteracy

While it is difficult for some people to believe that anyone involved in education would intentionally act in ways that would induce functional illiteracy, it is hard to overlook the educational philosophy that is responsible for cultural illiteracy. But no informed American can possibly doubt that there has been an all-out campaign to cut moral and religious values from our schools. Many educators will deny culpability with regard to functional illiteracy; they will claim innocence with regard to cultural illiteracy; but their contribution to their students' moral illiteracy is something many of them actually claim with pride.

The bias against religious and moral values has left us with a generation of moral illiterates. John Silber, president of Boston University, has taken note of this illiteracy in his powerful book, *Straight Shooting*:

⁶ Hirsch, *Literacy*, pp. xiv-xv.

⁷ Ravitch, Diane and Finn, Chester, *What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), p. 17.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵ Bennett, William, "Moral Literacy and the Formation of Character," *Faculty Dialogue*, Number Eight (Spring/Summer 1987), p. 24.

In generations past, parents were more diligent in passing on their principles and values to their children and were assisted by churches and schools which emphasized religious and moral education. In recent years, in contrast, our society has become increasingly secular and the curriculum of the public schools has been denuded of almost all ethical content. As a result universities must confront a student body ignorant of the evidence and arguments that underlie and support many of our traditional moral principles and practices.⁹

This loss of moral order is linked inseparably to the wrecking of our intellectual tradition. According to Jewish scholar Will Herberg: "We are surrounded on all sides by the wreckage of our great intellectual tradition. In this kind of spiritual chaos, neither freedom nor order is possible. Instead of freedom, we have the all-engulfing whirl of pleasure and power; instead of order, we have the jungle wilderness of normlessness and self-indulgence."¹⁰

The recovery of the belief that there does exist a transcendent, universal moral order is therefore a necessary condition of America's being delivered from its present educational crisis. Important thinkers throughout history have contended that there is a higher order of permanent things, that human happiness is dependent on living our lives in accordance with this transcendent order, and that peace and order within human society requires similar conduct. The most important task of education, then, is to continually remind students of the importance of this transcendent order and of its content.

Russell Kirk observes that even some college students sense that this important element is missing from their education. "Not a few undergraduates," he writes, "complain that their college offers them no first principles of morality, no ethical direction, no aspiration toward enduring truth."¹¹

Like any important human activity, however, education has an inescapable religious component. Whatever we may think of other things he said, Paul Tillich was right when he defined religion as a matter of "ultimate concern." Obviously religion is more than this, but it cannot be less. Every person has something that concerns her ultimately, and, whatever it is, that object of ultimate concern is that person's God.

It is absurd, then, to think that the choice in public education is between the sacred and the secular. Whatever choice the State makes will only establish one person's set of ultimate concerns at the expense of others. An education that pretends to be religiously neutral is a fraud.

One of the more disturbing ways in which one group's set of ultimate concerns has asserted itself in public education is the misleadingly named "values-

clarification" movement. Perhaps the most basic assumption of the values-clarification movement is that no one, a teacher or a parent, should think she has the right set of values to pass on to children.

As Kenneth Gangel, a professor of Christian education at Dallas Theological Seminary, explains:

Values clarification in secular education centers on inviting impressionable children and young people to make a choice among options without any consideration of absolute truth and absolute values. Is lying acceptable? Is stealing permissible? Should premarital sex be approved? Well, "it depends." Situations differ. If young people have "clarified" their own value systems and have chosen to do or not to do these things, education has been achieved.¹²

In one of the more helpful articles written about the movement, philosopher Christina Hoff Sommers explains that the leaders of the movement are convinced "that traditional middle-class morality is at best useless and at worst pernicious, and they have confidence in the new morality that is to replace the old and in the novel techniques to be applied to this end."¹³

Sommers often sounds as though she can hardly believe what she is reporting. As a university philosophy teacher who specializes in ethics, she advises that "Young people today, many of whom are in a complete moral stupor, need to be shown that there is an important distinction between moral and nonmoral decisions. Values clarification blurs the distinction."¹⁴

Gangel warns that this movement may be the most serious factor in America's educational crisis. He writes, "Perhaps the number one problem in public education is the attempt to educate students without a moral pint of reference. With a floating target of truth and the desertion of absolutes, the entire system has abandoned its base."¹⁵

This elimination of values in education has resulted from several factors. One has been the apathy, indifference, and inaction of people who should have been on guard. This includes the majority of conservative Protestants, Catholics, and Jews who failed to say or do anything. Like the people in Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares, they slept while the enemy came out and sowed tares in their field.

But the plague of moral illiteracy is also due to the greater commitment, dedication, and cleverness of the people who gained control of public education. It was their zealous dedication and specious arguments that won over enough politicians and judges to seal their victory. That victory has been a defeat for education in this nation and an irreparable loss for the millions of

⁹ Silber, John, *Straight Shooting* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), p. xiv.

¹⁰ Herberg, Will, "Modern Man in a Metaphysical Wasteland," *The Intercollegiate Review*, 5 (Winter 1968-69), p. 79.

¹¹ Kirk, Russell, *Decadence and Renewal in the Higher Learning* (South Bend, Ind: Gateway, 1978), p. 192.

¹² Gangel, Kenneth, *Schooling Choices*, H. Wayne House, ed. (Portland: Multnomah, 1988), pp. 126-27.

¹³ Hoff Sommers, Christina, "Ethics Without Virtue: Moral Education in America," *American Scholar* (Summer 1984), p. 381.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 383.

¹⁵ Gangel, *Schooling*, p. 127.

young people who had the misfortune of going to schools controlled by their philosophy.

The desertion of absolutes that Ken Gangel warned against above has escalated far beyond the mere teaching of values-clarification, however. We can see moral deterioration all through society as a result of such relativistic nonsense. But others have eloquently warned of the consequence of such moral decay.

We find a most creative expression of such concern in the writing of the nineteenth-century poet, essayist, and thinker, Matthew Arnold. Arnold saw the need for reform in education and the danger of losing moral values in the educational process not long after it began to be popular to promote relativism in the schools of his day.

Arnold saw the Bible as a great work of literature and a means of advancing culture, though he did not hold to personal faith in Christ. But he recognized the importance of the Christian faith as a guide for society and saw the waning of faith as a loss for society. He believed that culture and education would have to fill the void left by the retreat of Biblical faith as the integrating force in society.

In the poem *Dover Beach*, Arnold presents the reader with a couple in a room on the cliffs of Dover. The night scene is viewed through the window of the couple's room, and the feeling is one of quietness and near solitude. The man calls the woman to the window and, as they listen to the sounds of the sea, the tranquil mood gives way to feelings of apprehension and melancholy. The Christian faith, like the ocean, is waning, and the world has become dreary and naked. Secular humanity is exposed and alone; "free" but irrevocably lonely.

Finally the man calls his lover to be true. Nothing in the world is certain now that the Christian faith is in retreat. Confusion creeps in; war and conflict spread. All that remains is love and personal relationships.

Arnold believed that culture could take the place of Christian faith as the basis for society. Yet, as his famous poem plainly shows, the loss of Christian faith in the West left the world a more fearful, lonely, and confusing place. Culture and education are not adequate grist for the mill of society, and Arnold's poetry clearly reveals the loss his heart feels at the inadequate solution his secular solution has suggested.

With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago

Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery; we

Find also in the sound a thought,

Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

The Sea of Faith

Was one, too, at the full, and round the earth's shore

Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.

But now I only hear

Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,

Retreating, to the breath

Of the night wind, down the vast edges drear

And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true

To one another! for the world, which seems

To lie before us like a land of dreams,

So various, so beautiful, so new,

Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,

Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;

And we are here as on a darkling plain

Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,

Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Conclusion

Matthew Arnold recognized the incredible loss that the secularization of our educational system creates. The loss of Christian values has marched on, though, despite Arnold's poetic harbinger. The restoration of functional, cultural, and moral literacy requires that we identify and expose the ideas, ideologies, people, and movements who, to use Russell Kirk's apt phrase, have served as our generation's "enemies of permanent things," those values that have been replaced with relativistic nonsense, irrational ideas, and moral bankruptcy that sent Arnold into eternal sadness. We must find ways to loosen their destructive control over the education of future generations of young people. And we must then act in cooperation with others in our society who want to see an end to the crisis of American education. Δ

Dover Beach

The sea is calm tonight.

The tide is full, the moon lies fair

Upon the straits — on the French coast the light

Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,

Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.

Come to the window, sweet is the night air!

Only, from the long line of spray

Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,

Listen! you hear the grating roar

Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,

At their return, up the high strand,

Begin and cease, and then again begin.

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NATO's Disappearing Mission

Following the de facto collapse of the Warsaw Pact, NATO alliance officials are desperately dreaming up new tasks for the hundreds of thousands of U.S. troops stationed in Europe. But why must America's defensive role remain immutable?

Doug Bandow

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization was established forty years ago with one basic duty: to safeguard war-torn Western Europe. Only an alliance managed and manned by the U.S. was believed capable of preventing the Red Army from "liberating" the entire continent.

Today a Soviet attack is inconceivable. Moscow is reducing defense spending and withdrawing forces from Eastern Europe, while the Warsaw Pact is effectively dead. A regime willing to accept the end of communism in its one-time satellites is unlikely to launch a war of conquest against the West.

As a result, Washington has a unique opportunity to achieve

what once would have seemed to be its primary goal: the elimination of Soviet troops from Eastern Europe. Czechoslovakia and Hungary have already arranged for the withdrawal of the Red Army and in a year or two Moscow may find the rest of its erstwhile allies demanding the unilateral pull-out of its forces; the U.S.S.R. would be better off negotiating a mutual disengagement with the U.S. Even if Gorbachev is not willing to go so far so quickly, he might agree to a superpower demilitarization of Central Europe, or extraordinarily deep conventional cuts that would make a full withdrawal inevitable.

Yet earlier this year President Bush told the nation that "in a new Europe, the American role may change in form but not in fundamentals," apparently even if Europe changes fundamentally. True, he allowed, there might come a "utopian day" when NATO is not needed, but it could be a century away. Encouraged by the President's dedication to the status quo, NATO enthusiasts, instead of celebrating the elimination of the military threat that warranted the creation of the alliance, are now — as if to prove the truth of public choice economics — concocting new duties for America's troops in Europe.

Why must America's role remain immutable? The argument that glasnost and perestroika are merely a clever Leninist ploy is now confined to the fringe, such as John Birch Society head G. Allen Bubolz, who says that "nothing's really changed." Nevertheless, some analysts worry about the potential military threat from a post-Gorbachev regime. But once Soviet troops are out of Eastern Europe, they won't be invited back. And what Soviet leader — whether Gorbachev, Ligachev, or even Brezhnev — would risk war merely to move soldiers forward?

What if a new threat nevertheless develops? A European-based alliance centered around Western European Union would be sufficient to deter war. A Western Europe that greatly

outperforms the U.S.S.R. economically and possesses a larger population can defend itself. Indeed, Europe could easily devote far more resources to its defense. Until now, West Germany, the frontline state, has made less than half the defense effort than the U.S.; American citizens spend more on Europe's defense alone than do Europeans. With the collapse of the Soviet Union's nominal allies in Eastern Europe, no one can seriously contend that Europe still requires an American defense subsidy.

The British magazine *Economist* suggests NATO will be needed in the future to respond to other security threats, such as in the oil-rich Persian Gulf. But the U.S. has often met resistance from its NATO allies to its policies in Europe, let alone those elsewhere in the world. Without a common Soviet threat, allied cooperation will become increasingly difficult.

Other commentators talk vaguely about promoting European stability. But while superpower involvement may discourage change, that is not necessarily a benefit — remember Czechoslovakia in 1968? Disengagement would help insulate the East from pernicious Soviet meddling, presumably the reason that leaders in Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Hungary have all suggested that the Soviet soldiers soon "go home."

But can't NATO help "manage" the changes in Eastern Europe? As the bloody Romanian revolution demonstrates, there is little that the outside world can do to "manage" anything in the region. Anyway, there are plenty of forums outside the alliance in which to discuss the rebuilding of an independent Central Europe. Riots between Hungarians and Romanians in Transylvania may be unfortunate, but they do not justify America's participation in a European military alliance. Indeed, the presence of the superpowers' troops merely risks drawing the U.S. and U.S.S.R. into otherwise local disputes.

America's continued involvement in NATO has also been advanced as a means of ensuring that Europe achieves economic unity in 1992. But it's neither clear that such a development is in America's interest nor that there is anything hundreds of thousands of U.S. soldiers in Europe can do to encourage it to occur.

What about other tasks? David Abshire suggests helping promote ecology; Robert Hormats speaks of encouraging student exchanges and fighting drug abuse. Perhaps American soldiers could also help eliminate illiteracy by turning their tanks into book mobiles. Surely a better argument is required for America to maintain hundreds of thousands of troops in Europe.

Finally, there is the German question. In the view of some observers, NATO can control the unification process or forestall Germany's economic "domination" of the continent. James Chace of Columbia has even proposed an allied occupation force after Germany reunites. But a German attack on its neighbors, some of which possess nuclear weapons, seems about as unlikely as a Napoleonic revival in France, and Germany's economic success relative to its neighbors is of no concern to Washington.

Whatever the final outcome of the changes sweeping the one-time "Soviet bloc," America will remain deeply involved — culturally, economically, and politically — in European affairs. But the only serious argument for a trans-Atlantic military alliance backed by U.S. troops is to continue to guarantee the security of Western Europe from the U.S.S.R. Since the de facto collapse of the Warsaw Pact has eliminated the need for that protection, alliance officials, instead of desperately dreaming up new tasks for NATO, should begin preparing to retire the American-dominated pact. A

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Romeward Bound: Evaluating Why Protestants Convert to Catholicism

**Ex-Protestants
offer numerous
reasons for their
shift to Rome,
but the argu-
ments are
far from
cogent**

David Hagopian

The Wizard of Oz has fascinated adults and children alike for many years. You know the story well: a farm girl from Kansas finds herself in the middle of an unwelcomed adventure in an attempt to find the fanciful wizard, who, she hopes, will help her return home. After many trials and tribulations, she, along with her newfound friends, ultimately arrives at the Emerald City only to discover, much

to her chagrin, that the "wizard" was really no wizard at all. He wasn't much of anything. In modern parlance, he was a wimp.

Believe it or not, many-a-Protestant claims to have experienced a disenchantment similar to that of Dorothy. And like the disenchanted Dorothy who just wanted to go home, so too these disenchanted Protestants want to go home. The home these Protestants long for, however, is not the home they left behind. These Protestants are Romeward bound.

True, the number of Protestant converts to Catholicism is less than the other way around.¹ And there are less actual converts to Rome today than during previous points in the history of Catholicism. Nevertheless, there is something unique about this modern conversion phenomenon, since "the kind of converts appears to be quite different, with fewer obligatory conversions for such reasons as marriage. A significant number of Protestant evangelicals...are among those moving to Rome...."²

¹ O'Neill, Dan, editor, "Introduction," *The New Catholics: Contemporary Converts Tell Their Stories*, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989), p. xi.

² *Ibid.*, p. xii.

That's right. Many evangelical Protestants are converting to "Roman obedience."³ Or, in the words of one such convert, they are "getting church'd" or "popping."⁴ Jocularly aside, it is important for Protestants to come to grips with the reasons why these Neocatholics⁵ have set their compasses toward Rome, because only then will Protestants be able to see some of the shortcomings of their espoused faith. Only then will they be able to meet the needs of those who are "taking the plunge."⁶

So why have Neocatholics chosen to plunge into Catholicism? For many reasons. This study culls such reasons from numerous twentieth-century Neocatholic conversion accounts as featured in a variety of sources. To be sure, each account reflects the nuances and idiosyncrasies of its author. Nonetheless, the accounts often ripple together, creating points of similarity along the way. What are these points of similarity? Why Rome, you ask? Allow Neocatholics to explain for themselves the reasons why they have found their home in Rome.⁷

The 'Rock' and Roll of Tradition

Above all else, Neocatholics embrace the Tradition of the Roman Catholic Church and contend that this Tradition sets the Catholic Faith apart from its Protestant counterpart. Catholicism is far "richer" than anything Protestantism can offer — so the story goes — since only Rome can lay claim to apostolic succession and living Tradition as an infallible guide to interpreting Holy Writ.

If at First You Do Not Succeed: The 'Rock' of Tradition

Neocatholics time and again state that only Rome is the true church, since only Rome can lay claim to apostolic succession dating back to Peter — the rock — per the sixteenth chapter of Matthew ("...you are Peter and upon this rock I will build My church...").⁸ Convinced that only the Roman Catholic Church is rooted and grounded in this ancient apostolic tradition, Neocatholics claim that "there is no fully Christian church but the one that was there from the beginning...."⁹ By cutting itself off from this unbroken chain of succession dating back to Peter, Protestantism was adrift from the beginning. And given the maturity of the "Mother Church," the Protestant Reforma-

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Vanauken, Sheldon, "The English Channel: Between Canterbury and Rome," *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁵ I take "Neocatholics" to be those, like Neoconservatives, who have abandoned their previous heritage.

⁶ O'Neill, *New Catholics*, p. xii; Vitz, Paul C., "A Christian Odyssey," *Spiritual Journeys Toward the Fullness of Faith*, (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1988), p. 390.

⁷ The reasons evaluated in this article are not organized in any particular order (e.g. ascending or descending frequency). Also while this study addresses one reason at a time, some reasons seem to dovetail into still other reasons, creating almost a seamless web of sorts in defense of Rome. For the sake of analytical clarity, though, this study separates such reasons and analyzes each in turn.

⁸ See, for example, Reichert, Charles, "I Will Be Where Peter Is," *This Rock*, January 1990, pp. 12-13.

⁹ Case, Thomas W., "The Real Thing," *New Catholics*, p. 121.

tion was really "nothing more than a kind of teen-age rebellion...."¹⁰

While Neocatholics rightly call the bluff of the zany ways some Protestants have interpreted Matthew 16 through the years, and the a-historical, if not un-historical, faith of other Protestants, the Neocatholic appeal to apostolic succession and antiquity is unconvincing, to say the least. From an exegetical perspective, such Neocatholics beg as many questions as do their less astute Protestant counterparts.

Even supposing our Lord referred to Peter as the "rock" upon which the church would be built, Neocatholics simply assume that Christ thereby gave Peter *papal* authority, as opposed say, to representative authority as one of many apostles who together formed the foundation of the early church (Eph. 2:20), Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone. Neocatholics also assume that this passage grants a right of succession from Peter onward. Until and unless Neocatholics can prove that Christ, in Matthew 16, specifically granted Peter *papal* authority and that Christ thereby intended to establish an unbroken chain of apostolic succession from Peter onward (both of which are read into the text), they have not met the exegetical burden that is incumbent upon them.

Neocatholics also err when they proffer that Rome has carved out a unique position in the history of the church. Is Rome really the church, *par excellence*, dating back to "antiquity"? Despite Neocatholic protestations to the contrary (yes, Neocatholics do "protest" too!¹¹), ironically the Catholic view of church history is the view that is truncated since, along with dispensationalism, Catholicism simply assumes that the church sprang up in the first century A.D.¹² A truly Reformed view of church history, though, marks the beginning point of the church far before that first Easter morn. On a truly covenantal view of church history, the church — the covenant people of God — did not rush on the scene in the first century A.D. Thus, if Neocatholics really want to appeal to antiquity to justify their faith, then they should be Reformed Protestants. But a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of weak Protestant minds, right?

Like a Horse and Carriage: The Role of Tradition

Neocatholics not only appeal to apostolic succession and to the antiquity of the Roman Catholic Church;

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ While Neocatholics contend that they became tired of protesting as *protestants*, this contention is flawed in that it incorrectly and uncharitably assumes that Protestantism was and is exclusively concerned with negatively protesting against Roman abuses and falsities instead of positively promoting unadulterated truth. This contention also collapses under its own weight since many Neocatholics are just as anti-Protestant as they accuse Protestants of being anti-Catholic. Even one Neocatholic apports some of the blame on his fellow Catholics by noting: "I was dismayed with Catholic attitudes toward non-Catholics just as much as I had been put off by anti-Catholicism among Protestants" — Forest, Jim, "Coming to Know the Mercy of God," *New Catholics*, p. 26.

¹² In at least this one respect, Catholicism is one step ahead of dispensationalism, since at least Catholicism doesn't adhere to what I refer to as the "grammar" theory of church history — that the church age is merely a parenthesis in history. Is it any

they also claim that Scripture was never intended to be the believer's sole guide for all of faith and practice, for all that he believes and does. Just as love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage, so we are told that Scripture and Tradition belong together as well.

The Chicken or the Egg?

Some Neocatholics, for example, claim that Christ left a church, not a book,¹³ and that the Protestant doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* is illogical because the formation of the canon (i.e. what we recognize as Scripture) was itself a monumental act of the church.¹⁴ Thus, we are told that an infallible Bible requires and presupposes an infallible church.¹⁵

This argument, though, fails to differentiate between *recognition* of the divine imprint which already existed in Holy Writ and *creation* of Holy Writ. The church didn't create Scripture; it simply recognized the divine imprint and authority Scripture already possessed because it was and is the very Word of God.

Courting Disaster

At this point, Neocatholics reason that the church is a necessary guide to the meaning of Scripture. To prove this claim, at least one fairly prominent Neocatholic — Sheldon Vanauken — argues that if the Constitution, as a relatively simple human text, needs the Supreme Court as its interpretive guide, then all the more does Scripture need the Catholic Church as its interpretive guide.¹⁶

The less-than-perfect Supreme Court, though, has often arrogated to itself powers nowhere to be found in the text of the Constitution. When, in fact, the Court has ignored the limits the Constitution has placed upon it, the Court has ended up adding to the text rather than interpreting what the text actually says — all, mind you, in the name of "interpretation." In law, we call this phenomenon judicial tyranny. What shall we call it in theology?¹⁷

Let's Be Objective about This

Still other Neocatholics such as William Reichert argue that the Protestant doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* leads necessarily to an "incipient subjectivism"¹⁸ since without Tradition, each man becomes his own authority and interpreter of Scripture. According to this view, the history of Protestantism is the outworking of this incipient subjectivism.¹⁹

This argument, though, is riddled with error (objectively speaking, of course!). For starters, it is based on the fallacious assumption that a plurality of interpreta-

wonder why Catholics find so much editorial fodder in such strained versions of Protestantism?

¹³ Talbot, *New Catholics*, pp. 84-85; Vree, Dale, "A Less Traveled Road to Rome," *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹⁴ Matatics, Gerry, "A Conversion Story," (audio cassette), (West Covina: Saint Joseph Communications, Inc., 1990).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Vanauken, *New Catholics*, p. 128; and "Encounter with Light," *Spiritual Journeys*, p. 360.

¹⁷ Vanauken's analogy is flawed in other respects as well perhaps the most significant of which is the fact that the analogy begs the crucial question in dispute: that Tradition is a necessary and legitimate authority co-equal with Scripture.

¹⁸ Reichert, "Where Peter Is," p. 8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

tions necessarily entails subjectivism, what we shall refer to as the pluralism-is-subjectivism fallacy. Just because there are many interpretations competing in the Protestant marketplace of ideas does not mean that every one of those interpretations is false (or, conversely, that none of those interpretations is true).²⁰ Much the same can be said, for example, about political pluralism in America today vis-a-vis Christianity. Just because we allow propagandists of all sizes, shapes, and colors the opportunity to offer their wares in the marketplace of ideas, does not mean that they are *all* false. They can't *all* be false, since we know that Christianity is true. As Scripture itself declares, "let God be found true, though every man be found a liar" (Rom. 3:4 — There I go again with that annoying Protestant habit of appealing to Scripture!).

Not only does this argument assume that a plurality of interpretations necessarily leads to an incipient subjectivism, it also assumes that this so-called subjectivism proves the objectivity of Tradition. Even assuming for argument's sake that Protestantism leads to subjectivism, however, Reichert's argument does not prove the objectivity of Tradition. At best, this argument leads to the conclusion that Protestantism involves the subjectivity of the many whereas Catholicism involves the subjectivity of the one (the Pope speaking *ex cathedra*) or the few (the Magisterium). Thus, this argument begs the crucial question at issue: that Rome is the one and only objective guide to the meaning of Holy Writ.

The upshot of all this is that Reichert erroneously assumes that a plurality of interpretations necessarily entails subjectivism and that such subjectivism proves the objectivity of Tradition.

Authority and Authoritativeness

Even as Reichert attempts to refute the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* by arguing that it leads to an incipient subjectivism, so he also argues that Protestants deceive themselves by believing that Scripture is their ultimate authority.²¹ According to Reichert:

Authority, in all of our daily experiences, means a person or institution empowered to enforce a rule. *Sola scriptura* is in a sense a philosophical sleight of hand. A book by its nature can only be *authoritative*, not an authority.

To prove this distinction, Reichert continues:

Ironically, it was the first pope — the apostle Peter — who pointed out the rather obvious fact that Scripture is not necessarily self-explanatory; it can be twisted by the unscrupulous to support any theological position (2 Peter 3:16).²²

Talk about sleight of hand! This view, like the others we have examined so far, falls by the wayside of Neocatholic gibberish. Reichert generates this distinction by attacking a straw man: no right-thinking Protes-

tant believes that the Bible, in a vacuum, is the believer's authority. What Protestants really believe — unlike the straw man Reichert has attacked — is that Scripture possesses authority precisely because it is God's Word; that is, only because God Himself vests it with His authority. Thus, the ultimately personal and triune God, who can swear by no one higher than Himself (Heb. 6:3), vouchsafes for the authority of His Word.

Not only does Reichert attack a straw man, he also unabashedly leaps to a conclusion based upon a hasty generalization and anecdotal "evidence." Is it really true that "in all of our daily experiences" the word "authority" means only a person or an institution empowered to enforce a rule? Reichert should know better. As an attorney, his own daily experience betrays his bold rhetoric. Attorneys, for example, quite frequently refer to case law in a given jurisdiction as "binding authority" or to case law from another jurisdiction as "persuasive authority."²³ But attorneys aren't the only ones who speak this way. Philosophers frequently use the word "authority" in a technical way to refer to the ultimate standard of knowledge in a particular worldview, what is known as an epistemological or epistemic authority. Thus, Protestants who speak of Scripture as an authority speak quite accurately since, Scripture, as God's Word, is their epistemological authority — their standard for all of faith and practice.

Aside from erecting a straw man, and reasoning hastily from anecdotal evidence, Reichert also fatally misunderstands the Protestant doctrine of the perspicuity (clarity) of Scripture. Enter 2 Peter 3:16, where Peter writes that some of the things in the Pauline epistles are not easy to understand. Contrary to Reichert's skewed assumption, the Protestant doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture doesn't hold that Scripture is always easy to understand. What it does teach is that since God chose to reveal Himself by means of propositional revelation, He has given His people the means of understanding that revelation such that the true believer has no need of anyone else — let alone a Magisterium or Pope on high — to teach him. After all, Peter could not *speak of Scripture-twisting without first presupposing that there is a correct way to go about interpreting Scripture*. And what is the correct way to do so? To take what the alleged first Pope taught on its face? Or to subject even what he taught to the supreme standard of Scripture as did the noble Bereans (Acts 17:11)? Much to Reichert's chagrin, then, this passage nowhere even remotely suggests that Tradition is a necessary or legitimate authority co-equal with Scripture.

While Reichert appeals to irony in an attempt to chide Protestants, he is the one who ironically ends up engaging in sleight of hand. If Roman Tradition is co-equal with Scripture pursuant to Rome's view of twin authorities, then there is no need to appeal to Scripture ostensibly to prove the authority of Tradition. Yet, Neocatholics constantly do so. And that's the real problem: the extent to which anything is put on par with Scripture — be it human reason, the *Book of Mormon*, charismatic revelations, or Tradition — is the extent to which that "other" authority ends up displacing Scripture. And to the extent that

²⁰ Nor does this Neocatholic argument prove the Roman view to be true.

²¹ Reichert, "Where Peter Is," p. 9 (where Reichert refers to *Sola Scriptura* as a deceptive banner and accuses the Reformers of "sleight of hand").

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Of course, to salvage this now-defunct argument, Reichert may contend that attorneys use the word "authority" elliptically, but to admit such is to disprove his universal generalization.

Scripture is not self-sufficient and all-sufficient is the extent to which it is rendered futile and unnecessary. It is also the extent to which Scripture disappears. Just say the magic words: "Abracadabra and *Ex cathedra*!"

From Relishing the Mustard Seed to Seeing Double

Any time you adopt a "Scripture and..." theory, you must also conjure up a companion theory to explain all of those apparent discrepancies between what Scripture says and what your other (read: ultimate) authority says. The same is true with Catholicism no less than with the Mormon faith. Of course, even if Neocatholics realize that many Catholic doctrines cannot be found explicitly in Scripture, mum is the word. Well not exactly mum. How about a mustard seed?

Displaying more exegetical ingenuity than even some Protestant televangelists, Reichert has the answer: the parable of the mustard seed. According to Reichert, the parable of the mustard seed explains why the Catholic church of today doesn't look like the early New Testament church. "The fact that the seed became a tree," reflects Reichert, "does not prove its development was illegitimate."²⁴ He continues by noting that the

teachings of the Catholic Church could be shown to have developed, slowly but distinctly, from roots going back to apostolic times, and the earliest picture of Church doctrine...did indeed look like a small Catholic tree! (It certainly does not resemble a Protestant seed.)²⁵

In other words, everything the Catholic Church teaches today was taught in germinal form in the apostolic era.²⁶

Another Neocatholic, Dale Vree, also advances the doctrinal development argument. To raise the ante just a bit, however, Vree doesn't waste his time with mustard seeds. Vree concentrates on what he sees as a global doctrinal development in Scripture: that is, since the Bible itself contains doctrinal development over time, then we should not be surprised to find such development in the Roman Catholic Church.²⁷ To that end, Vree touts that the God of the Old Testament is a "tribal, vengeful, forbidding, and warlike God while the God of the New Testament is universal, forgiving, loving, and peace loving."²⁸ And Vree's doublevision-bordering-on-polytheism is supposed to convince us that the trappings of Marian theology, icons,

indulgences, purgatory, priestly celibacy, and the rest are justifiable? Is this theology or comedy?

Split Ends

Sometimes Neocatholics argue against *Sola*

Scriptura by appealing to the jumble of Protestant denominations and sects. Sometimes, though, they appeal to Protestant sectarianism as independent proof of the alleged inadequacy of Protestant theology as a whole. Believe it or not, one Neocatholic actually had time to count all of the Protestant denominations and sects, claiming that the grand total is over 25,000!²⁹

This Neocatholic argument suffers from almost as many flaws as the total number of sects Protestantism

has allegedly spawned. For the sake of brevity, we will concern ourselves with only a few of these flaws. Even interpreting this argument in its most charitable light by granting its premise (that there are a huge number of Protestant denominations), the conclusion does not ineluctably follow on the basis of the premise (i.e. that Protestantism is false and Catholicism is true). This argument is a textbook example of a *non-sequitur*.

But the premise can't get off scot-free either. This entire argument is based on the hidden assumption that because X precedes Y that X was the cause of Y. Just because Protestantism (and *Sola Scriptura*) preceded rampant sectarianism doesn't prove that the former caused the latter, especially since many of the "Protestant" sects don't adhere to *Sola Scriptura* in the first place. In fact, many of them have an authority structure more similar to Catholicism ("Scripture and...") than to Protestantism (*Sola Scriptura*), albeit with a different "pope" and "magisterium."

And just when Neocatholics thought it was safe to bash Protestantism again, they get pulled under the water by the jaws of their own rhetoric. Rearing its ugly head one more time is the pluralism-is-subjectivism fallacy. Just because there are many Protestant denominations and sects does not prove that all of those denominations and sects are false. Nor does it necessarily prove that Rome is true. Thus, while plurality is not necessarily an indicator of falsity, uniformity is not necessarily an indicator of truth.

Perhaps most fallaciously, though, this argument assumes that institutional unity is a virtue in and of itself. But there is another Biblical dynamic Neocatholics should consider: truth (or doctrinal purity). The simple fact of the matter is that truth sometimes divides. And that division is not necessarily to be eschewed. After all, didn't the real Head of the church once say that He came not to bring

²⁴ Reichert, "Where Peter Is," pp. 11-12.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²⁶ Matatics, "Conversion Story."

²⁷ Vree, *New Catholics*, p. 55.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Vree, *Ibid.*, pp. 56, 59. For other Neocatholics who attempt to refute Protestantism based on the number of Protestant sects, see also Talbot, Vanauken, and Reichert, *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 82, 128, 131.

peace but a sword? Truth, you see, is not to be sacrificed on the altar of misguided ecumenicism.

Liturgical Longings

While high church liturgy, is a common feature of Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, as well as most Anglican and Lutheran churches, it also separates Roman Catholics & Co. from most of their Reformed and Evangelical Protestant counterparts. In *Evangelical Is Not Enough*, Howard claims that evangelicalism has terribly missed out on something special by rejecting liturgy.³⁰ Neocatholics pick up this ball and run with it, contending that Protestantism has missed out on the fullness and richness of high church liturgy, and in particular, the glory of the Mass and the Eucharist.

Mass Hysteria

By extolling the splendor of Roman Catholic liturgy, Howard isn't referring to ceremonial dazzle. Rather, he refers to the "vision" of the Roman Catholic Church. Describing this vision, Howard writes:

It is immense. It is full of glory. It is unsupportedly bright. But not only this: it is *present* in the Mass. ... But it is only in the liturgy...that the whole drama is unfurled and the scrim of temporality is pierced, and we begin to see both the abyss and the Sapphire Throne. It is very hard to keep this vision alive in nonliturgical worship.³¹

According to Howard, there is an ineffable sublimity and a sheer plenitude which animates the Mass.³²

Why are Neocatholics like Howard drawn to appreciate liturgy? For some, it is the kind of worship with which they have grown up. Reichert, for example, explains that when he became an evangelical, he was surprised by "the lack of anything [he] recognized as liturgy"³³ from his childhood. He actually became homesick for liturgical worship. Of course, it almost goes without saying that just because we are accustomed to something, just because we have a fondness for something, or just because we may long for the good ol' days, doesn't mean that what we are accustomed to, fond of, or long for is necessarily right.

Still another reason why Neocatholics are drawn to liturgy is that the liturgy, for the most part, is the same no matter which Catholic church a parishioner attends. The Catholic can worship at most any Catholic Church and discover there basically the same order of worship, the

same symbolism, and the same ritual. Crudely analogous is the joy and delight weary road travelers experience when they spot the golden arches, since they know that the Big Macs will always taste the same! Sameness, however, is no guarantor of propriety. After all, something can be the same and yet be erroneous, in which case it would simply be the same old error uniformly committed.

While some Neocatholics weaned themselves away from liturgy during their evangelical years, only to discover how much they really missed it, and others are attracted to the sameness of the Mass, still others are drawn to the Mass because they have developed a cultured appreciation for the symbolism and beauty of liturgical worship. It would be mistaken, however, to think that aesthetic appreciation is the only reason why liturgy appeals to some Neocatholics. Not all Catholic liturgy resembles Easter morning Mass at St. Peter's basilica. One Neocatholic humorously made this point by claiming that those who think all Masses imbue an equal sense of aesthetic satisfaction obviously haven't been to the local Catholic church!³⁴ A point well-taken. But whether the Mass resembles Easter morn at St. Peter's basilica or not, the real question is whether the Mass accords with what God has commanded His people in Scripture regarding how they are to approach Him in worship. Besides, as we have already noted, liturgy is not unique to Rome.

Some Neocatholics also see in the Mass the opportunity to worship God emotionally as well as intellectually. After describing how he was immeasurably influenced by C.S. Lewis' "rational approach" to Christianity, where faith and reason are not antithetical to one another, Floyd Newman has written that the Mass provided an opportunity to blend heart and mind. He continues by noting:

When I applied this reasoning [Lewis' notion that faith and reason are not antithetical] to Catholicism, I began to see the appropriateness of liturgical worship with its ceremony and ritual. The Catholic Church became more attractive.³⁵

But does Newman's conclusion follow from his premise? Even granting the premise that faith and reason, on Lewis' view, stand shoulder-to-shoulder, this reasoning does not uniquely favor Roman Catholic liturgy. To be sure, Newman doesn't base his conversion entirely upon his attraction to the Mass. But this argument, even if it is only

one arrow in Newman's quiver, is still unsound.

Saved by the Bell

The Mass and the Eucharist really can't be separated since the latter is the central act — the climax — of

**Vree claims
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³⁰ Howard, Thomas, *Evangelical Is Not Enough*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990).

³¹ Howard, *New Catholics*, pp. 96-97.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 97.

³³ Reichert, "Where Peter Is," p. 7.

³⁴ Hudson, Deal, "Baptist Preacher Becomes Catholic," (audio cassette) (West Covina: St. Joseph Communications, Inc., n.d.).

³⁵ Newman, Floyd I. Jr., "The Search for a Shepherd (Jeremiah 23:4)," *New Catholics*, p. 146.

the former. Scott Hahn links the Mass to the Eucharist by telling how he attended a noontime Mass and saw the religious devotion of rank-and-file workers, with their heads bowed and their hearts stirring.³⁶ After regularly attending Mass, he recalls that the Eucharist became the all-controlling, essential pursuit of his life.³⁷

As with the attraction to the Mass in general, so there are many reasons why Neocatholics are drawn to the Eucharist in particular — why they embrace transubstantiation and believe that at the sound of the bell, the substance of bread and wine turn into the physical body and blood of our Lord.

One Neocatholic, for example, claims that it was impossible for him to get along without the Eucharist since he would get homesick apart from it.³⁸ Hahn claims that he was attracted to the regularity of the Eucharist as over and against most Protestant churches which, on the whole, have communion only a few times each year. Not every Protestant church, though, partakes quite so infrequently. There are, in fact, Protestant churches which partake of the Lord's supper weekly. So what's the real reason why Neocatholics are drawn to Catholicism through the Eucharist?

Many Neocatholics claim that Scripture itself teaches the doctrine of transubstantiation in the sixth chapter of the gospel of John.³⁹ Protestants are literalists elsewhere, Neocatholics clamor, except when it comes to interpreting Christ's words about being the bread of life, about eating His flesh and drinking his blood.

As with other Neocatholic arguments we have examined so far, this one, even if true, does not prove that Roman Catholicism, as a whole, is true. A part is no substitute for the whole. This literalist argument also equivocates between the belief that Scripture is literally true and the literal interpretation of Scripture. While Protestants believe that Scripture is literally true, they quite correctly disavow the notion that Scripture is always to be interpreted literally. Right-thinking Protestants, unlike the straw men Neocatholics prop up, believe that Scripture, like any work of literature, must be interpreted in light of its local context (including its literary, historical, grammatical, and logical contexts), as well as in light of the broader context of Scripture as a whole (i.e. what parallel passages teach). The sixth chapter of John is no exception.

All That Glimmers

Love at First Sight

High steeples. Glorious columns. Stained glass windows. No doubt these are beautiful things to behold. Not surprising, then, many Neocatholics describe how they were drawn to the richness of Catholic symbolism expressed in the architectural beauty of Catholic churches. Howard, for example, describes how, when only a sniveling

twelve year old boy, he stumbled into a dark building lit only by a "religious light" streaming through the stained glass windows.⁴⁰ It wasn't until later in life, that Howard realized the full impact of this childhood event.

But Howard is not the only Neocatholic who was awestruck by the beauty and symbolism of Roman Catholic churches. Vree, while in high school, also "wandered into Catholic churches a couple of times" and learned the following lesson:

We Protestants correctly talked about our church building as 'God's house,' but our church interiors resembled auditoriums, whereas I was immediately struck by a different ambience inside Catholic churches: there was a permeating 'divine presence' (even when no worship was in progress).⁴¹

Vree then exclaims that the candlelight, kneeling saints, statues, and wonderful altar colors excited his primitive sense of worship.⁴²

Whereas Howard was a young boy and Vree was an adolescent when they each stumbled into a Roman Catholic church, yet other Neocatholics such as Dan O'Neill and Reichert fell in love with the beauty of Roman Catholic churches as full-fledged adults.⁴³ Reichert, for example, recalls sitting in a Catholic chapel in Europe where he became entranced by Gregorian chants and thought that he must have been "listening to angelic conversation."⁴⁴

A Slightly Different Twist

While the melody is the basically the same, some Neocatholic accounts vary the chorus just a bit.

Away in the Manger

Glenwood Davis, Jr., relates how he derived a sense of religious inspiration from the nativity scene his father set up each year during the Christmas season.⁴⁵ Ever the inquisitive youth, Davis noticed that passersby gazed intently — almost worshipfully — at this nativity scene, leading him to conclude retrospectively that he could "sense something other-worldly" in this nativity scene. What made it all come together for Davis? Let him explain:

I happened to walk into the local Catholic church, and although I didn't understand everything I saw and heard, the blessedness I sensed at my father's nativity scene seemed to permeate the atmosphere of the building.⁴⁶

The Twilight Zone

At least two other Neocatholics inform us how they literally became enlightened while visiting a local

³⁶ Hahn, Scott, "Protestant Minister Becomes Catholic," (audio cassette) (West Covina: Saint Joseph Communications, Inc., n.d.). Even granting Hahn a modicum of literary license, how could he really tell whether or not their hearts were stirring?

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Forest, *New Catholics* p. 22.

³⁹ O'Neill, *Ibid.*, p. 179; Hahn, "Protestant Minister"; Matatics "Conversion Story."

⁴⁰ Howard, *Evangelical*, p. 22.

⁴¹ Vree, *New Catholics*, p. 50.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ O'Neill, *Ibid.*, p. 178; and Reichert, "Where Peter Is," pp. 6-7. Both Vree and Reichert refer to "falling in love."

⁴⁴ Reichert, *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

⁴⁵ Davis, Glenwood, "Leaving the Fundamentalist Wilderness," *This Rock*, May 1990, p. 14.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Catholic church. Jim Forest, for instance, relays the following account:

One afternoon when I was praying in the chapel, I felt as if I were in a river of light. Opening my eyes, I found that indeed I was. Light of a deep golden color was pouring through the lancet of the window over the Mary altar on the right side of the church, and I was in the center of its narrow path. I closed my eyes and enjoyed being bathed in light.⁴⁷

Forest recounts that when he searched for a rational explanation, he could find none (since it was overcast), thus leading to the implied conclusion that this was a miracle verifying the truth of Catholicism.

On a somewhat less miraculous note, another Neocatholic recalls that when he was in a Catholic church one day, his

attention became fixed on a very simple statue of the Virgin on the left side of the church. I enjoyed watching the candlelight flit across her wooden surface.... I was captivated by the whole scene — bright green vestments, stone altar, priestly apparatus, of chalice, paten, and sacramentary, the bread, the wine.⁴⁸

While we may want to share the tingles of Neocatholics who relay their love at first sight, away in a manger, and twilight zone accounts, we should step back for a moment and reflect further upon them. It is true that Protestants need to learn that worshipping God is something which involves their entire being. And Protestants also need to learn that symbolism is, in a sense, inescapable. But such love at first sight, away in the manger, and twilight zone accounts do not prove that Catholicism is true. Nor do they prove that Protestantism is false. After all, the Roman Catholic Church does not have a monopoly on beauty or symbolism. The Eastern Orthodox Church, the Anglican and Episcopalian churches, and the Lutheran Church, just to name a few, are also saturated with much of the same kind of beauty and symbolism. Even Reichert himself tells of how he had a twilight zone experience while visiting a Lutheran church where light entered through a stained glass window and shimmered on the communion wine, conveying something almost mystical.⁴⁹ Hence, beauty and symbolism (not to mention light pouring through stained glass windows) are not unique to Rome.

Moreover, for every Neocatholic who tingles when he walked into a Catholic cathedral, church, or chapel, there is a Reformed Protestant who rejoices in the regulative principle of worship and the symbolism of true worship by relying upon the graces God has provided in His Word and in the sacraments of baptism and communion. Even one Neocatholic, who expected to see a miniature St. Patrick's Cathedral, was impressed when, still a Protestant, he found a Roman Catholic Church of "shocking simplicity" with "none of the creepy-mysterious atmosphere that had

both repelled and allured me on previous excursions into Catholic churches."⁵⁰

In passing we must also note that lavish churches, while architecturally and aesthetically pleasing to some, come with a hefty price tag. True enough, Protestants who live in glass houses — like Rev. Schuller in his Crystal Cathedral — shouldn't throw stones. But advancing the kingdom of God and meeting the needs of others often compete for the same limited resources. Ironically, it is some of the more socially liberal Neocatholics — like Vree — who seem most enthralled with such lavishness as long as it's inside a Roman Catholic Church!

Lean to the Left

Whatever else can be said of Neocatholics, one Neocatholic himself has written that "[o]n the whole they seem to be socially liberal, yet theologically conservative in outlook...."⁵¹ Another Neocatholic dresses the same point in slightly different garb by distinguishing between evangelicals who have spirituality without social concern and theological liberals who have social concern without spirituality. Only the Catholic Church, we are told, has both.⁵² Still other Neocatholics speak of the need for "Christian social action",⁵³ tout the "social conscience" of the Catholic Church,⁵⁴ or advocate "proletarian consciousness".⁵⁵ Neocatholics who lean to the left thus see in Rome the opportunity to be switch hitters, the opportunity to be "socially Left, theological[ly] Right."⁵⁶

To be sure, many evangelicals bat from the right side of the plate: they are theologically and politically conservative. In fact, they often arrive at their conservative political conclusions by adopting patently non-Christian premises. And worse yet, since ideas have consequences, many evangelicals have failed to exercise Christian charity and compassion in addressing various social ills such as poverty and homelessness. But that is a far cry from swallowing leftist utopianism whole hog.

Many Neocatholics, though, are still gulping. But while they rightly fault their evangelical counterparts for buying into the non-Christian aspects of their political conservatism, Neocatholics themselves often buy into the non-Christian aspects of political leftism. Their leftism, to be quite blunt, is often born of an unparalleled theological naivete. Vree, for example, contrasts what he sees as the social implications of Calvinism (which, according to Vree, focuses on individual pursuit of prosperity) with Catholic "proletarian consciousness" (which focuses on struggling together for a better world).⁵⁷

While Calvinism sanctions private property and godly stewardship, the Calvinist view of industriousness (i.e. an aspect of the doctrine of the priesthood of all

⁴⁷ Forest, Jim, "Coming to Know the Mercy of God," *New Catholics*, p. 22.

⁴⁸ Weiskel, Peter K., "Drawn to the Sacramental Mysteries," *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁴⁹ Reichert, "Where Peter Is," p. 7.

⁵⁰ Thompson, James J. Jr, "A Wink of Heaven," *New Catholics*, p. 48.

⁵¹ O'Neill, "Introduction," *Ibid.*, p. xi.

⁵² Weiskel, Peter, K., "Drawn to the Sacramental Mysteries," *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁵³ Talbot, John Michael, "On Becoming a Radical for Christ," *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁵⁴ O'Neill, Dan, "The Pearl of Great Price: My Search for the Church," *Ibid.*, p. 178.

⁵⁵ Vree, Dale, "A Less Traveled Road to Rome," *Ibid.*, pp.

50

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 60

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

believers,⁵⁸ sometimes known as the Protestant work ethic) is no more responsible for the abuses of capitalism than is the Calvinist view of Christian liberty responsible for alcoholism. The one simply does not entail the other. To boot, Vree also bespeaks a profound ignorance of the covenantal — community — nature of true Calvinist theology which eschews the radical individualism he attempts to eviscerate. Thus, Calvinism is not inherently individualistic, let alone individualistic in its pursuit of prosperity.

Far worse than attributing the abuses of capitalism to Calvinist theology, Vree's leftism is ultimately based on a mistaken theological premise: that God has a "preferential love for the poor."⁵⁹ Scripture, however, informs us that God is no respecter of persons. As such, true Christianity refuses to romanticize either wealth or poverty (Prov. 30:8-9). A consistently Christian worldview should agree with political conservatism and liberalism only to the extent that such political views are Christian. And this spins us around, just one more time, to the intractable question of authority.

The English Channel

While political leanings heavily influenced some Neocatholics to jump ship, cultural connections have caused them to swim across the channel — what Vanauken refers to as the English channel.⁶⁰ Emphasizing the cultural influence of Anglicanism, Cardinal John Henry Newman, a nineteenth century Anglican convert to Catholicism, once astutely observed that Anglicanism is neither "a system of religion nor a body of truth but a feeling, a tradition, its roots intertwined with associations of national history and of family life."⁶¹ "You do not learn it," he continued, "you grow into it; you do not forget it, you grow out of it."⁶²

One convert to Catholicism from the ranks of the Eastern Orthodox clergy, continues much in the same vein by noting that Anglicanism is "a kind of national spirit.... Its state connection molded Anglicanism into a national religion intended to encompass every Englishman's private search for God."⁶³

To understand why some Anglicans seem more disposed to Rome as opposed to Wittenberg or Geneva, it is important to note that while the Anglican Church was at one time heavily influenced by Lutheran and Calvinistic thought (and in some cases still is), the Oxford Movement of the early nineteenth century, led by Newman, revived the

Anglican Church's Catholic heritage in many instances. Those who longed for this Catholic heritage, quite naturally, either already viewed or came to view the split with Rome not as a boast but as a tragedy. For them, the Anglican church was the *via media*, the half-way house, between the Catholic heritage they longed for and the English culture they lived and breathed.

Given Anglicanism's cultural milieu and its theological heritage, it both surprising and unsurprising, that many Anglicans, including Anglophiles like Howard and Vanauken, have found their way across the English channel. While Anglican churches sympathetic with Rome offered a distinctively British worship, they nonetheless served as a primer on many Catholic distinctives. But true Brits who find themselves attracted to the distinctively British character of Anglican music, prose, liturgy, architecture and hymnody are not the only ones who have swum across the English channel. Much the same can be said of non-Brits as well, many of whom were members of Episcopalian churches in America. To use a slightly different metaphor, Anglicanism, in a very real way, has served as training wheels helping to stabilize quite a few Neocatholics on their road to Rome. Cultural influence aside, what really caused both true-Brit and non-Brit Neocatholics to turn to Rome, though, was their antipathy for Anglicanism's "different theology," that is, the "neo-modernist" tendency

in Anglican theology which forsook the Book of Common Prayer, defended the ordination of women, and approved divorce, abortion,

Anglicanism, in a very real way, has served as training wheels helping to stabilize quite a few Neocatholics on their road to Rome.

and homosex (including the ordination of those who commit homosex). Rather appropriately, Vanauken observes that he did not leave the Anglican Church; the Anglican church left him.⁶⁴

We heartily applaud those who parted ways with the neo-modernist "different theology" of Anglicanism. But as with so many of the Neocatholic arguments we have already seen, this argument does not tip the scale in the direction of Rome.

Pope-Pourrie

Aside from the many reasons evaluated above, Neocatholics offer a hodge-podge of other reasons for converting to Rome.

Getting Poped

While Vanauken jocularly refers to the Protestant-to-Catholic conversion process as getting "poped,"⁶⁵ many such converts, including Vanauken, express the deepest admiration for the current pontiff, Pope John Paul II, claiming that he is one of the reasons why many Neocatholics have converted to Rome. In a private letter to

⁵⁸ See, Hagopian, David, "Trading Places: The Priesthood of All Believers," *Antithesis*, May/June, Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 40-41.

⁵⁹ Vree, *New Catholics*, p. 51.

⁶⁰ Vanauken, *Ibid.*, pp. 122-143.

⁶¹ Newman, John Henry, quoted in Vanauken, *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Parker, James, "A Married Catholic Priest?" *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁶⁴ Vanauken, *Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁶⁵ Vanauken, *Ibid.*, p. 138.

a Protestant-about-to-be-Catholic, Vanauken pontificates (a little papal humor never hurt anybody) that "since John Paul II mounted the chair of Peter, the tide is setting strongly toward Rome. I hear of conversions on every hand."⁶⁶

Beating the papal drum further, Vanauken has elsewhere written that "[t]he joyful radiance of John Paul II's appearance among us [gave] this sheep [Vanauken] intimations, however faint, of what the second coming might be like."⁶⁷ Not able to contain himself, Vanauken calls the current pope the "white knight of Christianity", and argues that his election actually proves the Holy Spirit's continued guidance of the Roman Catholic Church.⁶⁸

Vanauken does not stand alone in claiming that Pope John Paul II is one of the main reasons why many Neocatholics have converted. Elena Vree has written that

[t]he event that brought me to the realization that I should become a Roman Catholic was the election of the current pope....If the Holy Spirit could move the College of Cardinals to elect this man to the papacy, then the Holy Spirit, through the Pope, could energize me and stir me from my complacency and move me into action. This is the man who symbolizes the persecuted Church.⁶⁹

After thus extolling the current Pope, Elena Vree writes that when John Paul II allowed Anglo-Catholic, Episcopalian, and Eastern Orthodox priests who were already married to become Roman Catholic priests, she had no reason to wait to become a Roman Catholic.⁷⁰

Appeal to the Masses

Vanauken not only appeals to the one (the Pope), he also appeals to the many – the masses – by claiming that Catholics outnumber Protestants by at least two to one.⁷¹ More generically, former Christian rock star-turned-Franciscan monk, John Michael Talbot, claims that there "is no larger unified group of professing Christians on the face of the earth" than Catholics.⁷² While arguments appealing to the masses are quite frequent in Neocatholic literature, such arguments just don't add up.

At absolute best, appealing to the masses is an *argumentum ad populum* – appealing to the people to determine the truth. Such appeals are dangerous if for no other reason than that public opinion polls are no indicator of truth. Before you jump aboard the Neocatholic bandwagon, consider the form of this argument which basically holds that if more people believe X as opposed to Y, then X must be true and Y must be false. On that reasoning, Christianity would be false since approximately two-thirds of the world's population is non-Christian!

⁶⁶ Vanauken, quoted in F. Newman, *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁶⁷ Vanauken, *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* For a similar argument, see Hitchcock, Helen Hull, "With God's Help," *Spiritual Journeys*, p. 149.

⁶⁹ Vree, Elena M. "Home at Last," *New Catholics*, p. 69.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* See also Parker, James, "A Married Catholic Priest?" *Ibid.*, pp. 169-172 (Eastern Orthodox convert to Rome); and Rubin, Jeffrey, "Crooked Lines," *Spiritual Journeys*, p. 329 (Jewish convert to Rome).

⁷¹ Vanauken, *New Catholics*, p. 123: "What of the mere existence of the Catholic – the Universal – Church, twice as large as the splinters of Protestantism put together?"

⁷² Talbot, *Ibid.*, p. 86.

Beyond embarrassing themselves with such elementary blunders, Neocatholics who appeal to the masses also assume that they are comparing apples with apples when they are really comparing apples with oranges. Were they to read the small print in the almanac charts they banter about so freely, they would see that the number of Roman Catholics worldwide includes infants whereas the number of Protestants generally includes only "adult" members.⁷³ The point in dispute is not whether children should be counted as part of God's family. The point is that you can't make a meaningful statistical comparison between the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant churches, since the Roman Catholic Church includes under its umbrella many who have no affiliation with the Roman Catholic Church today, whereas the Protestant church figures generally account only for those who have such present affiliations!

A Miraculous Thing Happened to Me

When we examined the love at first sight and twilight zone accounts above, we saw that a few Neocatholics claimed to have experienced miraculous or near-miraculous appearances of light, either pouring through stained glass windows or beaming on statues of Mary.⁷⁴ Stranger things have happened. One Neocatholic, for instance, claims that God personally confirmed the truth of Catholicism to him and communicated to him the role he was to play in the Roman Catholic Church.⁷⁵ My personal favorite, though, was the cameo appearance of Joan of Arc who appeared to one Protestant-about-to-be-Catholic in a dream and exclaimed "I never expected you to be here [Rome]."⁷⁶

Wake up! For every Catholic that claims to have been bathed in light, experienced divine extra-biblical revelation, or dreamed a little dream of Rome, there are hundreds if not thousands of Pentecostal or Charismatic Protestants who would claim to have had even more dramatic experiences. Both Protestants and Catholics who appeal to the ethereal realm need to realize that "even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Cor. 1:14), as evidenced from the fact that even pagan animistic cults claim guidance from similar "revelations." We need to build our houses on a firmer foundation, which, of course, means that the Catholic and the Protestant, once again, must decide what serves as the ultimate foundation of their respective faith-systems. In other words, they must answer the intractable question of authority.

⁷³ Hoffman, Mark, editor, *The World Almanac and Book of Facts*, 1990 ed. (New York: Pharos Books, Scripps Howard Co., 1989), p. 610. The small prints goes as follows: "Comparisons of membership statistics from group to group are not necessarily meaningful. Membership definitions vary – e.g. Roman Catholics count members from infancy, but some Protestant groups count only adult members, usually 13 years or older; some groups compile data carefully, but others estimate; not all groups report annually."

⁷⁴ Howard, *Evangelical*, pp. 21-22; Forest, *New Catholics*, p. 22; Weiskel, *Ibid.*, p. 73; Reichert, "Where Peter Is," p. 7.

⁷⁵ Talbot, *New Catholics*, p. 85.

⁷⁶ Case, "The Real Thing," *Ibid.*, p. 121. For additional accounts of dreams and/or visions, see Livingston, Judith Bane, "The Wonderful Ways of the Lord," *Spiritual Journeys*, pp. 218-219, 226; Vitz, Evelyn Birge, "My Path to Rome," *Ibid.*, p. 373; and Vitz, Paul C., *Ibid.*, pp. 391-92.

Name Dropping

Howard has written that if he said "no" to Rome, he would have to reckon with the likes of "Augustine and Bede and Gregory and Aquinas and Erasmus and Thomas More and Ignatius and Bellarmine and Bossuet and Suarez and Newman and Chesterton and Knox for starters...."⁷⁷ Then he quickly adds that doing so would make him nervous.⁷⁸ While many of these names head the list, still other Neocatholics appeal to other influential Catholic scholars or authors such as Day, Derrick, Greene, Howard, Jurgin, Keating, Kreeft, Merton, Sheed, Shrack, Waughn, and others.

The only problem with the name dropping argument is that it cuts both ways. Protestants, in fact, can "see" the Neocatholic ante and "raise it". Just consider those who brilliantly carried the Protestant torch such as Luther, Bucer, Calvin, Zwingli, Melancthon, Goodwin, Owen, Perkins, Sibbes, Ames, Chemnitz, Dabney, Thornwell, Spurgeon, the Hodges, Warfield, Young, Wilson, Machen, Murray, Berkhof, and Van Til.

But do names really matter? What really matters is whether the message these theological greats heralded is true. And that spins us right around — again — to answering the intractable question of authority. You see, Neocatholics have to name drop because name dropping is built into their ultimate authority (Tradition). When all of their rhetorical dust settles to the ground, however, the only true authority left standing is God speaking to His people through His veritable Word.

Are We Having Fun Yet?

Sadly, some distorted versions of Protestantism soured many Neocatholics, particularly when it comes to the ever-infamous list of Fundamentalist taboos. One Neocatholic, for example, came to abhor the notion of "a deity who hated movies, cards, and dancing, a cruel being who held out the offer of heaven much like a carrot on a stick for a stubborn mule."⁷⁹ Quite correctly, Neocatholics criticize Fundamentalist legalism for failing to recognize the goodness of God's creation and the liberty that is ours in Christ.⁸⁰

The problem with appealing to the distortions of Fundamentalist taboos is that such an appeal doesn't prove Protestantism, as a whole, to be defunct. Nor does it prove Catholicism to be true. In other words, you don't need to become a Catholic to overcome Fundamentalist legalism. Reformed Protestants have been perhaps the greatest champions of Christian liberty, teaching that Christians are free to enjoy all things that God doesn't forbid in Scripture (i.e. as long as they do so within the limits that God has prescribed in Scripture). This goes for drinking and dancing as well as music and movies and a host of other activities. So this is actually an area where Reformed Protestants and Catholics agree, albeit formally.

⁷⁷ Howard, *New Catholics*, p. 94.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Davis, "Fundamentalist Wilderness," p. 16.

⁸⁰ Freeman, *Spiritual Journeys*, pp. 90-91; Hudson, "Baptist Preacher."

Conclusion

One reason, but certainly by no means the primary reason, many Neocatholics turn to Rome is the at-homeness they feel with Catholicism. For them, Rome is their final resting place, a place where they claim to have achieved a sense of cognitive rest. Longing to come home to this place of cognitive rest, one leading Neocatholic reminisces about a moment of deep personal crisis when he wanted to become a Catholic, despite the fact that he had previously decided to wait for several more months before converting.⁸¹ During this time of deep soul-searching, he felt a divine nudge, an internal sense of

God saying "What do you want?" to which he answered, "That's easy, I want to get home...."⁸² And getting home to the alleged truth of Catholicism is, in a sense, what Neocatholicism is all about: not only getting home, but attempting to help other Protestants do the same.

In this article, we have had an opportunity to travel alongside a handful of Protestants who claim to have found their home in Rome, to see exactly why they have gone home to Rome. Summing up why he was Romeward bound, one Neocatholic simply exclaims that he fell in love with everything Rome had to offer:

When asked what attracted me to Catholicism, I cannot say, for it wasn't *something* it was *everything*. The art, the architecture, its antiquity, the beauty of the liturgy...the social conscience of the Church, its prophetic role in our modern world, the lives of the saints, the mystery, the presence of Christ, the sheer universality — I was falling in love — and perfect love casts out all fear, if not all apprehension.⁸³

Falling in love with everything Rome has to offer is ultimately why Neocatholics have found their home in Rome. Perhaps after travelling part of the way down the yellow brick road of Neocatholic rhetoric, we are now in a better position to "give an answer" — in an introductory way, to be sure — to those who are considering making their home in Rome and even to those who are already there. After all, even Dorothy, with the blink of an eye, realized that her adventure in the land of Oz was only a dream. Δ

⁸¹ Hahn, "Protestant Minister."

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ O'Neill, *New Catholics*, p. 178.

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ADDENDUM:

Why I Left Protestantism for Catholicism

Jeffrey A. Tucker

I am no fan of "conversion" essays, which are sometimes pompous and self-serving. My purpose is to achieve a greater spirit of mutual respect. How rare are Protestant conversions to Catholicism? More rare than reverse, but I know enough cases, including my own, to make the subject worth exploring.

J.I. Packer recently wrote in *Christianity Today* (May 1989) that the contrast between the "zany wildness" of Protestantism and the "at-homeness" of Catholicism alone is sufficient to explain conversions to Catholicism. It is the only Church that can, and does, claim institutional continuity from the time of Christ to the present. He contrasts the "at home" motive with a more genuine longing for the truth.

But the Road to Rome is a long one, and, I submit, the choice between instability and continuity, sectarianism and universality, is not a sufficient reason for conversion. The Christian ought to be willing to be a minority of one if the truth is at stake.

It is precisely the conviction of truth that led to my conversion to Catholicism. I wrote Rev. Packer that "My conversion to Catholicism was motivated by more than a feeling of 'at-homeness.' God makes us feel at home when we have a sincere conviction of truth. There is no dichotomy between the two, as you suggested. Truth is what I sought when God led me to Rome....My plea is for you to take my conversion, and others like mine, seriously."

Anti-Catholicism

Catholic and Reformed theological discussion has matured since the Reformation, when neither side was immune from using smear tactics to score debating points. Today the inflammatory rhetoric is largely gone, yet fundamental misunderstandings persist. My own anti-Catholicism was partly a product of ethnic prejudice, growing up, as I did, as a Southern Baptist in a largely Hispanic town in West Texas. It took years before I could look at Catholicism as more than a hypocritical, anti-scriptural, even anti-Christian cult.

The Baptist culture of my childhood treated Christianity as a wholly individualized phenomenon. No

man was to exercise authority over any other, in the affairs of the church, or, more importantly, in the understanding of doctrine. There was no discussion of history, councils, creeds, saints, martyrs, or controversies. I don't think my experience was far from typical. Even in the "good-old days" when every family attended Wednesday night prayer meeting such instruction was absent. The Bible — one's subjective interpretations of it — was all that was necessary for individualized Christianity.

My high-school conversion to Presbyterian Church moderated my anti-Catholicism. I began to understand, for the first time, the significance of the creeds, of Church government, of liturgy (however loosely defined). But the most important thing being a Presbyterian did for me was to alert me to the meaning of Christian history. It was the overwhelming weight of 2000 years of history that finally convinced me of the truth of Catholicism.

The Devil Theory of History

Presbyterians do not *want* to tear themselves away from church history, but rather want to be part of God's eternal covenant with His people, from its inception to eternity. At my Orthodox Presbyterian Church, we read the words of the great Reformers with respect and even veneration. We discussed their theological views. We tried to imitate their liturgical styles. All of this is important; it helps in the maturation process. Even though Presbyterians endorse the Reformed doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* (formed in opposition to Rome), they recognize that the Church has a teaching role and that pious individuals in Church history have a level of understanding that supersedes most of our own. Individual faith and conscience are the final guides, of course, but our primary earthly allegiance must be to the teaching authority of the Church.

But there was still something missing from Presbyterianism for me. It seemed to concentrate too heavily on post-Reformation Church history, and the first 1500 years of Christianity received scant attention. Do these years offer us anything that will enhance our understanding of Christianity? One easy way to answer this question is to adopt the Devil Theory of History, which says the history of the Church is the story of corruption. The way to sound doctrine is to adopt the views of the Persecuted simply because they stand against Rome. The result of this view is intolerable: heresy becomes orthodoxy and anybody who shouts "to hell with the Pope" gets a hearing.

The Devil Theory collapses on the most superficial analysis. Christians justifiably take pride in their heritage, yet the Catholic Church was the only Christian Church for at least 1500 years (leaving aside the 11th century Orthodox break). Why would Christ have allowed his Church to wallow in the mire of falsehood and heresy for so long? What kind of witness would that have provided to the world? If Christ did indeed establish a Church, wouldn't He have providentially protected her from significant error?

Partial Corruption?

An alternative view is to see the Church as only partially corrupt. As I understand it, this is the Presbyterian position (the new one; not the traditional). But given the Church's own historical claims of authenticity, authority, and infallibility, this view is difficult to sustain. One cannot have it both ways: the Church was either in Christ's hands (as she claimed) or she was the anti-Christ by virtue of making such claims.

One can selectively draw from pre-Reformation doctrine and expunge from it its pro-Papacy statements. For example, Reformed thinkers are famous for quoting St. Augustine in support of predestination and election. But rarely quoted is St. Augustine's view of the Church, which anticipates ultramontanist (an extreme position on papal authority).

Yet the partial corruption thesis collapses from internal contradictions. Christendom's greatest thinkers and the most pious saints were also devoted to the Church as a divinely protected institution: its catholicity, apostolicity, infallibility, and sacraments. It is anomalous to claim the authority of a saint like Augustine without mentioning his views on the Church. It's like discussing the development of a child without mentioning the mother's role in nurturing, sustaining, and reinforcing the maturation process.

Presbyterians must decide if they were ever part of the universal Church of Catholicism. Did they ever endorse the papacy as a legitimate institution reflecting Christ's will? Was it corrupt from the beginning or just become so in the 16th century? Under what conditions would Presbyterians have been willing to be in communion with Rome? Ideally, should the papacy have been wiped out? It seems to me the correct path is to regard the Catholic church as Christ's church and to regard her claims as true.

The Role of Tradition

Protestants look skeptically on the Catholic view that Christian tradition has doctrinal authority stemming from Christ and the apostles. Yet tradition (the teaching authority of Christ and His apostles) is essential to full Christian understanding for several reasons. First, not everything concerning Christ's work is found in Scripture (Jn. 21:25) and some Christian teaching is handed down by word of mouth (II Tim. 2:2). The Bible instructs us to "stand fast, and hold the traditions which you have learned, whether by word or by our epistle" (II Thess. 2:15). Second, the early Church did not have a Bible in the sense that we do today; yet their faith was fully protected and sustained through tradition. The Bible itself is a product of the 4th century Church. Third, no single individual can fully derive the meaning of scripture by himself: it takes tradition to set up the proper framework for understanding and for asking the right questions. Say the Bible was given to a fully competent scholar and he was asked to write a creed based upon it. Even if he had ten years to do so, who doubts that he would not get it quite right? Christ never intended him to. The Church was established to articulate and defend Christian doctrine (Mt. 16:18-19).

As a Presbyterian, I rejected the subjectivist position of Biblical understanding, and I wanted to embrace Church history. Then I had to decide which parts of the tradition to embrace and which parts to reject. It seemed to me that the doctrine of the Reformers was too much in flux to provide a sufficient grounding in the Faith. And that approach freezes Christianity in time. The Reformers had valuable things to say; but I thought their words and liturgical practices should be weighed against the whole of Christian tradition. I settled on this: I reject the part of tradition that is contradicted by the Bible. And that is the rule the Catholic Church herself has accepted.

The consistent Christian finds that the Church is the anchor of his faith. The fair-minded historian finds that the Catholic Church is the anchor of history. In both cases, I came believe, Providence is at the helm.

My Conversion Process

There were many steps in my conversion, but the most important one was the initial one: investigating what the Church has to offer. My experience accords with G.K. Chesterton's: "This process, which may be called discovering the Catholic Church, is perhaps the most pleasant and straightforward part of the business; easier than joining the Catholic Church and much easier than trying to live the Catholic life. It is like discovering a new continent full of strange flowers and fantastic animals, which is at once wild and hospitable."

There were a host of Catholic terms and objects that have meaning with Catholicism with which I was completely unfamiliar: offices, the magisterium, mortal and venial sins, confession, penance, rosary beads, the saints and martyrs, and even, yes, Marian theology. Suddenly, I found that most of the anti-Catholic ideas that I held were canards with no basis in fact (e.g., that Catholics worship Mary and statues, that they don't believe the Bible inerrant, that they cannot pray directly to God). Even the dreaded doctrine of the infallibility sounded more reasonable considering its limits: the Pope must speak *ex cathedra* (from the Chair of Peter) and he must do so in communion with the Bishops.

This discovery process led me to the proverbial slippery slope of Romanism. As Chesterton describes it: "It is impossible to be just to the Catholic Church. The moment men cease to pull against it they feel a tug towards it. The moment they cease to shout it down they begin to listen to it with pleasure. The moment they try to be fair to it they begin to be fond of it. But when that affection has passed a certain point it begins to take on the tragic and menacing grandeur of a great love affair."

Finally, I cannot discuss my conversion without mentioning the Eucharist, the source and sacrament of Catholic spirituality. Here lies a central difference between the Catholic and Orthodox faiths as versus Protestantism. The vast majority of Christians believe what scripture says about the Eucharist: the bread and wine is fully transformed into the body and the blood — the doctrine of transubstantiation. The Real Presence is indeed a divine mystery (as is much else about our Faith). I was amazed to discover that both Luther and Calvin, in

different degrees, taught the Real Presence in the Eucharist. The Memorialist view—that the Eucharist is all bread and that communion is really without divine significance, done merely “in memory” of Christ—that is, the common teaching of evangelicals, wasn’t believed or taught by the Reformers. I rejected the Memorialist view, but could see no reason not to go all the way to a pure Catholic position.

From Geneva to Rome

It was in my search for a “pure” Presbyterianism that I found Catholicism. I became tired of “protesting”; I wanted a real and positive Christianity. I didn’t want a liturgy and theology defined in opposition to something else; I wanted the *Christian* liturgy and theology that the Church throughout the ages defined and practiced. Moreover, I did not want these things because they were part of the past; I wanted them because they will be part of the future.

John Henry Cardinal Newman, among the most famous of converts from Protestantism to Catholicism, makes the point in *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* that the best and most orthodox elements of evangelical, Reformed, and Anglican Christian doctrine find their fullest expression and glory within Catholicism. The bread in the Lord’s supper becomes the mystery of the Real Presence; collective confession becomes private, specific, and efficacious; the claim of Church authority becomes the hard-core position of infallibility; Scripture becomes the infallible story of the covenant of God, both in content and canon; mere perseverance becomes a well-defined penance; martyrs and saints, whose lives are to be admired and emulated, become advocates on your behalf; the pastor becomes priest; the worship service becomes the Mass, with liturgy based on Scripture and imbued with holiness; the Christian “quiet time” becomes the requirement of a regular and disciplined prayer life, with litanies, memorization, and hours of

intense contemplation on the Triune God.

Yet at the base, there is one reason why I converted to Catholicism. It is summarized by the line from the Apostle’s Creed: “I believe in the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.”

It’s no wonder that Catholics have been so hysterically hated and persecuted throughout history. The Church’s claim to be a fortress of truth, fully expressing the whole of Christian doctrine, makes it the single biggest threat to the forces of modernism and atheism. If a person hates God, why bother attacking Lutherans, Methodists, or the Reformed movement when he can attack Catholicism?

I am not hostile to Protestantism in general, and certainly not to Presbyterianism, to which I owe a great debt. I came to believe that Christ’s Church subsists in Catholicism, which is why it has been so successful in defending orthodoxy and in standing against the tides of Christian sectarianism and atheistic modernism. Catholicism offers orthodoxy, universality, and stability.

Conversion was not an easy decision; the agonizing process lasted nearly three years. My final step was taken out of a conviction of truth, and it was a step I shall never regret. Δ

Conversion reading material: *Vatican II; The Catholic Catechism* by John A. Hardon, S.J.; anything by G.K. Chesterton, but especially *Orthodoxy* and *The Catholic Church and Conversion*; *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* by J.H. Cardinal Newman, *Catholicism and Fundamentalism* by Karl Keating (Ignatius Press, 1988); and *Evangelical is Not Enough* by Thomas Howard (Ignatius Press, 1989).

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New Confusions for Old: Rome and Justification

Roger Wagner

Recent defenders of Rome's doctrine of justification are making the same mistaken accusations today as did their predecessors in the sixteenth century. Rome is still not listening to the Scripture.

I. Introduction

In his recent book, *Catholicism and Fundamentalism*, Karl Keating begins the preface by saying,

Few orthodox Catholics can imagine themselves leaving their religion for another. If, in the disorientation that comes between sleep and wakefulness, they imagine changing their spiritual allegiance, they see themselves waving fond farewell to Rome...and walking but a short distance to something Romelike.¹

Later on the same page, Keating continues,

What few practicing Catholics can imagine is that they might chuck Catholicism for something like fundamentalism, to which they are not drawn at all. Still, they know that people of their acquaintance, people from their own parishes, have made the transition, and are seemingly none the worse for wear.²

He presses his concern on the next page, warning,

This lack of sympathy with the bare possibility of conversion to fundamentalism may be one reason the fundamentalism problem is misunderstood by Catholics. After all, it is hard to understand something that is not taken seriously. But the allure of fundamentalism should be taken seriously...³

¹ Keating, Karl, *Catholicism and Fundamentalism*, (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), p. 9.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

If one were to simply switch the places of the two parties mentioned in the discussion above, one might well express a growing concern among fundamentalist, evangelical, and Reformed Protestants today in the same terms. While it might seem unthinkable, there has been a growing interest in Catholicism within evangelical and Reformed circles in recent years. This interest has led to some notable "conversions" among the evangelical leadership — one can remember the "bombshell" that hit the *Christianity Today* world several years ago with the news of the "conversion" to Rome of noted author and teacher, Thomas Howard. This growing interest in Catholicism has added new vitality and credibility to efforts toward a rapprochement between Protestants and the Vatican. And, what is of more concern to the present writer, is that in this resurgence of Catholicism we have even seen some Reformed and Presbyterian ministers and laymen embrace the doctrine and life of Romanism.⁴

Keating's warning, then, is equally appropriate if addressed to evangelical and Reformed Protestants — the attractiveness of Rome, however unimaginable to 20th century Protestants, remains very strong, and the threat of a "return to Rome" movement needs to be taken as seriously in our day as it was in the days of the Reformation.

One serious problem facing evangelicals and Reformed Christians today is that many of them have become ill-equipped to face the challenge of "converted Protestants" seeking to win other evangelicals over to their new way of thinking. For many Protestants, Romanism seems a dead issue. The Protestant Reformation finished the controversy once and for all as far as they are concerned. Many have become uninformed regarding the theology and piety, as well as the ecclesiastical structures and practices, of the Roman Catholic Church.⁵ Consequently, they may

⁴ I realize that use of terms like "Romanist" is not going to be appreciated by some of the new ex-evangelical defenders of Roman Catholicism. Karl Keating, for example, contrasts those who use such terms as "papist," or "Romish," or "jesuitical" with those who "act irenically, making common cause with Catholics on social and political matters and never using [such] terms." Terms like those mentioned above, he says, "are dead giveaways for active anti-Catholics" (Keating, *Catholicism*, p. 11). It is true that such terms can be and have been used in a gratuitously defamatory way by defenders of Protestantism. But it is also true that they can be used thoughtfully and advisedly. I hope to use them in that latter fashion. I believe it is possible to be "actively anti-Catholic," in the sense of opposing (what I take to be) the very serious errors of Rome, and seeking to persuade men to reject those teachings in favor of (what I take to be) the Biblical gospel, without being mean-spirited and abusive. At the same time the issues over which we are contending are not peripheral or trivial — they are vitally important to the eternal destinies of men and women. As such they call for strong language and strenuous debate.

Furthermore, I will resist with all my heart the kind of spiritual indifference that parades as "irenicism" or academic "distance" and (supposed) "objectivity." Some who have written against Roman doctrine have used very strong language out of just such a deep spiritual concern (e.g., the quotations from Bishop J.C. Ryle that conclude this article). I hope to stand in that line of opposition to Rome. I will leave it to the reader, unprejudiced by the dichotomy suggested by Keating, to pass judgment on the spirit and tone of the present article.

⁵ One common argumentative tactic used to disarm one's opponent in debate is to claim that one's position has not been properly understood. That charge has been made in the current discussions of justification, sometimes (perhaps) with good reason. On other occasions such a charge can be nothing less than a ploy, or itself an expression of serious misunderstanding of the issues involved. Peter Kreeft, for example, declares that "the split between Protestant and Catholic originated in a misunderstanding" (*Fundamentals of the Faith*, [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988], p. 277). He goes on to suggest (p. 279) that both Protestants and Catholics agreed that faith was necessary for salvation, and that the Bible requires good works of believers, and therefore that the problem arose in connection with the ambiguity of the

fall easy prey to the often winsome and even "evangelical-sounding" Romanist who is seeking to persuade them to "return to the fold of the true church." Recent confrontations between formerly-evangelical or -Reformed spokesmen for Rome, on the one hand, and proponents of traditional Protestantism, on the other, have pointed up the problem in fairly graphic ways.⁶

Nor are these aggressive Catholics with (allegedly) new answers gaining a hearing by presenting an expurgated version of Romanist theology and piety. They are more than willing to believe and defend all the major tenants of traditional Roman Catholic doctrine and practice — including papal infallibility, justification by faith and works, the special reverence of Mary and the saints, and traditional Roman sacerdotalism — all of which historically have been serious stumbling-blocks to thoughtful Protestants.

II. The Debate Over Justification

The eagerness on the part of the new defenders of Rome to address evangelical Protestants has led to a renewed debate over the Romanist doctrine of justification as formulated by the Council of Trent (Sixth Session, 1547) and explained by Roman Catholic theologians before and since. The purpose of this present article is to examine recent defenses of the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification, especially those put forth by way of appeal to evangelical Protestants, in the light of the Scripture and the historical Protestant formulations of the doctrine. This, of course, is not a new debate, and many defenders of the evangelical and Reformed Protestant doctrine of justification who have been far more able than the present writer have repeatedly addressed the question in great detail.⁷

Indeed, one wonders what can be contributed at this stage in the debate that will be insightful and helpful, when the ground has been covered so well many times before. One is spurred on to make the effort, however, in part by the fact that some of these contemporary proponents of the Romanist doctrine of justification by faith and works have come to it against the background of what we must presume was an understanding from the inside of the Protestant doctrine.

Some of these defenders claim the special right to be heard by other evangelicals on that basis. They claim that they have asked the leading lights among the heirs of Calvin and Luther (in print and in person) for answers to their

questions and concerns about justification (and other doctrines) and that they have not been given satisfactory answers.⁸ This, of course, raises the question of whether the past discussions of the Reformation/Rome debate over justification have in fact been inadequate as answers to these men's concerns, or if it is rather the case that the "converts" have simply been *unteachable* in light of cogent Biblical argumentation. The only effective way to evaluate that is to review the evangelical and Reformed Protestant understanding of justification in light of the recent discussions by converts to Rome from the ranks of evangelicalism.

III. Features of Recent "Evangelical" Defenses of the Roman Catholic Doctrine of Justification

In reading and listening to the recent advocates of the traditional Romanist view of justification, one is struck by several features, and it is worth noting them before we proceed to re-examine the Biblical doctrine of justification.

A. The Tempting Evangelical Ring

First, there is a decided evangelical "ring" to the defenses made by former Protestants. Listen to Scott Hahn, for example:

The Catholic Church does not teach legalism. If individual Catholics you meet believe that through their own legalistic works-righteousness they can buy their way into heaven, or merit everything on their own, you tell them to go back to their church, back to the Scripture, back to their councils, and change their minds. It isn't works righteousness, it isn't striking a bargain or a deal with God at all. It's God having His way in us by filling us with His life, His love, His power. So God transforms children of the devil into children of God — not just by mere legal decree, but by giving us Christ in His Sonship. Therefore, according to the Roman Catholic Church, each and every deed I do that is pleasing to God is nothing other than the work of Christ active in me through the power of the Holy Spirit.⁹

Certainly much of this language sounds pleasing to evangelical Protestant ears. Indeed, some of these statements could well be made by "card-carrying" evangelicals.

In terms of the debate, this evangelical flavor makes the appeal of these Catholics so potentially winning to Protestant audiences. Efforts to remove the language of "works," "self-righteousness," and "merit"¹⁰ goes a long way to putting evangelical listeners at ease. But, leaving the

⁸ Scott Hahn makes this point in connection with his discussion of the question of the authority of tradition (in the debate with Knudsen mentioned in n.6 above). While a student, according to Hahn, he asked his professors and other leading evangelical theologians about this issue, and (he claims) they were not able to answer his questions/objections to the traditional Protestant doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* (cf. the taped transcript of Hahn/Knudsen, "The Authority/Justification Debate").

⁹ Hahn, "The Authority/Justification Debate."

¹⁰ William Marshner refers to "a Protestant allergy to the word 'merit'" (Marshner, William, *Reasons for Hope*, [Front Royal: Christendom College Press, 1978/1982], p.220). It is more than the word "merit" to which the Reformers objected — it is the very idea that any human quality or action could be added to the righteousness and satisfaction of Jesus Christ as part of the ground of justification.

terms used in the debate. He misses the fact, or at least does not mention it, that the real issue at stake was not the "necessity" of faith and works but the role of either in relationship to God's justification of the ungodly that was the heart of the disagreement.

⁶ If you listen to the recent debate between Scott Hahn and Robert Knudsen on the issues of (1) the authority of church tradition and (2) the nature of justification, I think you will come away with the impression that the issues in the debate were not well-focused, and that much of the time the two advocates were "talking past each other." A tape-recording of this debate is available from Catholic Answers, P.O. Box 17181, San Diego, CA 92117 (under the title "The Authority/Justification Debate," by Scott Hahn and Robert Knudsen).

⁷ I would refer the reader to the discussions of justification by John Calvin, Charles Hodge, Robert Dabney, B.B. Warfield, John Murray, and Norman Shepherd (to name only those in the Reformed theological tradition). A brief consultation of the standard works on systematic theology, and a look through the card catalog at your nearest theological library should give you more than enough to read. I am convinced from my research that there truly is *nothing new* being said in the present round of the debate (which, in my judgment, capitalizes on the *ignorance* of the hearer/reader more than on the inadequacy of the previous discussions of the subject of justification).

rhetoric to one side, the more telling question is whether or not their understanding of the nature of justification actually removes the *reality* of merit and works leading to self-righteous justification. This question remains to be evaluated Biblically. On the surface level, however, the contemporary defenses of the doctrine of justification by adherents of Rome certainly *sound* much better than older formulations of the defense of the same doctrine.¹¹

B. Missing the Antithesis

A *second* notable feature of recent defenses of Roman Catholic justification is the almost exclusive concentration on the question of the role of good works in justification.¹² As we will see below, debate on this question, as important as it is, *does not adequately focus the antithesis* between the Roman and Protestant doctrines of justification. Much of what is said about the necessity of good works to justification can be, and has been, endorsed by Protestants. Marshner appears to admit as much.

A second stage is the very transition from death to life, which is the first stage of justification proper. Here the parties are at one in saying "*sola fide*," though they seem to mean different things by it. Protestants tend to mean that, at this stage, by the grace of God, man's act of faith is the sole act required of him; Catholics mean that faith is the beginning, foundation and root of all justification, since only faith makes possible the acts of hope and charity (i.e. love-for-God) which are also required. However, since most Protestants have a broad notion of the act of faith, whereby it includes elements of hope and love, it is often hard to tell how far the difference on this point is real and how far it is a matter of words.¹³

Without examining Marshner's comments in detail, we simply note at this point that he at least is willing to grant that "most Protestants have a broad notion of the act of faith, whereby it includes elements of hope and love." This "love" includes the "good works" of grateful obedience to God which contemporary defenders of justification by faith *and*

works are eager to emphasize.

If both Protestants and Roman Catholics can speak of the "necessity" of good works, one is left with the conclusion, either that the whole debate has, in fact, been a misunderstanding (as some have said), or that the real issue lies elsewhere. We will argue the latter in our discussion below. The exact character of that "necessity" must be precisely understood in Biblical terms.

Before we leave this point, something more needs to be said about the way in which the Romanist doctrine of justification is currently being defended by former evangelicals. Not all are willing, as Marshner is, to grant that the Protestant position does allow for, indeed requires, good works in the life of the justified believer. In several of the discussions under consideration, there is an all too frequent *caricature* of the Protestant doctrine, suggesting that, since the Protestant rejects good works as *meritorious* (or quasi-meritorious), he is thereby denying *any* importance (or "necessity") of good works to justification. Having set up such a straw man, proponents of Rome's doctrine of justification have an easy time pointing out Scriptures that clearly teach the necessity of subjective renewal and transformation, grateful obedience, and personal holiness as part and parcel of justification. Most notably they draw attention to Mt. 7:21-23 and James 2:20-24.

That such a portrayal of Protestant doctrine is a caricature is evident from John Murray's comments (which are now 35 years old!):

It is an old and time-worn objection that this doctrine ministers to license and looseness. Only those who know not the power of the gospel will plead such misconception. Justification is by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone. Justification is not all that is embraced in the gospel of redeeming grace. Christ is a complete Saviour and it is not justification alone that the believing sinner possesses in him. And faith is not the only response in the heart of him who has entrusted himself to Christ for salvation. Faith alone justifies but a justified person with faith alone would be a monstrosity which never exists in the kingdom of grace. Faith works itself out through love (cf. Gal. 5:6). And faith without works is dead (cf. James 2:17-20). It is living faith that justifies and living faith unites to Christ both in the virtue of his death and in the power of his resurrection. No one has entrusted himself to Christ for deliverance from the guilt of sin who has not also entrusted himself to him for deliverance from the power of sin. "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Rom. 6:1,2).¹⁴

Roman Catholic arguments which overlook the vital role of obedient holiness embraced by Protestants in the application of redemption are, at best, misleading. At worst, they are dishonest and deceitful. Protestants do, and have always, acknowledged the necessity of good works to salvation. Some have even been willing to speak of the necessity of good works *to justification* (in light of the emphasis of James 2),¹⁵ though that has made other Protestants

The Reformers recognized that the Bible includes the language of "merit" and "reward," and so it was not simply the idea of merit, abstractly considered, to which they objected. Rather, it was because "merit," as understood in the Romanist doctrine of justification, compromised the sufficiency of the work of Christ that they wanted to exclude the concept of human merit from their teaching on justification. Even Norman Shepherd, who in recent years has been willing to discuss the question of good works in connection with justification, has repeatedly and unequivocally affirmed that such good works, while necessary to salvation, should not be understood as part of the *ground* of justification. Their "necessity" is to be understood along other lines. This is a point that Rome has never appreciated or acknowledged, and contemporary exponents of the doctrine of justification by faith and works show no signs of having grasped the significance of it either.

¹¹ Herein lies the special danger of these contemporary, evangelical advocates of Rome. The uninformed Protestant listening, for example, to a debate sponsored by *Catholic Answers* may be easily taken in by the appealing rhetoric which sweetly coats the dangerous spiritual poison being taught by the Roman Catholic Church.

¹² Scott Hahn confines his discussion of justification almost exclusively to the question of the necessity of good works (Hahn/Knudsen, "The Authority/Justification Debate"). So does William Marshner, though he broadens his discussion of the question more than Hahn (*Reasons*, pp. 219-238). Karl Keating has some things to say about the question of assurance, but the focus of his concern is again with the necessity of good works to salvation/justification (Keating, *Catholicism* pp. 164-176).

¹³ Marshner, *Reasons*, p. 220.

¹⁴ Murray, John, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), pp. 160-161.

¹⁵ Shepherd, Norman, "The Grace of Justification," (mimeographed paper, 1979).

somewhat nervous. Be that as it may, *none* have suggested that good works are *irrelevant* to the salvation of men. What they have not been willing to do is identify good works, and the supposed merit arising therefrom, as the *ground* (or supplement to the ground) of justification, as Rome has always contended. To do so would compromise the uniqueness and sufficiency of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.¹⁶

Further, Protestants have emphasized that the salvation of men involves *both* the objective (judicial) pardon and acceptance of the sinner as righteous in Christ, on the one hand, and the subjective transformation of the sinner in holiness — a renewal in the image of Christ (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10; cf. Eph. 2:10; etc.). These two dimensions (corresponding in evangelical parlance to “justification” and “regeneration”/“sanctification”) while *distinguished* from one another have never been *separated* from one another, as if one could take place without the other.¹⁷

Some of the contemporary advocates of Roman Catholic justification fail to acknowledge these important

¹⁶ I realize that not all Protestant defenders of the doctrine of “justification by faith alone” are clear on these issues. There has always been a broad range of opinion between Lutherans, Reformed, and Anabaptists on questions related to justification, particularly on the relationship of good works to saving faith.

The recent emergence of controversy within the evangelical camp over so-called “Lordship Salvation” only serves as a contemporary reminder that anyone who finally claims “to speak for Protestantism” on this vital question is presumptuous. Some of what I have already styled “caricatures” of the Protestant view are, in fact, held by some Protestants. Some of the “straw men” are *real* men. That is why recent defenders of Romanist view of justification have been able so easily to find Protestants to quote and refute.

A striking case in point is Karl Keating in his book, *Catholicism and Fundamentalism*. Because of Keating’s choice to limit his interaction with Protestants to actively anti-Catholic Fundamentalists — “what follows will be no thorough review of fundamentalism as a whole and still less of Protestantism” (p. 10) — he can confine his discussion on salvation (pp. 164-176) to a refutation of such men as Kenneth E. Hagin and Wilson Ewin, whose credentials and argumentation are more than a little suspect. Meanwhile, he has nothing to say Luther or Calvin, or even to a more recent champion of justification by faith alone like John Murray. These recent Romanist apologists have been very successful so far in defining the field of discourse to their advantage, i.e., in such a way as to place their position in the best possible light.

¹⁷ “No doctrine in Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* stands alone. Each is a part of the whole. This is especially true of the doctrine of the Christian life or, more specifically, of regeneration. Calvin continually reminds his readers that the gift of the gospel is twofold: forgiveness of sin and renewal of life. These two gifts are the reverse sides of the one experience: salvation. Thus it is essential for each gift to be understood in the context of the other. There is no true knowledge of regeneration apart from a knowledge of justification by faith alone” (Leith, John, *John Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life*, [Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989], p. 87). This inseparable relationship between the various elements of the application of redemption, especially between justification and sanctification, is reflected in formulations of the *Westminster Larger Catechism*. Question #77 asks, “Wherein do justification and sanctification differ?” The answer given is, “Although sanctification be *inseparably joined* with justification, yet they differ, in that God in justification imputeth the righteousness of Christ; in sanctification his Spirit infuseth grace, and enableth to the exercise thereof; in the former, sin is pardoned; in the other, it is subdued: the one doth equally free all believers from the revenging wrath of God, and that perfectly in this life, that they never fall into condemnation; the other is neither equal in all, nor in this life perfect in any, but growing up to perfection” (emphasis added).

Note also that these English Reformation divines had no problem using the language of “infused grace” and of the Spirit’s enabling of the believer to the exercise of such grace unto good works — language so zealously regarded by Rome. But they had a Biblically-informed understanding of the application of redemption to the life of the believer, and from that standpoint they recognized that this language properly referred to sanctification.

distinctions. What makes such failure unforgivable in the present context of debate is that, as former evangelical Protestants, *these men know better*. It is not a matter of ignorance but of the willful (and deceitful?) suppression of the knowledge of important elements in the doctrinal position they are opposing. This makes for more than an argumentative weakness. It is a demonstration of spiritual blindness which is culpable (Rom. 1:18,21,28).

C. The Absence of Exegesis

In addition to the problem of these argumentative red herrings, there is a third, more substantial, characteristic weakness with recent Roman Catholic defenses of justification. This substantial weakness is the absence of any careful exegesis of the relevant passages on justification. These defenders, with their almost exclusive focus on the place of good works in salvation, fail to exegete the great passages that deal specifically with the doctrine of justification, particularly those passages in Romans and in Galatians. While these texts have been treated in the past by some of the exponents of the Romanist position, they are passed over by many of the more recent defenders.

For example, Hahn, in his debate with Knudsen does not mention, much less exegete, a single one of the classical New Testament texts on justification.¹⁸ Neither does Peter Kreeft.¹⁹ Karl Keating spends his time discussing the matter of assurance and its relationship to faith and justification.²⁰ William Marshner does a little better.²¹ He at least wants to attempt to “break down that lively conviction by which the Protestant feels that St. Paul is his home turf,” and wants to try to demonstrate “that St. Paul’s real position is far closer to that of Trent than to that of Luther.”²² He therefore addresses himself to some of the Pauline material, but his exegesis is partial and superficial at best.

Certainly it is not necessary that every theologian or polemicist deal with all the questions or arguments relevant to the subject under discussion. But for contemporary Roman apologists to fail to mention or refute the substantial exegetical considerations which appear to contradict the Romanist view of justification is much more than a significant oversight. It amounts to a total failure of the Romanist position. Unanswered, the exegetical case expounded by the classical defenders of the Protestant view stands in all its clarity and Biblical authority.

This failure is especially telling in that these defenders, some of whom are themselves former evangelicals, are (no doubt) keenly aware of the massive exegetical and theological evidence that has been put forth by the Protestant side in defending their understanding of justification by faith. Therefore, the decision by the current popular defenders of Romanism to pass over this corpus of Biblical argumentation suggests that they find it safer to *ignore* it than confront it head-on, and refute it.

In this same connection, we also note the absence of any serious attempt on the part of these (and other earlier) Romanist defenders of justification by faith and works to conform their theological formulations to either Biblical language or thought-forms. Reading the arguments put forward since Trent (and before), one is aware that an alien theological system is being *imposed* upon Scripture and that

¹⁸ Hahn, “Authority/Justification Debate.”

¹⁹ Kreeft, *Fundamentals*, pp. 277-281.

²⁰ Keating, *Catholicism*, pp. 164-176.

²¹ Marshner, *Reasons*, pp. 219-238.

²² *Ibid.*, p.223.

exegesis and theological argument are being pressed to fit the system, rather than letting the words and ideas of Scripture itself give rise to the theological system.

D. Downplaying Sacerdotalism

A fourth characteristic of these recent defenses is a failure to face up to the ecclesiastical and sacramental dimensions of Roman Catholic dogma. Though it is never denied, the central and indispensable role of the Roman Church and its sacraments — particularly the sacraments of baptism and penance — is not explained forthrightly in connection with the discussions of justification. It is easy enough to see why Catholic apologists address such issues in discussions designed to appeal to Protestants. The strong sacerdotal dimensions of Roman Catholic justification would certainly be a stumbling-block to many would-be converts from Protestantism. It is more appealing to talk in generalities about God's grace, the adoption of sinners so that they become part of God's family, and the glories of partaking in the unique sonship of Christ, than to clutter up these mystical wonders with talk of a regeneration which cannot be accomplished apart from Roman baptism. Defenders of Rome are somewhat coy about acknowledging the fact (in their discussions of justification) that without auricular confession and the reception of priestly absolution in connection with acts of satisfaction (vital elements of the Roman "sacrament" of penance or reconciliation), one cannot participate in the grace of justification.²³

Today, just as during the debates of the Reformation, Roman Catholic theology maintains that without the mediatorial office of the Roman Church the sinner is *distanced* from divine grace and remains lost in sin and subject to the condemnation of God. Those who are attracted to the new "evangelical" sounds of the "gospel" according to Rome set forth by Keating, Kreeft, Hahn, and others, had better realize that they need to get connected with a duly-consecrated priest and the sacraments of the Roman Church, or else they will be left under condemnation, grasping for an ephemeral grace that remains out of reach. There is *still* something that stands between the sinner and the Savior. Rome has always claimed for itself that unique role. It continues to do so.

E. Trivializing Judicial Pardon

One fifth, and final, observation about the characteristic flavor of recent discussions of justification by ex-Protestants and others will prepare us to examine the Biblical teaching itself. That characteristic is the consistent downplaying of the reality and importance of judicial pardon.

²³ As Kenan B. Osborne observes, "When the relationship between reality and sign is of such a nature that the reality cannot be made manifest except in and through a sign, then we have a dynamism which is at work in the sacraments." (*Sacramental Theology: A General Introduction*, [New York: Paulist Press, 1988], p. 26). In so saying, Osborne reaffirms (though in more contemporary, post-Heideggerian garb) the traditional view of the necessity of the sacraments, i.e., without the mediatorial church and its sacraments, the reality of God's saving grace cannot be conveyed to men. He goes on to point out that this "necessity" is not absolute, but arises from the revealed ordinance of God. "I do not want to give the impression that this situation could not have been otherwise; God could have worked out our salvation without baptism and Eucharist. To use a Scotistic dictum, *de potentia Dei absoluta*, this is quite possible. However, on the basis of revelation, as we find it in the New Testament, baptism and Eucharist, *de potentia Dei ordinata*, are the ways in which God has chosen to bring about our salvation" (pp. 26-27). Thus Rome preserves its unique role of sole dispenser of grace through the sacraments. Its doctrine of justification presupposes at every point this mediatorial office for the Roman Church.

While some defenders pay lip-service in passing to the judicial pardon of sinners as an aspect (or precondition) of justification, they repeatedly describe judicial pardon with minimizing epithets like, "mere," "only," "simply," etc. Karl Keating says, "the Reformers saw justification as a mere legal act by which God declares the sinner to be meriting heaven even though he remains in fact unjust and sinful"²⁴ It is "only an external application of Christ's justice."²⁵ The Romanist doctrine, by way of contrast, sees justification as a "true eradication of sin and a true sanctification and renewal." Sinners become "actually good," thereby "meriting" heaven.²⁶ Similarly, Scott Hahn alleges that the Protestant view makes justification "just simply a legal exchange."²⁷ According to Marshner, the view of the Protestant Reformers means,

...our "justification" can no longer be conceived as a real change in us; it will have to become a sheer declaration on God's part, e.g. a declaration that, thanks to the work of Christ, He will henceforth consider us as just, even though we remain inwardly the sinners we always were. Hence, the Protestant doctrine of "forensic" or "extrinsic" justification. Now watch what happens to our own act of faith: it ceases to be the foundational act of an interior renewal and becomes a mere requirement, devoid of any salvific power in its own right, which God arbitrarily sets as the condition on which He will declare us just. Whereupon watch what happens to our good works: they cease to be the vital acts wherein an ontologically real "new life" consists and manifests itself; they become mere human responses to divine mercy — nice, but totally irrelevant to our justification — or else they become zombie-like motions produced in us by irresistible divine impulses, whereby God exhibits His glory in His elect.²⁸

Notice in these quotations the sustained contrast between the concepts of "legal," on the one hand, and "real," on the other. Forensic justification, according to Rome, is "sheer declaration." It is a legal fiction — God "will henceforth consider us as just," though we are not really just, for we "remain inwardly the sinners we always were." God acts "arbitrarily" with respect to the satisfaction of His justice.

This kind of language, used in the interest of emphasizing the importance of the inner transformation which results from the infusion of divine grace, in fact serves to trivialize divine pardon. This is somewhat ironic in view of the fact that Rome has always tried to get as much mileage as possible out of the spiritual terrorism afforded by graphic visions and thoughts of Final Judgment. One need only think of the visual horrors of Michelangelo's fresco of the *Last Judgment* on the wall of the Sistine Chapel. The second section of the traditional Romanist "Requiem" (a mass for the dead), the *Dies irae* ("day of wrath"), is another portrait of the fearful realities of judgment facing the sinner. It begins,

*The day of wrath, that day shall
dissolve the world in ash, as*

²⁴ Keating, *Catholicism* p. 167.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 167-168.

²⁷ Hahn, "Authority/Justification Debate."

²⁸ Marshner, *Reasons*, p. 222.

David prophesied with the Sibyl.

What trembling shall there be
when the judge shall come
Who shall thresh out all thoroughly...

Death and Nature shall be astounded
when creation rises again
to answer to the Judge...

And therefore when the Judge shall sit,
whatsoever is hidden shall be manifest;
and naught shall remain unavenged...

Soon follows the desperate cry of the guilty sinner,

And what shall I say in my misery?
Whom shall I ask to be my advocate,
when scarcely the just may be without
fear?

The horror of divine judgment is almost palpable (especially when conveyed, for example, by Berlioz' or Verdi's musical language!). Such fear, according to traditional Roman Catholicism, may move the sinner to the beginnings of faith. For that reason fear ought to be, and is, cultivated. But then the Roman apologist for justification by faith and works enters to declare to this terrified sinner facing the reality of the eternal wrath of the holy God that the pardon and forgiveness which they seek is "only an external application of Christ's justice," it is "just simply a legal exchange." The quaking sinner looking for a sure resting-place for his faith is told to look away from the pardon of God, and the sacrifice of Christ which satisfied divine justice. They are *only* legal; they are *insufficient*.²⁹ The sinner is told to look elsewhere — *he is told to look to himself!*

Is this "gospel?" Is this "good news" to the sinner's ear. Is it not rather blasphemy?³⁰ By thus trivializing God's

²⁹ "For Catholics, salvation depends on the state of the soul at death. Christ has already redeemed us, unlocked the gates of heaven, as it were. (Note that redemption is not the same as salvation but is a necessary prelude.) He did his part, and now we have to cooperate by doing ours. If we are to pass through those gates, we have to be in the right spiritual state. We have to be spiritually alive. If a soul is merely in a natural state, without sanctifying grace, which is the grace that gives it supernatural life, then it is dead supernaturally and incapable of enjoying heaven. It will not be allowed through the gates. But if it has sanctifying grace, then heaven is guaranteed even if a detour through purgatorial purification is required first. The Church teaches that only souls that are objectively good and objectively pleasing to God merit heaven, and such souls are ones willed with sanctifying grace. (Keating, *Catholicism*, p.166, emphasis added). All this is to say that the death of Christ is *insufficient* for salvation, and must be *supplemented* by human effort. All the talk of grace (as in "sanctifying grace") - and the Romanist is careful to emphasize that human effort must be begun and continue by the grace of God - is irrelevant to this foundational question of the sufficiency of Christ and His redemptive accomplishment. Having faith in the finished work of Christ on the Day of Judgment is simply *not enough*, and no amount of Romanist rhetoric can negate that basic, tragic reality.

³⁰ It appears that the anonymous poet of the "Requiem" may have been more in touch with the heart of the gospel than these theologians, for he goes on to put these words in the mouth of the trembling sinner: "King of awful majesty / who freely savest the redeemed, / save me, O fount of mercy... / Seeking me...thou didst redeem me, suffering the cross, / let not such labor be frustrated. / O just Judge of vengeance, / give the gift of remission / before the day of reckoning." No demeaning here of the hope for full and free remission as the legal deliverance from the liability of punishment. No word here of self-effort or of self-righteousness. No pleas here for the recognition by God of one's own merits. Only the cry for mercy and a looking to Christ alone for pardon!

forgiveness (a legal category), the Romanist dogma has the effect of minimizing with it the *divine justice* that demands such pardon, and, most importantly, the Savior who *satisfied* the holy demands of *that* divine justice to secure for sinners *that* full and free pardon.

VI. Toward a Biblical Appreciation of Justification

We turn at last to a brief review of the Biblical doctrine of justification as articulated repeatedly by the greatest scholars of the Reformation and their heirs for nearly 500 years. As already mentioned, it is not my intention to rehearse the Protestant doctrine in detail. There is no need to — it has been proclaimed and explained faithfully and ably by many right down to the present day. The contemporary advocates of the Roman view have raised no new or telling objections to the view of the Reformers. They have simply restated the traditional position of Rome (before and after Trent).

Having examined some of the characteristics of their defenses above, we will now conclude this article with an overview of the main lines of argument in favor of the Protestant understanding of justification. For this summary review, I will be relying on the work of John Murray, because he is both a recent and one of the most able defenders of the doctrine of justification by faith. He has imbibed the rich Protestant tradition of exposition and his book, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*, is readily available to the interested reader.

A. Justification is Forensic

Justification is forensic in character. In order to properly understand the Biblical teaching on justification, one must grasp it in the *ethical categories* in which Scripture sets it forth. Rome has made a prolonged effort to deny — or at least minimize — the legal (forensic) terms with which the Reformation understood the doctrine of justification. Instead they have stressed that justification must be understood in *metaphysical* terms. This confusion of the metaphysical with the ethical has been characteristic of Rome's interpretation of both the fall of man and his redemption. Recent defenders of the Roman view continue to press the same point. Marshner admits that the controversy between Rome and the Reformation over the nature of divine grace was (in part) a "metaphysical quarrel."³¹ He speaks of grace as an "elevation of our nature" which was also the case before the Fall.³² Grace is "a quality of man which is a property of God," and "in order to cope with such an entity, one needs a sophisticated metaphysics of participation."³³

When we see clearly this preference for the metaphysical over the ethical, we can better understand the previously-mentioned antithesis between the "legal" and the "real" in Romanist defenses. "Ontic grace" is "a *real* entity in man."³⁴ If one fails to understand this, Marshner declares, "the whole Catholic understanding of justification makes no sense."³⁵ He is right. For that reason he charges the

³¹ Marshner, *Reasons*, p.220.

³² *Ibid.*, p.221.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.222.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Reformers with denying the existence of this metaphysical "sanctifying grace." He alleges that, because of their nominalistic assumptions, "they found that course 'simpler.'"³⁶

Here Marshner misses the point. Luther and Calvin did not choose the "simpler" way. Rather, they determined to explicate the doctrine of justification in the ethical terms in which Scripture reveals it. They understood clearly that redemption, as revealed in Scripture, is not a metaphysical transformation, but an ethical one. The "Creator-creature distinction" which is foundational to Biblical metaphysics and revelation remains firmly in place throughout God's plan of salvation. The Romanist is still quite confused on this matter, and until he will allow himself to think God's thoughts after Him — i.e., let the Bible itself shape his categories of understanding — he will remain confused.³⁷

If the Biblical terminology of justification is examined — in both the Old and New Testaments — one sees forensic, juridical language. With very few exceptions the legal concept of "a declaration or vindication of righteousness" is the meaning of the Biblical terms for justification.³⁸ It is only by wresting the Scriptures that these terms can be forced into consistency with the metaphysical description of justification demanded by Romanist dogma. Many of the contemporary defenders of that dogma have not even attempted to deal with the texts specifically related to justification. Can anyone seriously wonder why?

Protestants have repeatedly pointed out that even if one grants that justification is based on the inherent righteousness (or on the "infused-grace"-produced righteousness) of the person justified, the act of justification can, nevertheless, be nothing other than declarative. Just as "condemn" cannot mean "to make sinful or criminal" so "justify" (its consistent Biblical antithesis) cannot mean "to make just or righteous."³⁹ The categories are inescapably ethical and legal, not metaphysical.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

³⁷ There is a dramatic example of this confusion in Scott Hahn's debate with Knudsen on the subject of justification. In setting forth his concern to emphasize the believer's participation in divine sonship, Hahn presents a quotation from John Murray's *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* on the subject of adoption (p. 167). His citation of Murray is so edited as to give a completely different sense from Murray's original comment, which has reference to the dangerous "confusion and error" of understanding adoption to involve participating (metaphysically) in Christ's unique "Sonship" and in the divine life of the trinity. The irony is that is precisely what Hahn is claiming. According to Hahn, only by participating in Jesus' "own divine sonship and nothing less than His own divine sonship" (Hahn's words) can the believer really become a child of God (i.e., as opposed to being simply "declared to be" a child of God by adoption). Hahn's confusion of the metaphysical and the ethical leads him into dangerous error claiming that *the believer is absorbed into deity* by virtue of his adoption. He falls into the very thing Murray warns against, and does so while criticizing Murray for the warning! Indeed, this is not uninformed ignorance, but deliberate and willful blindness.

³⁸ For a detailed and thorough exegetical treatment of the relevant Biblical texts, cf. Murray, John, *New International Commentary on The Epistle to the Romans*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959/1968), vol. 1, Appendix A: "Justification," pp. 167-168.

³⁹ "There are passages in which the thought of giving judgment provides us with the sense in which we are to understand the word justification...Rom. 8:33,34 conclusively shows that the meaning is that which is contrasted with the word 'condemn' and that which is related to the rebuttal of a judicial charge. The meaning of the word 'justify,' therefore, in the epistle to the Romans, and therefore in the epistle which more than any other book in Scripture unfolds the doctrine, is to declare to be righteous. Its meaning is entirely removed from the thought of making upright or holy or good or righteous" (Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*, pp. 150-151).

B. Justification is Grounded in Christ, Not Faith or Works

The central point at issue between the Roman and Reformation views of justification concerns its ground. It has already been noted that recent discussions have not succeeded in sharply focusing the central antithesis between the Protestant and Roman Catholic positions on justification. The basic question in dispute is not the necessity of good works, though that question is important and must be addressed in the broader discussion of justification. Rather it is the question of what constitutes the *ground of justification* — the foundation upon which God accepts the sinner as righteous in His sight.

Romanists argue that the ground of justification is faith in Christ⁴⁰ plus a person's own good works (wrought in the power of God's grace infused into the person who receives baptism). As Keating says, "[God] did his part, and now we have to cooperate by doing ours."⁴¹ Some Protestants, particularly of the Arminian stripe, substitute faith alone for faith and works as the ground of justification. Faith, on this construction, is seen as accepted by God in lieu of obedience to the Law as the ground of justification. But we must argue, with Luther and Calvin, that *neither* faith nor good works are the *ground* of justification.

Contra Rome we must say that the basis of one's justification cannot be one's own righteousness, even if it were produced in cooperation with the grace of God (and is thus in some sense a "gift" of God). As John Murray argues,

A righteousness wrought in us, even though it were perfect and eliminated all future sin, would not measure up to the requirements of the full and irrevocable justification which the Scripture represents justification to be. Such a righteousness would not obliterate the sin and unrighteousness of the *past* and the condemnation resting upon us for our past sin. But justification includes the remission of *all* sin and condemnation. Consequently the righteousness which is the basis of such justification must be one that will take care of past sin as well as provide for the future. *Inwrought righteousness does not measure up to this need.*⁴²

This truth is further borne out by the fact that the gospel reveals the grace and mercy of God specifically in the justification of the *ungodly* (Rom. 4:5; cf. 3:21-26). "The justification with which we are now concerned, however, is God's justification of the ungodly. It is not the justification

⁴⁰ It is not clear if, in the Roman Catholic construction, it is *faith* which forms part of the ground of justification (along with good works), or the righteousness of Christ in *whom faith is placed*. Since Romanism has such an aversion to the idea of imputation, it seems more likely that Christ, by his death, merits the grace which is then infused in the sinner producing faith and good works. Thus Christ's work is acknowledged as the source of divine grace in the sinner's life, but His righteousness and satisfaction of divine justice do not themselves constitute the ground of justification. Rather, faith and good works (the fruit of grace) do.

⁴¹ Keating, *Catholicism*, p. 166.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 155-156 (emphasis added). Murray adds, "And we must also bear in mind that the righteousness wrought in us by regeneration and sanctification is never in this life perfect. Hence it cannot in any sense measure up to the kind of righteousness required. Only a perfect righteousness can provide the basis for a complete, perfect, and irreversible justification. Furthermore, justification gives a title to and secures eternal life (Rom. 5:17,18,21). A righteousness wrought in us equips for the enjoyment of eternal life but it cannot be the ground of such a reward" (p. 156).

of persons who are righteous but of persons who are wicked and, therefore, of persons who are under God's condemnation and curse."⁴³ Thus, Biblical justification cannot be based — in whole or in part — on the righteousness of the one justified. Those who are justified are said to be sinners and must be declared just on the basis of the righteousness of another.

On the other hand, contra Arminianism, we must point out that human faith is just as tainted as human works, and is therefore unsatisfactory as a ground for full and free justification. Even if it were argued — along the lines of Rome — that faith was the product of the prior workings of God's grace in a person's heart, it would still not answer to God's demand for a perfect, indeed a divine righteousness as the only basis upon which a sinner can be reckoned just before God.⁴⁴ The sinner must *look away from himself* — his faith and his good works — and look to Christ as the only sure foundation for his hope of justification before God.

The ground of justification, according to Scripture's consistent testimony is nothing less than *the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ* — expressed in His "active obedience" (whereby He perfectly kept the commandments of the Father in exhaustive detail from the heart) and His "passive obedience" (whereby He fully satisfied the penal liability for broken law which justly stands against His peoples). According to the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, "Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein He pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone" (Q/A#33). "*Only for the righteousness of Christ.*" Here we discover the only true resting-place for saving faith. Here alone is there a righteousness sufficient to our need for justification. "The righteousness of Christ is the righteousness of His perfect obedience, a righteousness undefiled and undefilable, a righteousness which not only warrants the justification of the ungodly but one that necessarily elicits and constrains such justification. God cannot but accept into His favor those who are invested with the righteousness of His own Son."⁴⁵

C. Justification is Declarative and Constitutive

Justification is not merely a legal fiction, but a judgment in truth. If the ground of justification is the righteousness of another, of Jesus Christ, then are the Romanists right in charging that in the Protestant view justification is nothing more than a "legal fiction."⁴⁶ Does

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 152.

⁴⁴ Murray discusses, and finally rejects, the notion that faith itself is the righteousness contemplated in justification. The reader is referred to that careful discussion (Murray, *Commentary on Romans*, pp.354-359). As to the phrase regarding Abraham's believing in God, "it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6; cf. Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6), Murray concludes that the righteousness contemplated in justification "is the righteousness of God brought to bear upon us because it is by faith, and it is by faith that we become the beneficiaries of this righteousness because it is a God-righteousness. So indispensable is this complementation in the justification of the ungodly that the righteousness may be called 'the righteousness of God' or 'the righteousness of faith' without in the least implying that faith sustains the same relations to this righteousness as God does....The righteousness is a God-righteousness and it is a faith-righteousness. But it is a God-righteousness because it is of divine property; it is a faith-righteousness because it is brought to bear upon us *by faith*" (*Ibid.*, pp.358-359).

⁴⁵ Murray, *Redemption*, p. 154.

⁴⁶ If one subscribed to a "governmental theory" of the atonement, this charge might have some foundation, but *not* if one holds (as most conservative Protestants do) to the view that the atonement of Christ was a *real substitutionary satisfaction* of the demands of divine justice on

God simply call "righteous" those who are *not* righteous, even though to do so would be to violate His own holy law for judges (e.g., Deut. 25:1; Prov. 17:15)? Not at all. Here we must recognize the way in which the Protestant doctrine draws attention to the reality of imputation, and to the fact that justification is both (to use Murray's words) "declarative" and "constitutive."

"Imputation," in the Biblical sense, refers to the legal accounting of one person's righteousness or sin to another. It presupposes a relationship of covenantal representation between those who are parties to the imputation.⁴⁷ By virtue of this representation, sin and guilt or righteousness and justification can be imputed from one to the other. In Scripture, imputation is involved in three particular situations: (1) the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity in the so-called "covenant of works," (2) the imputation of the sins of His people to Christ as their representative Savior, and (3) the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to His people as the ground of justification.⁴⁸ The classic text concerning imputation is Rom. 5:12-21.

Rome has traditionally sought to suppress the teaching of Scripture on imputation in favor of its emphasis upon *infused grace* and the resulting *subjective transformation* in an individual's life. Only this will bring about "a true eradication of sin and a true sanctification and renewal" so that the soul becomes objectively pleasing to God and so merits heaven.⁴⁹ This alone will suffice for *real* justification. While there may appear some minimal initial plausibility to this notion when applied to the imputation of Christ's righteousness to His people, it will never fit the other side of the imputation transaction. Are we to understand that the imputation of our sin and guilt to our Savior involved the *infusion of some "sin-principle"* (the negation of grace) into Him, with the result that He was *subjectively transformed into a sinner* for us? The notion is as preposterous as it is blasphemous! Even Rome has to admit as much.

Rome's zeal for its metaphysical categories cannot be applied in the several ways demanded by the Biblical revelation concerning justification. Those categories must therefore be *rejected*. Instead, we must understand that, by virtue of our relationship to Christ as the "last Adam," and as the covenantal "head" of His people, we legally, but

behalf of His people (cf. John Murray, *Ibid.*, ch. II, "The Nature of the Atonement," pp.25-56).

⁴⁷ Cf. Murray, John, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), pp.36-41. Consider also B.B.Warfield's evaluation of the historic significance of the growing emphasis on the "covenant" in the seventeenth century: "The idea [the 'covenant' or 'federal' method of exhibiting the plan of the Lord's dealings with men] was present to the minds of the Church Fathers and the Schoolmen; and it underlay Protestant thought, both Lutheran and Reformed, from the beginning, and in the latter had come to clear expression, first in Ursinus. But now it quickly became dominant as the preferable manner of conceiving the method of the divine dealing with men. The effect was to throw into the highest relief the threefold doctrine of imputation, and to make manifest as never before the dependency of the great doctrines of sin, satisfaction, and justification upon it" (Warfield, Benjamin *Studies in Theology*, [New York: Oxford University Press, 1932], p.306).

⁴⁸ "Thus it came about that in the hands of the great Protestant leaders of the sixteenth century, and of their successors, the Protestant systematizers of the seventeenth century, the three-fold doctrine of imputation - of Adam's sin to his posterity, of the sins of His people to the Redeemer, and of the righteousness of Christ to His people - at last came into its rights as the core of the three constitutive doctrines of Christianity - the sinfulness of the human race, the satisfaction of Jesus Christ, and justification by faith. The importance of the doctrine of imputation is that it is the hinge on which these three great doctrines turn, and the guardian of their purity" (*Ibid.*, p.305).

⁴⁹ Keating, *Catholicism*, pp.167-168.

nevertheless most *truly*, receive His righteousness as our own through imputation. In the same way, through the reality of imputation, Jesus Christ Himself bore our sins and guilt in His body on the cross of Calvary (1 Pet. 2:24). As a result of His death for us, the indictment from the bench of the heavenly Judge of all the earth, that justly stood against us, has been taken away (Col. 2:14). These are wonderful, gracious *realities*. They are legal and covenantal realities. They are — praise God! — realities that will stand the test of the great *Dies irae*, when all flesh will stand before God for the Final Judgment. “Then, Lord, shall I fully know, not till then, how much I owe.”

John Murray was concerned to point out that there was a potential danger in the Protestant emphasis on justification as a *declarative* act. The danger he saw was that the church would overlook the fact that justification is also revealed in Scripture as a *constitutive* act. “For as through the disobedience of the one man the many were constituted sinners, even so through the obedience of the one the many will be constituted righteous” (Rom. 5:19). Herein is to be seen the *unique* glory and grace of God’s act of justification.

The peculiarity of God’s action consists in this that he causes to be the righteous state or relation which is declared to be. We must remember that justification is always forensic or judicial. Therefore what God does in this case is that he constitutes the new and righteous judicial relation as well as declares this new relation to be. He constitutes the ungodly righteous, and consequently can declare them to be righteous. In the justification of sinners there is a constitutive act as well as a declarative. Or, if we will, we may say that the declarative act of God in the justification of the ungodly is constitutive. In this consists its incomparable character.⁵⁰

Justification is both a declarative and a constitutive act of God’s free grace. It is constitutive in order that it may be truly declarative. God must constitute the new relationship as well as declare it to be. The constitutive act consists in the imputation to us of the obedience and righteousness of Christ. The obedience of Christ must therefore be regarded as the ground of justification; it is the righteousness which God not only takes into account but reckons to our account when he justifies the ungodly.⁵¹

Such is the reality of justification. Such an understanding of the Biblical doctrine should have silenced the charges of “mere legalities” long ago, but as we have seen, it has not. The same accusations are being made against the forensic character of justification today as in the sixteenth century.⁵² Rome is still not listening to the Scripture.

D. Justification is Direct Union With Christ

Justification is enjoyed by the believer in union with Christ. The Roman Catholic Church claims a unique mediatorial role in the justification of sinners — it is the exclusive channel of divine grace through its priesthood and sacraments. Justifying (or sanctifying) grace is received through baptism, and is “improved” by means of the sacrament of penance, the post-baptismal sacrament of reconciliation. Through penance — with its confessions and

works of satisfaction — the sinner receives grace and forgiveness for sins committed after baptism. Without penance, even the baptized soul remains unforgiven for whatever mortal sins it may have committed, and, thus unshriven, cannot stand in the Day of Judgment. Such a person is not justified.

As we have already noticed, recent defenders of the Romanist view of justification do not make much of this indispensable sacerdotal element, at least in their public declarations and writings on justification aimed at Protestant audiences. Nevertheless, it is an indispensable element in their understanding of justification. In their polemic against the Protestant view, they give the impression — by drawing attention to the “merely” legal, external, objective emphasis of the Reformational view of justification — that the Protestant system is impersonal, a system in which the grace of God cannot be brought effectually into the life of the sinner. Nothing could be farther from the truth!

It is true that the Reformation denied the mediatorial role of the church claimed by Rome. But they did not do this so as to leave the sinner at a distance from God and His saving grace. On the contrary, they rejected the mediatorial work of the church in favor of a renewed emphasis upon the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ. They claimed that the Roman system of priestly intermediaries and sacramentalism in fact *distanced* sinners from Christ rather than bringing them closer to Him. The Pope and his priestly minions, the saints, and Mary *obscured* the sinner’s sense of the presence of Christ. For all of this ecclesiolatry, they substituted the Biblical emphasis on the *nearness* of God through Christ. The sinner did not need an earthly intermediary. He already had the perfect, indeed the only, true mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5). As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the Reformers lifted up Jesus the Savior — through the preaching of “Christ crucified” — and men and women who looked unto Him in faith lived (John 3:14-15).

The Protestant doctrine of full and free justification — with its proper Biblical emphasis on the forensic and covenantal character of that justification — cannot be properly appreciated apart from the further Biblical teachings (also emphasized in a new way by the Reformers) concerning union with Christ and the internal work of the Holy Spirit in the application of redemption to the life and experience of the redeemed sinner. While further discussion of the latter would carry us too far beyond the scope of our concern in this essay, I do want to close our review of the Protestant doctrine of justification with a word or two about the former — union with Christ.

The Bible teaches us that Christ is our great substitute. He has acted in our stead to secure the blessings of the covenant forfeited by Adam in his sin. Jesus has come to bring forgiveness and new, eternal life in fellowship with God to sinners who put their trust in Him. This is the “good news.” But the greatest glory of salvation is that we do not enjoy those covenant blessings in abstraction from the

⁵⁰ Murray, *Redemption*, p. 153.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 154-155.

⁵² There is a price to pay for this continued willful blindness, not the least element of which is an ongoing *lack of assurance* in the piety of Rome. How could it be otherwise? If Christ has not done all the sinner needs, and if the work of Christ might prove to be in vain, then where can the soul rest for comfort and encouragement? Modern advocates of Rome (e.g., Hahn and Keating) are somewhat defensive on the subject of assurance, charging that no one can have *absolute* certainty with regard to their salvation. But that misses the point. Does the heart have a resting-place in a fully-sufficient Savior, or is it left to languish in the doubts and fears that must necessarily come as the Christian struggles with the ongoing reality of temptation and sin?

beloved Person who gives them to us. On the contrary, these mercies are experienced by the believer "in union with Christ." Jesus came into the world not simply to give us blessings, but to give us Himself. He came to bring to its eschatological realization — in all its depth and fullness — the ancient promise of the covenant — "I will be their God, and they will be my people, and I will dwell with them." Jesus does this in His own person, and through the relationship He graciously creates with those who love and trust Him. Who would have ever guessed that the mystery of that central covenant blessing, when finally revealed, would be nothing less than "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27)?

It is this union with Christ that Calvin (and others in the Reformation) brought into sharp focus in connection with the Biblical reality of justification. He declared,

We deny that good works have any share in justification, but claim full authority for them in the lives of the righteous. For if he who has obtained justification possesses Christ, and, at the same time, Christ never is where his Spirit is not, it is obvious that gratuitous righteousness is necessarily connected with regeneration. Therefore, if you would duly understand how inseparable faith and works are, look to Christ, who, as the apostle teaches (I Cor. 1:30), has been given to us for justification and for sanctification.⁵³

Quotations such as this from Calvin and others could be multiplied, but this one shows the way in which Calvin saw union with Christ, not as the logical foundation or starting-point of God's redemptive work for sinners, but as the living, personal center. Regeneration, justification, sanctification, adoption, etc. are not just so many entrees on the "smorgasbord-table" of redemption. They are rather personally bound up with Christ Himself. As Calvin points out, it is *Jesus* who is made to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption (I Cor. 1:30). These spiritual blessings are thus received and enjoyed by the believer *in union with the Savior*. The fear of Rome that the Protestant doctrine of justification would lead to an undervaluation of obedience and purity in the Christian life, to whatever extent it was sincere and legitimate, arose from a failure to understand the Protestant teaching as a whole. That is why the Reformers were zealous to emphasize it over and over again. Their words have still gone largely unheeded by the advocates of Romanism.

V. Conclusion

We must draw our study to a close. We have examined the ongoing debate over justification between advocates of the Roman position ("justification by faith and works") and the Protestant position ("justification by faith alone"). In particular we have tried to focus our attention on defenses of the Roman position made by recent apologists and ex-evangelicals. Our concern has been to evaluate their arguments in light of the teaching of the Word of God and the best theological arguments produced by the church. We've seen that these recent advocates, like their predecessors, have failed to sharply set forth the real antithesis between the two positions. They have rather resorted to caricatures of their opponents' positions — even though as former evangelicals they know full well that what they are attributing to Protestantism is untrue — and have introduced

⁵³ Calvin, John, "Reply to Sadoletto," quoted in Leith, *Calvin*, p. 95, n. 48.

argumentative red-herrings into the discussion that simply serve to obscure the debate.

Nevertheless, for all that, they are commanding a hearing in some circles. They are presenting a winsome appeal to Protestants. Their appeals are therefore dangerous and must be opposed with the best we have to offer in the way of a contemporary defense of the Biblical faith of our Reformation forefathers. Such a threat has endangered the church in the past. We close with the eloquent and challenging words of J.C. Ryle, bishop of Liverpool, England, written at a time when John Henry Newman and others were leading a pilgrimage "back to Rome" that was threatening the Church of England. His words are as appropriate today as they were one-hundred years ago.

Men may call me an alarmist, if they like, for using such language. But I reply, there is a cause. The upper classes in this land are widely infected with a taste for a sensuous, histrionic, formal religion. — The lower orders are becoming sadly familiarized with all the ceremonialism which is the stepping-stone to Popery. — The middle classes are becoming disgusted with the Church of England, and asking what is the use of it. — The intellectual classes are finding out that all religions are either equally good or equally bad. — The House of Commons will do nothing unless pressed by public opinion. We have no Pym or Hampdens there now. — And all this time Ritualism grows and spreads. The ship is among breakers, — breakers ahead and breakers astern, — breakers on the right hand and breakers on the left. Something needs to be done, if we are to escape shipwreck.

The very life of the Church of England is at stake, and nothing less. Take away the Gospel from a Church and that Church is not worth preserving. A well without water, a scabbard without a sword, a steam-engine without a fire, a ship without compass and rudder, a watch without a mainspring, a stuffed carcase without life, — all these are useless things. But there is nothing so useless as a Church without the Gospel. And this is the very question that stares us in the face. — Is the Church of England to retain the Gospel or not? Without it in vain shall we turn to our archbishops and bishops, in vain shall we glory in our cathedrals and parish churches. Ichabod will soon be written on our walls. The ark of God will not be with us. Surely something ought to be done.⁵⁴

Indeed something should be done. Let us continue to resist the threat to the gospel represented by the doctrines of Romanism — with thoughtfulness and compassion, and with our strongest arguments and persuasions. And let us pray for these young men who have sadly taken a wrong turn, one which endangers their souls eternally. Let us pray that God would graciously grant them, and others in the Roman Catholic Church, a new Reformation. May the distracting splendors and earthly reassurances of Rome be eclipsed once again by "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (II Cor. 4:6). Δ

⁵⁴ Ryle, J.C., *Light from Old Times*, (London: Chas J. Thyne & Jarvis, 1924), pp. 52-53.

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Enduring Anathemas of the Roman Catholic Eucharist

Understanding the framework of the Roman Eucharist and the reasons given in its support helps to remind us why we should reject it.

Douglas M. Jones

In an age like ours, which mocks religious debate, a critical evaluation of the Roman Catholic Eucharist appears quaint. Nevertheless, the Roman Catholic Sacrifice of the Mass is nothing to trivialize. The stakes in this debate are too high, and sincere persons on all sides of the issue realize that this is not a minor Swiftian

quibble. The answers in this debate stand at the very heart of Christian faith and have eternal consequences.¹

With the very apparent resurgence of Roman Catholicism over the last decade, we've witnessed renewed *Biblical* defenses of the Roman Catholic Eucharist. My goal in this essay is to provide a helpful summary of the Roman Catholic Eucharist and analyze traditional and recent *Biblical* arguments for two of its central features: Real presence and sacrifice. These two aspects of the Roman Eucharist, like any doctrines, do not sit in a moral vacuum. From a Protestant perspective, these doctrines are grave offenses against a holy God. The two primary offenses or "anathemas" — idolatry and a distortion of Christ's atoning work — have, since the Reformation, yet to be expunged from Roman Catholic teaching, and therefore remain under Christ's condemnation. My Roman Catholic friends obviously reject such contentions, but I hope they will consider the arguments.

I. Theological Background and Outline of the Roman Catholic Eucharist

In order to understand the Roman Eucharist adequately, we need a sketch of its general theological underpinnings. The doctrines discussed under the Roman Catholic understanding of "God the Sanctifier" provide an apt starting point for this overview.

¹ I am grateful to Kark Keating and Gerry Matatics of *Catholic Answers* for comments on an earlier version of this essay.

A. God the Sanctifier

Taking Ludwig Ott's *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* as our benchmark,² the discussion of "God the Sanctifier" would translate in Protestant theology to a discussion of soteriology in general — the doctrines of salvation. This usage in itself is a portend of what is to come.

Grace, the most general concept in the discussion of God the Sanctifier, is understood in subjective and objective senses. In the subjective sense, it is the "disposition of condescension or benevolence shown by a highly-placed person to one in a lower place, and especially of God towards mankind."³ In the objective sense, the concept of grace is "an unmerited gift proceeding from this benevolent disposition."⁴ This objective sense of grace is further distinguished into uncreated (God Himself) and created (any gift or work of God) grace. Created grace includes natural (e.g., Creation, bodily health, Eden) and redemptive grace.

In turn, redemptive grace may be divided into External (e.g., revelation, sermons, liturgy, sacraments) and Internal graces. Internal grace "affects the soul and its powers intrinsically, and operates physically on it."⁵ For this discussion, the main subdivision of Internal grace is *Gratia Gratum Faciens* or the grace of sanctification. This grace is distinguished as either Actual grace, which is "a temporary supernatural intervention by God by which the powers of the soul are stirred up to perform a salutary act...directed toward [an] increase of sanctifying grace" or Habitual grace, which is "a constant supernatural quality of the soul which sanctifies man intrinsically and makes him just and pleasing to God (sanctifying grace or justifying grace)."⁶

B. Habitual or Sanctifying Grace

Sanctifying grace is the key to redemption in Roman Catholic theology. Ott declares that "[a]ccording to the teaching of the Council of Trent, sanctifying grace is the sole formal cause of justification."⁷ In popular language, Sheed contends, "When we come to die there is only one question that matters — have we sanctifying grace in our souls? If we have, then to heaven we shall go...[though] there may be certain matters to be...cleansed, on the way....If we have not [sanctifying grace], then to heaven we cannot go."⁸

As noted above, sanctifying grace is, according to Roman Catholic theology, a created supernatural gift which God infuses into the soul in order to sanctify/justify believers, thus elevating them "to participation in the Divine nature."⁹

Two characteristics of this definition must be drawn out. First, the physicalistic language used to describe grace is *not metaphorical*. The notorious Roman Catholic devotion to, and utter dependence on, an Aristotelian worldview plays heavily in this discussion. For example, Ott explains that "sanctifying grace is not a substance, but a real accident, which inheres in the soul-substance."¹⁰ Similarly the Council of Trent describes sanctifying grace as: "a divine quality inhering in the soul."¹¹ Sanctifying grace as this sort of Aristotelian quality or property can be "inserted," "added,"

² Lynch, P. (trans.), Bastible, J., (ed). (Illinois: Tan Books and Publishers, 1974)

³ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

⁸ Sheed, F.J., *Theology for Beginners*. (Michigan: Servant Books, 1981), p. 67.

⁹ Ott, *Fundamentals*, pp. 254, 255.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

¹¹ Cited in *Ibid.*

"lost," "conveyed," "balanced," "outweighed," "contained," etc., since sanctifying grace and other divine properties "are really in our very souls."¹²

This object-like nature of grace provides the ground for the second notable characteristic in the definition of sanctifying grace, namely, that by it we become like God, partakers of His nature, that is, by grace man "becomes elevated to a supernatural grade of assimilation to God."¹³ Ott contends that the church fathers had "a firm conviction that God became man so that man might become God, that is, deified...[since this is] 'the greatest possible assimilation to and unification with God.'"¹⁴ As sanctifying grace is added to the soul, a person becomes more assimilated to or united with God's nature. Nevertheless, Roman Catholic theology denies that this understanding of grace is in any sense pantheistic since "the infinite distance between Creator and created remains."¹⁵ [n.b., R. Catholic theology assumes that both God and man, I claim, are, nevertheless, on the same grade or continuum of being.]

On the positive side, and particularly relevant to this discussion, the unity resulting from the infusion of sanctifying grace "represents a physical communion of man with God."¹⁶ Hence, God assimilates man closer to His grade of being by means of increasing the created gift of sanctifying grace. This assimilation is completed in the next life by the Beatific Vision of God — "the direct vision of himself...[T]he seeing that causes bliss."¹⁷

Finally, according to Roman Catholic theology, though God is the ultimate source of sanctifying grace, sanctification/justification "requires the free co-operation of men." Though mysterious, the "mutual co-operation of Divine power and human freedom"¹⁸ lies at the heart of Roman Catholic doctrines of grace. Hence, Roman Catholic theology does not flinch in asserting that the grace of God is resistible. The Council of Trent declares, "If anyone says that man's free will moved and aroused by God, by assenting to God's call and action, in no way cooperates toward disposing and preparing itself to obtain the grace of justification, that it cannot refuse its assent if it wishes, but that as something inanimate, it does nothing whatever and is merely passive, let him be anathema."¹⁹ Hence, by this claim alone, the Roman Catholic church has forever revealed itself as a false teacher, and, with Arminians and Lutherans, has determined that the success of Almighty God's Sovereign plan rests upon the caprice of finite man.

C. The Instrument of Sanctifying Grace

Contrary to Protestant theology which maintains that God's Spirit may effect salvation apart from intermediaries, Roman Catholic theology teaches that God has chosen to dispense His grace only through the instrumentality of the church: "While Christ acquired the fruits of Redemption by His own efficacy, the task of the Church consists in the application of the fruits to mankind....[T]he Church is Christ's continuing and perpetually working on earth."²⁰ Thus, "[t]hrough the Apostles — and, since it was to be until the world should end, through their successors — we were to find

the truth, the life, the union by which we shall be saved."²¹

Given that the Roman church is the only instrument of sanctifying grace, Pius IX could declare: "By faith it is to be firmly held that outside the Apostolic Roman Church none can achieve salvation. This is the only ark of salvation. He who does not enter into it, will perish in the flood."²² Strangely, Roman Catholic theologians are quick to add that in rare cases persons might be saved by merely desiring baptism or desiring membership in the church.²³

Hence, as the "only ark of salvation" the Roman Catholic church is the instrument which distributes the sanctifying grace of God through seven sacraments.

D. The Sacraments

In Roman Catholic theology, a sacrament is "a thing perceptible to the sense, which on the ground of Divine institution possesses the power both of effecting and signifying sanctity and righteousness (= sanctifying grace)."²⁴ There are two primary characteristics which hold of any of the sacraments.

1. Conduits of Sanctifying Grace

Each of the seven sacraments in Roman Catholic teaching — baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, anointing the sick, priestly orders, and matrimony — serves to infuse sanctifying grace into the souls of the recipients. Moreover, each of the seven sacraments confers its own specific sacramental grace in accord with its particular aim.²⁵

2. Objective Efficacy — *ex opere operato*

Roman Catholic theology maintains that the sacraments operate objectively in the sense that they have "an efficacy independent of the subjective disposition of the recipient or minister,"²⁶ and have more than a merely symbolic or psychological significance. This sort of claim, as an example of a typical misunderstanding on the part of the Roman Catholic church, is supposedly set in opposition to even a Reformed understanding of the sacraments. Though the Reformed tradition within the Protestant Reformation was one of the main targets of Tridentine curses, we will see below that it never maintained that the sacraments have only "psychological and symbolic significance."²⁷ Instead, Reformed theology holds that the efficacy of the sacraments is decisively "objective," in that, as means of grace, the Holy Spirit Himself works through them to curse or bless.

Nevertheless, Roman Catholic theology goes on to maintain that the sacraments contain the sanctifying grace which they signify within themselves. Thus Trent curses: "If anyone says that the sacraments of the New Law do not contain the grace which they signify, or that they do not confer that grace on those who place no obstacles in their way, as though they are only outward signs of grace or justice received through faith...let him be anathema."²⁸

The Scholastic theologians designated this objective characteristic by the phrase: "*Sacramenta operantur ex opere operato*, that is the Sacraments operate by the power of the completed sacramental rite."²⁹ The Council of Trent subsequently etched this terminology in doctrinal stone and cursed

¹² Sheed, *Theology*, p. 72.

¹³ Ott, *Fundamentals*, p. 257.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

¹⁷ Sheed, *Theology*, p. 75, 67.

¹⁸ Ott, *Fundamentals*, p. 219.

¹⁹ *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, trans. Schroeder, H., (Illinois: Tan Books and Publishers, 1978), p. 42: VI, 4.

²⁰ Ott, *Fundamentals*, p. 274.

²¹ Sheed, *Theology*, p. 105.

²² Cited in Ott, *Fundamentals*, p. 312.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 312, 313.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 329.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 327.

²⁸ Schroeder, *Trent*, p. 52: VI, 6.

²⁹ Ott, *Fundamentals*, p. 329.

anyone who held otherwise. The essence of the *ex opere operato* formula is (a) that the efficacy of the sacrament is not dependent on the subjective disposition of the recipient as a cause of grace and (b) that the sacramental grace is caused by the validly operated sacramental sign.³⁰ Nevertheless, Roman Catholic theology denies that *ex opere operato* has a mechanical or magical operation, since the sacrament's efficacy *does* depend upon the recipient's subjective disposition as "an indispensable pre-condition of the communication of grace."³¹ Hence, interestingly, the necessity of the recipient's subjective disposition is both affirmed and denied.

In general, then, according to Roman Catholic theology, "the Sacraments are the means appointed by God for the attainment of eternal salvation."³² Some of these are so necessary that "without their use salvation cannot be attained."³³ Of all the sacraments, "[t]he Blessed Eucharist is the Sacrament. Baptism exists *for* it, all the others enriched by it."³⁴

E. The Roman Catholic Eucharist

Peter Stravinskias summarizes the entire Mass as "God's mysterious plan, conceived from all eternity and brought to fulfillment in His divine Son's passion, death, and resurrection....made present. Or as Pope St. Leo the Great put it, 'What our redeemer did visibly has passed over into the sacraments.'"³⁵ Thomas Howard describes the Roman Catholic Eucharist in the following terms:

The Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood is the great pledge, given by the Lord to His Church, for as long as history lasts, of the reunion of form and matter, or spirit and flesh. Put more directly, it presents to us His death, by which He redeemed the world from sin and death and from ruin brought on by the Fall. The "rebuilding," or reunion, of things from this ruin was inaugurated by God in the Old Testament, manifested at the Incarnation, and will be completed at the Parousia. It is pledged and kept present to us in the Eucharist which is both memory and anticipation. It recalls Christ's body, broken for us, and it looks forward to His glorious reappearing.³⁶

In less eloquent though more precise terminology, Joseph Jungmann summarizes the Mass, in general, and Eucharist, in particular, as follows:

The Mass is a celebration for which the Church assembles, a celebration which occupies the center of her charge and service, a celebration which is dedicated to the Lord. It is a celebration which presents God with a thanksgiving, an offering, indeed a sacrifice. And it is a celebration which reacts with blessings upon those who gather for it.³⁷

1. Purpose of the Roman Catholic Eucharist

The Council of Trent (13, 1) specifies at least four purposes for its Eucharist. First, it was instituted as a

remembrance of God's work, especially to show forth the death of Christ until He comes to judge the world. Second, it was instituted as "spiritual food for souls, whereby they may be nourished and strengthened, living by the life of Him who said: He that eateth me, the same also shall live by me" (i.e. a means of infusing sanctifying grace). Third, it was instituted as an antidote to free participants from daily faults and preserve them from daily sins. Fourth, it was instituted as a pledge of future glory and happiness of that "one body" to which all Christians ought to be "mutually bound and united."

2. Nature of the Roman Catholic Eucharist

The first two of the above purposes — memorial and meal — can be used to explain the nature of the Eucharist (the other purposes are dependent upon these).

a. Memorial Sacrifice: One of the most unique (and, to Protestants, scandalous) aspects of the Roman Catholic theology is its insistence that the Lord's Supper is in itself a "true and real sacrifice," not merely the commemoration of a sacrifice. Trent declares that, on the night Christ was betrayed, He "offered up to God the Father His own body and blood under the form of bread and wine," and subsequently left to His church a "visible sacrifice" whereby His bloody sacrifice on the cross "might be represented," remembered, and "its salutary effects applied to the remission of...sins" (22: 1, 11). This "unbloody" sacrifice "is truly propitiatory" and thus since God is "appeased by this sacrifice" He forgives "even the gravest crimes and sins." This unbloody sacrifice is essentially identical to the bloody sacrifice of the cross, since the "victim is one and the same,...the manner alone of offering is different." Hence, according to Roman theology, the unbloody sacrifice in the Roman Eucharist is far "from derogating in any way from the former" — i.e. Christ's atonement on the cross.

The foregoing sketch may be summarized by the following characteristics.

(i) *Genuine Sacrifice:* The Roman Eucharist is not only a memorial meal but a genuine sacrifice in which "Christ is offered as a sacrificial gift to God"³⁸ by "the Church [which] joins in the sacrifice of her Lord and Master."³⁹

(ii) *Unbloody Sacrifice:* Roman Catholic theology presses the "unbloody" aspect of the sacrifice to counter accusations that Christ is re-sacrificed and not in the sense that no blood is present, since to deny that Christ's blood is truly in the Eucharist is to invoke the curses of Trent (13: Canon 1).

(iii) *Essentially Identical to Calvary:* By maintaining that the Sacrifice of the Mass is "essentially identical" to the Sacrifice of the Cross, Roman theology aims to receive the same benefits provided by the latter, thus continuing Christ's sacrifice on the cross "until the end of time."⁴⁰

(iv) *Non-Repetitive Sacrifice:* The Roman Eucharist is sacrificial in nature in that Christ's "one-time act of redemption [is] made present under cloak of the rite, 'in the mystery.'"⁴¹ As such, it is "a liturgical reenactment of Christ's death on Calvary and not a blasphemous effort to 'add to' His saving death and resurrection."⁴²

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 330.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, p. 340.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 341.

³⁴ Sheed, *Theology*, p. 153.

³⁵ Stravinskias, P., *The Bible and the Mass: Understanding the Scriptural Basis of the Liturgy*, (Michigan: Servant Publ., 1989), p. 15.

³⁶ Howard, T., *Evangelical is Not Enough*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984), p. 105.

³⁷ Jungmann, J., *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origin and Development*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1986 [1951]), p. 175.

³⁸ Ott, *Fundamentals*, p. 402.

³⁹ Jungmann, *Roman Rite*, p. 183.

⁴⁰ Ott, *Fundamentals*, p. 407.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* Jungmann notes that describing the Eucharist as the "sacrifice of the Church" dwindled in conflicts with the Reformers, since the Roman Catholic theologians focused on the question of whether "the Mass was a sacrifice at all, and — opposing Calvin especially — whether believing it was contradicted by the teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews regarding the *one* sacrifice of Christ" *Ibid.*, p. 180.

⁴² Stravinskias, *Bible and Mass*, p. 86.

(v) *Sacrificial Act in Transubstantiation*: The precise sacrificial action in the Eucharist has been long disputed among Roman Catholic theologians. Contrary to what many might suppose, the precise sacrificial act is not the breaking or eating of the Host but rather the transubstantiation of the sacrificial gifts.⁴³

(vi) *Effects Glory to God*: The primary goal of the Eucharistic sacrifice is "the most perfect sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving."⁴⁴ God alone, Roman Catholics theology maintains, is worthy of such a genuine sacrifice, given the "infinite value of the sacrificial gift [i.e. Christ]...and on account of the infinite dignity of the Primary Sacrificing Priest [i.e. Christ]."⁴⁵

(vii) *Effects Propitiation of Sin*: Finally, given its essential identity to Calvary, the Roman Eucharist effects not only praise to God but also the remission of sins. As "truly propitiatory," it allegedly turns away the wrath of God from participants and "the Lord grants the grace and gift of penitence and pardons even the gravest crimes and sins."⁴⁶

These seven characteristics summarize the sacrificial nature of the Roman Eucharist. Many, if not each of these characteristics, ought to appall Protestants. The source of this Protestant revulsion resides in the central claim that the Lord's Supper is a sacrifice. Hence, we will focus on that claim and not its subsidiary characteristics. However, prior to evaluating the Roman Catholic arguments used to defend the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist, we must summarize the other equally important aspect of the Roman Eucharist – Real presence.

b. Meal of Presence: The other unique and equally scandalous aspect of the Roman Eucharist is the claim that "immediately after the consecration, the true body and the true blood of our Lord, together with His soul and divinity exist under the form of bread and wine."⁴⁷ Roman Catholics glory in the "Real presence" of Christ, since by ingesting the Divine, they are directly in union and communion with Him. Ex-Reformed pastor Scott Hahn describes the sublime effects of this Roman Eucharistic union:

We have become a temple. We have become a tabernacle. We have become almost like the blessed virgin Mary, who carried the Word incarnate within her womb for nine months. We carry the Word incarnate for about ten or fifteen minutes. And as He is flowing through our veins, and as he is assimilated into our bodies, we need to speak the most loving, generous words that our hearts can create.⁴⁸

By partaking in the Roman Eucharist and thus maintaining that the body of Christ "is flowing through our veins," the Roman Catholic aims to assimilate divinity (cf. section B above, footnotes 12-14). In his recent popular exposition of the Mass, Stravinskis speaks of the part the Eucharist plays in deifying those who partake in it:

To aspire to divinity is the noblest of human yearnings. It is implanted in us by God Himself to keep us on the road back to Him. That is why we should reflect very carefully on the words we pray each day at Mass: "...may we come to share in the divinity of Christ

who humbled himself to share in our humanity."

We need to look to the example of Jesus the Perfect Man, the Second Adam, *who brought us the possibility of becoming gods* – the right way – by submission to the will of the Father....Yes, *we can become gods with a small 'g,' for perfect humanity leads to divinity*....To strive to be god-like was not a sin for our first parents, but the desire to do it on their own was [emphasis added].⁴⁹

(I cannot forbear noting that statements like the two preceding ones are the type which should make our hair stand on end and enable us to better realize why our Reformation predecessors were so willing to lay down their lives in opposition to Rome.)

Finally, given the Real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, Roman Catholics are obligated to "give to this most holy sacrament in veneration the worship of *latria*, which is due to the true God."⁵⁰

The foregoing sketch may be summarized by the following characteristics:

(1) *Transubstantiation*: In short, transubstantiation is the name of the supernatural and mysterious process by which the underlying (invisible) substance of the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ. The substances of the bread and wine, not their visible characteristics, are transformed by God so that they take on the "matter and form" of the body and blood of Christ. This conversion of substances, according to Roman theology, is unique, without analogue in nature.⁵¹ This view stands in contrast to the view that the elements of the supper are merely symbols (no presence), the Lutheran view that the substances of the bread and wine exist conjointly with the body and blood of Christ (Consubstantiation), and the Reformed view that Christ is present "really, but spiritually" (Real, Spiritual presence).⁵²

(2) *Totality of the Presence*: According to Roman Catholic theology, Christ's entire person, "body and soul and Divinity" are present in the Eucharist. Moreover, He is totally present under each and in every part of the two elements individually. Hence, though communicants since the thirteenth century have regularly received only the bread, they, therefore, receive the body and blood of Christ.⁵³

(3) *Adoration Due to the Eucharist*: Ott states that "it follows from the wholeness and permanence of the Real Presence that the absolute worship of adoration (*cultus latriae*) is due to Christ present in the Eucharist."⁵⁴ In this regard Stravinskis explains, "[a]s the procession reaches the altar, priest and ministers genuflect to the Blessed Sacrament, if it is visible from the central axis, or else bow profoundly to the altar. The priest kisses the altar, in effect, greeting Christ....Why do we honor the Eucharist with incense, candles, bells, hymns, a sanctuary lamp, and genuflections? For one reason alone: Because God has come into our midst."⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Stravinskis, *Bible and Mass*, p. 112.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 76 (13,5).

⁵¹ Ott, *Fundamentals*, p. 380.

⁵² Westminster Confession of Faith, XXIX, 7.

⁵³ Ott, *Fundamentals*, p. 385.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 387.

⁵⁵ Stravinskis, *Bible and Mass*, pp. 23, 113. Roman Catholic scholar Joseph Jungmann provides the following unnerving account of the origins of elevating the Eucharist for adoration. Note well how the people, as opposed to God's command, motivate innovations in divine worship:

"[I]n the twelfth century, we begin to hear accounts of eucharistic miracles. In place of the species of bread, our Lord was seen in His own human appearance....Even if the ordinary Christian acknowledges his unworthiness to be favored by the visible appearance of the Redeemer, he will at least want to see the outward veil beneath which He

⁴³ Ott, *Fundamentals*, p. 409.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 412.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Schroeder, *Trent*, p. 146 (22, II).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 73 (13, III).

⁴⁸ Hahn, Scott, "Communion as Reunion," (audio cassette), Saint Joseph Communications, Inc., P.O. Box 720, W. Covina, CA 91793.

We now have before us a critical outline of the Roman Catholic Eucharist. It fits within a broader system of grace and is the Roman Catholic Church's most important conduit of sanctifying grace. The two primary characteristics of the Eucharist are that (1) it is a genuine sacrifice propitiating sin and (2) it is a meal in which Christ's body, blood, soul, and Divinity are present in the place of the substance of the common elements. These two primary characteristics — sacrifice and Real presence — are the targets for Reformed Protestant charges of idolatry and a distortion of Christ's atonement. Since the theology of the Roman Eucharist hinges on these two primary characteristics, I will now turn to evaluate traditional and contemporary Biblical arguments used to defend these notions.

II. Evaluating Roman Catholic Arguments for the Eucharist's Sacrificial Nature and Real Presence

A. Arguments For and Against the Eucharist as a Sacrifice

Traditionally, Roman Catholic theology has forwarded three primary Biblical arguments to support its claim that the Lord's Supper was intended to be a genuine propitiatory sacrifice. More recent Roman Catholic apologists have offered rejoinders to some of the common Protestant objections to viewing the Lord's Supper as a Sacrifice.

1. Melchizedek's Priestly Offering

The first argument to consider arises from the fact that following Abraham's rescue of Lot from the four enemy kings, Melchizedek, king of Salem, "brought forth bread and wine; and he was the priest of the most high God" (Gen. 14:18ff.). Add to this, the truth that Christ was made "a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 5:6; 7:1; Ps. 110:4), and infer that, since Melchizedek offered a sacrifice of bread and wine, Christ too "offers a sacrifice similar to that of Melchizedek. This Sacrifice can only refer to the proffering of His Body and Blood under the forms of bread and wine at the Last Supper and in the Holy Mass."⁵⁶ Hence, the Eu-

lies hid....For such a view of the host the first opportunity was offered by an old traditional rite, when at the words *accepit panem* the priest took the bread in his hands, as one our Lord Himself had done, and lifted it slightly. Urged by the desire of the people, the priests emphasized and augmented the rite. But since the interest of the people was centered not only on the outward act of oblation but on the presence of the Lord (which was not yet at this moment actual), many bishops were greatly concerned lest the people adore the bread, and so about 1210 a decree of the Bishop of Paris introduced the regulation which determined everywhere that the priest should elevate the Host only after the words of consecration, and so high then that all might see and adore.

Thus the Mass acquired a new center, a new focal point, and the devotion of the people acquired an object which corresponded to their understanding and to which they clung tenaciously....

To look at the sacred Host at the elevation became for many in the later Middle Ages the be-all and end-all of Mass devotion. See the body of Christ at the consecration and be satisfied! In the cities people ran from church to church, to see the elevated Host as often as possible, since rich rewards could be expected from such a practice. People even started lawsuits to ensure their getting a favorable view of the altar. There are examples of congregations where the majority of the faithful waited for the sance-bell signalling the approach of the consecration before they entered the church and then after the elevation they rushed out as quickly as they had come in.

Of course such abuses were discountenanced, but the underlying usage itself obtained ecclesiastical approval" — Jungmann, *Roman Rite*, pp. 119-121 [emphasis added].

⁵⁶ Ott, *Fundamentals*, p. 403.

charist is a proper sacrifice.

In response, first, the text makes no reference at all to a sacrifice, and so the argument depends upon the implicit premise that every time a priest presents some kind of food, he is making a sacrifice. Karl Keating sets up the universal generalization of this premise as, "a priest sacrifices the items offered — that is the main task of all priests, in all cultures, at all times."⁵⁷ Hence, we need only one counterexample to this premise to dispose of the argument. A very pertinent counterexample is found in Christ's feeding of the multitudes (Matt. 15; Mk. 8). Christ is a priest, and he presents a miraculous meal, yet no one claims that a sacrifice takes place. Hence, the appeal to Melchizedek fails.

Second, even if we grant the eisegeted premise that Melchizedek offers some kind of sacrifice, it is clearly not expiatory since no blood is shed. Yet, the Roman Eucharist is explicitly so; hence, if Christ allegedly offers a sacrifice "in the manner of Melchizedek,"⁵⁸ He cannot be doing what Roman Catholic theology requires Him to do.

2. Malachi's Future Perfect Sacrifice

A second argument for the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist is drawn from Malachi's prophecy that "in every place incense and a pure offering will be brought to my name, because My name will be great among the nations," says the Lord of Hosts" (Mal. 1:11). Ott sees two requirements here. One is that a future Messianic sacrifice will be offered "in every place," and two, it will be a clean oblation — "a pure offering." According to Ott, this cannot speak of the sacrifice on Calvary, since that sacrifice was carried out in one place, and it was not clean.⁵⁹

First, if Roman Catholics are determined to stand arm-in-arm with Dispensationalists in demanding narrow literalism regardless of the genre and context of a passage, then they need to be consistent and not just press *ad hoc* for literalism at Malachi 1:11 and John 6, but everywhere (including the book of Revelation).

Second, the truth is that prophets commonly use designations familiar to their audience to describe the glories of the Messianic age to come (e.g. Is. 2: 11; 19; 60; Mic. 4; Joel 2; Ezek. 40ff.; etc.). For example, Isaiah speaks in a manner very similar to Malachi, when he prophesies of sacrifices and altars that will arise in Egypt, Assyria, and Judah for pure worship of Jehovah. Must we apply the same wooden exegesis to Isaiah that Roman Catholics apply to Malachi and infer that these three nations and no others will literally erect altars for sacrifices and offerings?⁶⁰ Obviously not; both Malachi and Isaiah figuratively describe the spread of true worship of God throughout the earth in terms their immediate audience would relish. Hence, Malachi's prophecy does not stand as a support for the sacrificial nature of the Roman Eucharist without implying hermeneutical absurdities.

3. Christ's Words of Institution

Roman Catholic theology maintains that a third proof for the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist is that Christ Himself designated it a sacrifice when he used "biblical sacrificial terms, which express the oblation of a true and proper sacrifice."⁶¹

⁵⁷ Keating, Karl, *Catholicism and Fundamentalism*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), p. 253.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Ott, *Fundamentals*, p. 403.

⁶⁰ cf. Calvin, John, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, [ed. McNeill, J.T.], (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960) p. 1433; Bk. IV, Ch. 18, 4.

⁶¹ Ott, *Fundamentals*, p. 404.

Yet Christ's use of sacrificial terms could easily be seen to designate a commemorative meal. This third argument is simply missing too many premises for its desired conclusion, or it assumes Real presence, which we will evaluate in a moment. Nevertheless, as these three primary arguments stand, none of them successfully implies that the Lord's Supper is a Sacrifice.

4. Considerations Precluding the Lord's Supper as a Sacrifice

Beyond the failure of the three primary proofs presented above, there are weighty Biblical considerations which preclude considering the Lord's Supper as a sacrifice.

First, if anything is at the heart of Biblical redemption, it is the claim that "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb. 9:22; Lev. 17:11). Yet, the entire theology of the Eucharist contradicts this basic Biblical teaching; the Eucharist is dogmatically prescribed as an "unbloody" sacrifice by which the Lord is appeased and for which He "pardons even the gravest crimes and sins." Even the Roman Catholic appeal to the Eucharist's "essential identity" with Calvary cannot solve the dilemma.

Second, the Reformers strongly denounced the Roman Eucharist as a violation of Hebrews 7-11 which teaches that Christ's atonement was "once for all." The now standard Roman Catholic rejoinder is that "the sacrifice of the Mass is the sacrifice of the Cross, only presented in a different manner. The aspect of redemption which involved his death is finished, but Christ lives forever to offer, by his very presence in the Mass, his work on the Cross for our sins to the Father in heaven. In no way does this diminish Calvary."⁶² Keating claims that "what makes the Mass literally unbelievable for fundamentalists is that they cannot conceive of a single act that is perpetuated through time."⁶³ In short, Roman Catholic theology denies that the Eucharist repeats the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary; it merely presents anew⁶⁴ or re-enacts⁶⁵ the once-for-all sacrifice "in order that the redemption won for our race should produce its fruit in us individually."⁶⁶

However, the problem is not that Protestants are uniformly so dull that they cannot conceive the alleged subtleties of the Roman Catholic answer, it's that the answer woefully misses the mark. Contrary to Roman Catholic claims, the theology of the Eucharist still grossly denigrates Calvary since it assumes that Christ's atonement was radically incomplete. Roman theology assumes that Christ did not complete His propitiatory and expiatory work or else there would be no need for a re-enacted sacrifice in the Eucharist.

Yet Scripture presents Christ's atonement as "having obtained eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:12). He did not obtain six months or six day redemption but eternal redemption, since in the past by Calvary "we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Christ" (Heb. 10:10). And by this past, historical "offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" or set apart (Heb. 10:14). Because God's people have by Christ's perfect and complete atoning work received this forgiveness, "there is no longer any offering for sin" (Heb. 10:18). Given these glorious truths, Calvin was absolutely correct when he declared, "The cross of Christ is overthrown as soon as the altar is set up."⁶⁷ Hence,

the theology of the Roman Eucharist, even granting the "single-act-through-time" rejoinder, still grossly distorts and diminishes Christ's atoning work. Given these constraints, Scripture cannot conceive of the Eucharist as a sacrifice.

Let us now turn to evaluate the Roman Catholic arguments for Real Presence to see if they fare any better.

B. Arguments For and Against "Real" Presence in the Eucharist

Roman Catholic theology also has traditionally forwarded three primary Biblical arguments to support its claims for Christ's Real Presence in its Eucharist. And as before, we will evaluate how more recent Roman Catholic apologists have rejoined historical Reformed objections.

Before examining the three arguments, please note that the Roman Catholic use of "Real" in this discussion should not be taken as in opposition to "unreal" or no presence. The Reformed faith as expressed in the *Westminster Confession* strongly endorses "Real" presence as well, though not in the Roman Catholic sense. We maintain that God's Spirit is real, in fact, God is a Spirit, and He is the foundation and precondition of all reality. A Biblical metaphysic, contrary to the Roman Catholic usage of "Real," need not require that reality be grounded in the physical, as is the tendency in those enslaved to an Aristotelian outlook.

1. Christ's Command to Eat His Body

John 6:48ff is the classic focus for the Roman Catholic defense of Real presence. The basic argument is that Christ declares that "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves" (v. 53). Roman Catholic apologists emphasize the fact that Christ does not soften his words, though he lost many disciples. "If they merely had misunderstood him, if they foolishly had taken a metaphor in a literal sense, why did he not call them back and straighten things out?...[They] would have remained had he told them he meant no more than a symbol."⁶⁸ Hence, Roman Catholics argue that the simple, literal, obvious meaning of the words teaches the Real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Sheed continues, "There are those, bent upon escaping the plain meaning of the words used, who say the phrase really means 'This represents my body.' It sounds very close to desperation! No competent speaker would ever talk like that, least of all Our Lord, least of all *then*."⁶⁹

First, the whole Roman Catholic case depends upon a strictly literal interpretation of the passage, and so one way to quickly pull the rug out from its defenders is to show that they themselves do not read the text literally. They read John 6 figuratively by not maintaining that (a) Christ is some genuine conglomeration of grain as "bread" — vv. 48, 51, (b) eating Christ's flesh is an unqualified necessity for salvation — v. 53, (c) believers actually live within the physical body of Christ — v. 56, and (d) by eating this bread believers shall never die in history — v. 58. These are all the "plain" meanings of the words, yet Catholics themselves reject such silly interpretations. Moreover, they can hardly succeed in having others take them seriously if they will not apply their *a priori* commitment to literalism everywhere else in the Bible. Once they concede that the text determines whether it should be taken as poetic, narrative, apocalyptic, dogmatic, etc., they lose the heart of their case from John 6 (Cf. the discussion

⁶² Brumley, Mark, "Once For All," *This Rock*, June 1990, p. 26. Cf. Sheed, *Theology*, p. 159, 160; Keating, *Catholicism*, p. 256.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Sheed, *Theology*, p. 160.

⁶⁵ Jungmann, *Roman Rite*, p. 183.

⁶⁶ Sheed, *Theology*, p. 160.

⁶⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, p. 1431; Bk. IV, Ch. 18, 3.

⁶⁸ Keating, *Catholicism*, p. 234.

⁶⁹ Sheed, *Theology*, p. 154.

below regarding figurative interpretation in the institution of the Lord's Supper).

Second, Roman Catholic appeals to John 6 assume that Christ would have no desire to drive away some of His disciples,⁷⁰ but this assumption is false given His own reasons for speaking in parables (Matt. 13:13-16; cf. John 6: 44,65).

Third, the gospel of John provides us with a pattern of Christ's dialogues in which the hearers mistakenly interpret Christ literally, and yet Christ does not explicitly correct their misinterpretations.⁷¹ In John 3, Nicodemus mistakenly interprets Christ literally and falsely in regard to the new birth, and Christ rebukes him for misunderstanding spiritual matters. Similarly, in John 4, the woman at the well mistakenly interprets Christ literally and falsely in regard to "living water," and Christ does not explain his words but rather redirects the discussion.

These patterns match that of the John 6 discussion, except that at least in chapter six, Christ does indicate that he is speaking figuratively, when finally he states, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (v. 63). Karl Keating rejoins that the Protestant interpretation of this verse makes it a "fairly clumsy" circumlocution for "symbolic." Yet Keating himself offers an interpretation which makes the Protestant's case. He argues that Christ is not using "flesh" in the same sense as in vv. 53-59, but rather like John 3:6, in which the contrast is between a spiritual understanding over against a carnal, earthly understanding: "Christ detects in some of his listeners an unsupernatural attitude....[By "flesh," Christ] means instead carnal understanding, as distinguished from spiritual."⁷² Protestants heartily agree, and as Leon Morris argues,

there is [in John 6:63] also in the manner of II Cor. 3:6 a contrast between the letter of the words and the spirit. A woodenly literal, flesh-dominated manner of looking at Jesus' words will not yield the correct interpretation. That is granted only to the spiritual man, the Spirit-dominated man. Such words cannot be comprehended by the fleshly, whose horizon is bounded by this earth and its outlook. Only as life-giving Spirit informs him may a man understand these words.⁷³

Fourth, beyond the above, most Roman Catholic defenses of John 6 narrowly aim to refute those Zwinglian type understandings of the Eucharist which maintain that the Lord's Supper is merely symbolic, but this is not the Scriptural view, and so many of their rejoinders are irrelevant or do not support "Real" in the Catholic sense over "Real" in the Reformed sense.

As it stands, then, John 6 cannot be used to support the Roman understanding of Real presence.

2. The Institution of the Lord's Supper

Ott contends that "the principal biblical proof for the Eucharistic Real Presence lies in the words of institution."⁷⁴ At the institution, Christ declares regarding the bread, "Take, eat; this is My body," and regarding the cup, "this is My blood of the covenant" (Matt. 26:26ff.; Mk. 14:22-34; Lk. 22:15-20). The argument from these verses is that the wording is not

figurative, the circumstances are straightforward, and the arguments raised against a literal understanding are flawed. Scott Hahn has also recently argued on the basis of Isaiah 55:11 that Christ's words bring about whatever they ascribe to an object.⁷⁵

First, contrary to the simplistic claim that the words are in *no way* figurative, Scripture provides a wide array of just such covenant language which is obviously figurative. For example, "thus shall my covenant be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant" (Gen. 17:13), "the rock was Christ" (I Cor. 10:4), and most relevant, the lamb "is the Lord's Pass-over" (Ex. 12:11).⁷⁶ The covenantal context bespeaks very important figurative language; a literal interpretation crassly misses the point.

Second, once again, Roman Catholics decidedly don't interpret these passages literally. For example, in Luke 22:20, Christ declares "*the cup* which is poured out for you is *the new covenant* in my blood." The emphasized text shows that the identification is now made between the wine or cup and an administration of God's grace, instead of Christ's blood. On Roman Catholic premises, we should expect some change in the substance of the wine's container (the cup) itself. Or similarly, promises, commands, and New Covenant mercies are constituted of fermented grapes! Such giant category mistakes are hard to come by.

Third, Hahn's argument that whatever God speaks comes to pass and that by declaring "This is My body" Christ immediately transformed substances requires that *every* time Christ makes a claim the event must come to pass. No one denies the power of Christ's word to create and destroy, but what I do deny is the premise that Christ always chooses to transform reality in this way. The frightful *reductio* that follows from Hahn's premise is that when Christ declared to Peter, "Get thee behind Me Satan" (Matt. 16:23), Peter was transformed into Satan. Similarly when Christ declared that he was the door, vine, or bread, dreadful transformations would have to take place. If Hahn rescinds the universality of his premise, then he simply loses his argument.⁷⁷

Fourth, Protestants have often argued that Christ's presence at the meal was a clear indication to those present that His words did not signify that He was also in the bread and wine. As a wild rejoinder, Roman apologists often claim that "Christ was at the Last Supper in two ways. He was present at the table in a natural way, as were the apostles, and he was present in the eucharistic elements in a sacramental way....There is no contradiction in Christ being both physically and sacramentally present."⁷⁸ Whatever "sacramental existence" is, this rejoinder surely forever bans Roman Catholic defenders from appealing to the "plain sense" of the text to buttress their case.

Fifth, Rumble and Carty rejoin the Protestant figurative interpretation of the institution of the Supper by arguing that those who appeal to such texts as "I am the vine" to prove the figurative nature of Christ's statements fail to see that,

There is no logical parallel between the words 'This is My body' and 'I am the vine' or 'I am the door.' For the images of the vine and door can have, of their very

⁷⁰ Ott, *Fundamentals*, p. 374.

⁷¹ My thanks to Doug Wilson for suggesting this line of thought.

⁷² Keating, *Catholicism*, p. 242.

⁷³ Morris, Leon, *The Gospel According To John*, (Eerdmans Publ. Co.: Grand Rapids, 1984), p. 385.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 374.

⁷⁵ Hahn, "Communion as Reunion."

⁷⁶ cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, p. 1384; Bk. IV, Ch. 17, 20.

⁷⁷ Hahn has also recently attempted another defense of Real presence by means of a rather interesting interpretation in which usually unmentioned details of the Last Supper are shown to have apparently direct ties to the four cups of the Passover. Though worthy of more study in itself, it simply doesn't entail Real presence over a Reformed view of presence — Hahn, Scott, "The Fourth Cup," (audio cassette) Saint Joseph Communications, Inc.

⁷⁸ Keating, *Catholicism*, pp. 243, 244.

nature, a symbolical sense. Christ is like a vine because all the sap of my spiritual life comes from Him. He is like a door since I go to heaven through Him. But a piece of bread is in no way like His flesh. Of its very nature it cannot symbolize the actual body of Christ.⁷⁹

Here we have a distinction with no difference. Contrary to their claim that bread cannot symbolize Christ ("actual body" begs-the-question), one need only see the symbolism in John 6 regarding God's provision of Manna in the wilderness. God nourished and sustained His people by bread in the desert, and now Christ applies that symbolism to Himself who nourishes us spiritually. The symbolism is evident.

As with John 6, Roman Catholic appeals to Christ's words of institution simply do not entail Real presence.

3. Paul and Those Who Have Died

The third and final primary support for Real presence is the appeal to I Corinthians 11:23ff. in which Paul warns him who takes the Lord's Supper unworthily that he "eats and drinks judgment to himself" and that "whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord." Hence, we are told that the passage assumes Real presence since mere symbols could not have such disastrous effects.

Reformed Protestants heartily agree and use this as a proof-text against those who hold to a mere Memorialist view. But again, it does not prove Real presence in the Roman Catholic sense.

In all then, none of the three arguments can be used to support Christ's "Real" presence in the Roman Eucharist. The arguments are either fallacious or do not uniquely support Roman Real presence.

Given such a weak Biblical basis for the Roman Eucharist, I would hope that Roman Catholics would recoil from the grave implications of Real presence, namely, the adoration of the creature over the Creator. The Westminster Confession speaks solemnly and truly when it declares, "The doctrine which maintains a change of the substance of bread and wine in the substance of Christ's body and blood...is the cause of manifold superstitions, yea, of gross idolatries."⁸⁰

III. A Biblical Approach

If we reject the Roman Eucharist as grossly unbiblical, how ought we to understand the Lord's Supper? Below I provide a brief sketch of a Biblical understanding of the Lord's Supper, realizing that each point is worthy of a lengthy discussion in and of itself.

- God's grace is not a material-like object but rather His personal favor and beneficence spiritually communicated to accomplish His purposes.

- God communicates His grace commonly to the unregenerate (Matt. 5:45) and redemptively to His people by various means, including His Word, written and preached, prayer, and the sacraments.

- A sacrament is one of the means of grace and is a perpetual ordinance instituted by Christ to serve as a *sign* and *seal* to those within the covenant of Grace (Gen. 17:7; Matt. 28:19; 27:26-28; Rom. 4:11; I Cor. 11:24; Rom. 15:8; Ex. 12:48).

- As a *sign*, a sacrament directs our thoughts to the redemptive reality it represents (Gen. 17:7; Matt. 3:11; I Pet. 3:21; Rom. 2:28, 29).

- As a *seal*, a sacrament serves to authenticate or confirm God's promises to His people individually. The Lord seals or places his mark of ownership on His people to strengthen their faith, unify them, and to separate them from unbelievers (Rom. 4:11; I Cor. 11:24; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 4:5; 2:11,12; I Cor. 12:13; Ex. 12:48).

- A sacrament is not effective due to anything in itself or its operation but only because the Spirit of God works through it to *curse* or *bless* (I Cor. 10:16; 11:20ff; 12:13). Moreover, since a sacrament is God's Word conveyed in pictorial or ritual form, and God's Word surely effects *blessing* or *cursing* as He determines (Is. 55:11), a sacrament, in turn, assuredly effects God's purposes as well. Hence, a sacrament is not merely a symbol but a powerful means of God's action (I Cor. 10:16; 11:26).

- The New Testament describes only two sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper (Matt. 28:19; I Cor. 11:20ff), and these two sacraments are essentially the same as the Old Covenant sacraments of Circumcision and Passover (Col. 2:12; I Cor. 5:7), though the latter anticipated Christ's work, "whereas those of the New Testament are concerned with and point back to Christ and His perfect redemptive sacrifice, which has now been *accomplished*."⁸¹

- The Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ on the night He was betrayed to serve as a commemoration of His perfect and complete sacrifice of Himself as the Lamb of God (Lk. 22:7ff.; I Cor. 10:20; 9:12; 10:10,14,18; Matt. 1:21; Jn. 10:11; Eph. 5:25). The Supper is not a true sacrifice, since Christ's work is complete, but it is a commemoration of that perfect sacrifice.

- Though the common bread and wine of the Lord's Supper are called by the names of what they signify, the body and blood of Christ (cf. Gen. 17:13; Ex. 12:11; Matt. 26:26), the Scripture rejects Transubstantiation (see discussion above). Hence, believers do really, spiritually, "yet not carnally and corporally....receive and feed upon Christ crucified,"⁸² the Lamb of God, who thereby effects union, communion, and peace between God and His people.

- This spiritual nourishment of the Lord's Supper furthers believers' growth, as well as the bond-of-unity to their Lord and each other, and distinguishes them from unbelievers ("incommunicants" vs. "excommunicants").

- The celebration of the Lord's Supper requires due preparation and discernment (I Cor. 11:27-29), and the norm of New Testament practice demonstrates that the Supper ought to be celebrated weekly (Acts 20:7).

The Lord's Supper is indeed the blessed and triumphant meal. It should lead us to glory in the truth that Christ "was pierced for our transgressions" (Is. 53:5) in order that He would "save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Our new song is "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain" (Rev. 5:12) for He "purchased for God with [His] blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). Yet, as we've seen, the Roman Catholic Eucharist makes a mockery of all of this. It transforms the glorious into the grotesque. It denigrates Christ's atoning work and idolatrously confuses the Creator and the creature. Therefore, our deepest and most sincere compassion should constrain us to cry out to our Roman Catholic friends, "Come forth from her midst, My People, and each of you save yourselves from the fierce anger of the Lord" (Jer. 51:45).

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⁸¹ Marcel, Pierre, *The Biblical Doctrine of Infant Baptism*, (trans. P.E. Hughes) (Greenwood: Attic Press, Inc. 1953, 1981) p. 91.

⁸² *Westminster Confession of Faith*, XXIX, 7.

⁷⁹ Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 236.

⁸⁰ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, XXIX, 7

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For the Record

This regular feature is an attempt to provide an elementary Biblical analysis of various topics in Christian theology and practice. We anticipate that this and future contributions will be helpful, in explaining fundamental theological issues to those who may be relatively unfamiliar with them.

The Concept and Importance of Canonicity

Greg Bahnsen

Scripture as Final Authority

The Christian faith is based upon God's own self-revelation, not the conflicting opinions or untrustworthy speculations of men. As the Apostle Paul wrote: "your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (I Cor. 2:5).

The world in its own wisdom would never understand or seek God (Rom. 3:11) but always suppress or distort the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18, 21). So Paul concluded that "the world in its wisdom did not know God" (I Cor. 1:21), and he set in sharp contrast "the words which man's wisdom teaches" and those which "God revealed unto us through the Spirit" (I Cor. 2:10, 13). In light of that contrast, we need to see that the apostolic message did not originate in persuasive words of human wisdom or insight (I Cor. 2:4). The light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ was, as they said, "of God and not from ourselves" (II Cor. 4:6-7). Paul thanked God that the Thessalonians received his message "not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God" (II Thess. 2:13). As Peter wrote, "no prophecy ever came by the will of man, but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit" (II Peter 1:21). Paul said of the sacred writings which make us wise unto salvation that every one of them is "God-breathed," inspired by God (II Tim. 3:15-17).

It is for this reason that the Scriptures are profitable for our doctrine, correction, and instruction. We must pay attention to the message which is divine – and all of it, as Jesus said: "Man shall live... by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). But God's people must not submit to uninspired words of men. "Thus says Jehovah of hosts, Harken not unto the word of the prophets... speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of Jehovah" (Jer. 23:16). Nor should God's people allow their faith to be compromised by any philosophy which is "after the tradition of men... and not after Christ" (Col. 2:8). Christ Himself condemned those who "have made void the word of God because of [their] tradition" (Matt. 15:6). Human philosophy and human traditions have no place in defining the Christian faith.

The message of the Christian faith is, therefore, rooted in and circumscribed by God's own revealed word – not the authoritative words of men. Where is God's Word found? "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by His Son" (Heb. 1:1-2). God verbally revealed Himself in many ways: from His personal address to Adam or Abraham to the inspired preaching of Jonah, Amos, or Ezekiel. He also sent His word in writing to His people: from the tablets of the Mosaic law to the written message or Isaiah or Jeremiah. Even the word of God which was originally delivered orally needed to be reduced to writing in order for us to know about it and for it to function as an objective standard for faith and obedience. The word of false teachers was to be exposed by the previously inscribed law (Deut. 13:1-5) or written testimony (Is. 8:20).

The grandest expression of God's Word was found in the very person of Jesus Christ, who is called "the Word of God" (John 1:1; Rev. 19:13). Again, what we know of Christ is dependent upon the written word of the gospels by men like Matthew and Luke. Christ commissioned certain men to act as His authorized representatives, His apostles. He inspired them with His word (John 14:26), so they spoke for Him (Matt. 10:40). It is noteworthy, however, that the oral preaching and teaching of the apostles were to be tested against the Scriptures, as we see from Paul's commendation of the Bereans (Acts 17:11). What the apostles themselves wrote was to be accounted as the very word of the Lord (I Cor. 14:37). Their written epistles came to have for the church the same authority as "the other scriptures" (II Pet. 3:16).

A key work of the apostles was precisely that of revelation: their confessing Christ, testifying to Him, interpreting and applying His person and work for the church (Matt. 16:18; John 15:27; 16:13; Acts 1:8, 22; 4:33; 10:39-41; 13:31). They did not speak by flesh and blood or according to human instruction, but rather by revelation of the Father and Son (Matt. 16:17; Gal.

1:11-12), being taught of the Spirit (John 14:26). In virtue of this revelatory work, Christ builds His church upon the foundation of the apostles (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 2:20; cf. 3:5).

The teaching of the apostles was received as a body of truth which was a criteria for doctrine and life in the church; because this teaching was passed down to the church and through the church, it was called the "tradition" (what had been "delivered") or the "deposit" (to be distinguished from the uninspired traditions of men which the Bible elsewhere condemns (e.g. Col. 2:8; Matt. 15:3). The apostolic deposit or tradition formed a "pattern of sound words" for the church (II Tim. 1:13-14) which was to be guarded (I Tim. 6:20-21) as the standard for Christian life (II Thess. 3:6; II Pet. 2:21) and for all future teaching in the church (II Tim. 2:2). This apostolic tradition was found in both oral instruction and written epistle (II Thess. 2:15); obviously only the latter is available to us today.

In the very nature of the case, apostolic revelation did not extend beyond the apostolic generation, the "foundational days" of the church.¹ Thus Jude in his day could speak of "the faith" – meaning the teaching content of the Christian faith – as now "once for all delivered to the saints" (v. 3). About this verse, F.F. Bruce comments: "Therefore, all claims to convey an additional revelation... are false claims... whether these claims are embodied in books which aim at superseding or supplementing the Bible, or take the form of extra-Biblical traditions which are promulgated as dogmas by ecclesiastical authority."²

The Question of the Canon

As we have seen from the Scriptures themselves, "the faith which has once for all been delivered to the saints" must be defined and circumscribed by God's revelation as it is found particularly in the

¹ The theological error of believing that special, verbal revelation or quasi-revelation continued beyond the time of the apostles is made equally by Roman Catholics (imputing inspired authority to papal "interpretations" and unwritten tradition) and Charismatics (teaching tongues and prophecy as gifts to be expected throughout the life of the church). Both the office of Apostle and the gifts which accompanied the ministry of the apostles (cf. II Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4) were intended to be temporary, confined to the founding of the church. To be an Apostle, it was required to be a witness of the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:22; e.g. I Cor. 9:1) and to be commissioned directly by Him (Gal. 1:1), thus restricting the apostolic office to the first generation of the church. Paul indicated that he was the last of the apostles (I Cor. 15:7-9); his successor, Timothy, is never given that title. By the later New Testament epistles we have no further mention or discussion of revelatory gifts like tongues and prophecy, for with the completing (bringing to its end or "perfection") of that which was "partial" – namely, the process of revelation – the temporary revelatory gifts of tongues and prophecy had to "cease" (I Cor. 13:8-10).

² Bruce, F.F., *The Defence of the Gospel in the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), p. 80.

written Word, from the law of Moses to apostolic deposit. The Christian faith is defined by all of Scripture, but only Scripture. From the Scriptures we may not add or subtract anything (Deut. 4:2; e.g. Rev. 22:18-19), lest our doctrine and conduct be governed by a defective standard. This, then, brings us to the question of what literary works ought to be recognized as the word of God — the question of "the canon." The word "canon" denoted a rod used for measuring (defining) things. In the context of theological discussion, "the canon" is the term used to name that established list of authoritative writings which are the rule of faith and life for God's people.

The idea of a canon — a set of writings bearing unique, divine, authority for God's people — goes back to the very beginning of Israel's history. A covenant document which defined the proper understanding of God, redemption, and life was placed in the ark of the covenant in the Holiest Place of the tabernacle, thus setting it apart from the words and opinions of men. Moreover, the notion of a canon is at the theological foundation of the Christian faith. Without revealed words available to God's people, there would be no exercise by God of Lordship over us as servants, and there would be no sure promise from God the Savior to save us as sinners.

Nature of Canonicity Distinguished from Its Recognition

What books properly make up the canon for the church? In answering this question, it is imperative that we not confuse the nature of the canon with the recognition of certain writings as canonical. The legitimate authority of canonical books exists independently of their being personally acknowledged as authoritative by any individual or group. The nature (or grounds) of canonicity is thus logically distinct from the history (or recognition) of canonicity.

It is the inspiration of a book that renders it authoritative, not human acceptance or recognition of the book. If God has spoken, what He says is divine in itself, regardless of human response to it. It does not "become divine" through human agreement with it.

Accordingly, the canon is not the product of the Christian church. The church has no authority to control, create, or define the Word of God. Rather, the canon controls, creates and defines the church of Christ: "...having been begotten again, not by corruptible seed, but by incorruptible, by the word of God which lives and abides forever.... And this is the word of good news which was preached unto you" (I Peter 1:23-25).

When we understand this, we can see how erroneous it is to suppose that the corporate church, at some council of its leaders, voted on certain documents and constituted them the canon. The church cannot subsequently attribute authority to certain writings. It can simply receive them

as God's revealed word which, as such, always has been the church's canon. Authority is inherent in those writings from the outset, and the church simply confesses this to be the case.

The Canon Not Identical with Special Revelation

In order for a book to be accounted canonical, it is necessary that it be inspired. However, while inspiration is a necessary condition of canonicity, it is not a sufficient one. Otherwise all of God's special (verbal) revelation would constitute the canon of the church; yet this is not the case, as we can see for a couple of reasons.

First, remember that not all special revelation was given in written form or subsequently committed to writing (e.g., many discourses by Jesus while on earth, John 21:25; private revelations to the apostles, II Cor. 12:4,7; Rev. 10:4; unpublished messages from New Testament prophets, I Cor. 12:28).

Second, we must note that not all of those inspired messages which were reduced to writing have been preserved by God's providence for use by His people through history, such as "The Wars of Jehiovah," "The Book of Asher," Paul's previous letter to the Corinthians, etc. (c.f., Num. 21:14; Josh. 10:13; II Chron. 9:29; 12:15; I Cor. 5:9; II Cor. 2:4; 7:8). Therefore, we should say more precisely that the canon of the Christian church is constituted by those inspired writings which God has preserved for His people in all subsequent ages.

Inspiration is Self-Attesting and Self-Consistent

Scripture teaches us that only God is adequate to witness to Himself. There is no created person or power which is in a position to judge or verify the word of God. Thus: "when God made promise to Abraham, since He could swear by none greater, He swore by Himself..." (Heb. 6:13).

Accordingly, men are not qualified or authorized to say what God might be expected to reveal or what can count as His communication. That is why Scripture draws such a sharp distinction between "words which man's wisdom teaches" and those "which the Spirit teaches" (I Cor. 2:13). The wisdom of man cannot be relied upon to judge the wisdom of God (I Cor. 1:20-25). Indeed, in its natural condition, man's mind will always fail to receive the words of God's Spirit: "the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God...he cannot know them because they are Spiritually discerned" (I Cor. 2:14).

Only God can identify His own word. Thus God's word must attest to itself — must witness to its own divine character and origin. "And you do not have His word abiding in you, for whom He sent you believe not. You search the scriptures.... and these are what bear witness of Me" (John 5:38-39).

Throughout the history of redemption God has directed His people to find His message and words in written form. Indeed, God Himself provided the prototype of written revelation when He delivered the tablets of law upon Mount Sinai. And when God subsequently spoke by His Spirit through chosen messengers (II Peter 1:21), their words were characterized by self-vindicating authority. That is, it was evident from their message that they were speaking for God — whether the claim was *explicit* (e.g., "Thus saith the Lord...") or *implicit* (the arresting power or demand of their message as a word from the Lord of the covenant: e.g., Matt. 7:28-29).

Moreover, their messages were of necessity coherent with each other. A genuine claim to inspiration by a literary work minimally entailed consistency with any other book revealed by God, for God does not lie ("...it is impossible for God to lie," Heb. 6:18) and does not contradict Himself ("But as God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no," II Cor. 1:18). A genuine word from God could always be counted upon, then, to agree with previously given revelation — as required in Deut. 13:1-5, "If there arises among you a prophet..., saying 'Let us go after other gods....' you shall not hearken unto that prophet.... You shall walk after Jehovah your God, and fear Him, and keep His commandments, and obey His voice...."

The Old Testament Jews had to beware of false prophets, and caution was likewise necessary in the early days of the New Testament church because of misleading messages from false teachers — words which were not revealed by God. For instance, Paul says "If any man preaches to you any gospel other than that which you received, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:9). Spurious "apostolic" letters sometimes circulated and troubled the early church, as we see from Paul's words: "...be not unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report, or letter supposedly having come from us" (II Thess. 2:2).

It was necessary to instruct the church to "believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (I John 4:1). And the criterion for judging was consistency with previous revelation — whether the Old Testament (e.g., "Now these were more noble than those at Thessalonica, in that they received the word [of Paul] with all readiness of mind, examining the [Old Testament] scriptures daily, whether these things were so," Acts 17:11) or the teaching of the apostles (e.g., I John 4:2-3; Gal. 1:9).

The Spirit's Persuasion

The self-attestation of Scripture as God's Word makes it objectively authoritative in itself, but such authority will not be subjectively received without an internal, spiritual change in man. The Holy Spirit must open our sinful eyes and give

personal conviction concerning the Scripture's self-witness: "Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, in order that we might know the things that are freely given to us by God" (I Cor. 2:12).

We must be especially careful not to confuse this with subjectivism, which is ultimately relativistic. The internal testimony of the Holy Spirit does not stand by itself or operate in a vacuum; it must be teamed with the objective self-witness of the Scriptures themselves.

Moreover, this work of the Spirit is not an individual or idiosyncratic matter, as though the internal testimony operated uniquely upon one person by himself. Thus it is the corporate church, not mystical religious mavericks, which recognizes — through the Spirit's gracious, internal ministry — that the objective self-witness of the Scriptures is genuine.

The Canon Historically Settled Under God's Providence

Those works which God gave to His people for their canon always received immediate recognition as inspired, at least by a portion of the church (e.g., Deut. 31:24-26; Josh. 24:25; I Sam. 10:25; Dan. 9:2; I Cor. 14:37; I Thess. 2:13; 5:27; II Thess. 3:14; II Peter 3:15-16), and God intended for those writings to receive recognition by the church as a whole (e.g., Col. 4:16; Rev. 1:4). The Spiritual discernment of inspired writings from God by the corporate church was, of course, sometimes a drawn-out process and struggle. This is due to the fact that the ancient world had slow means of communication and transportation (thus taking some time for epistles to circulate), coupled with the understandable caution of the church before the threat of false teachers (thus producing dialogue and debate along the way to achieving one mind).

Historical evidence indicates that, even with the difficulties mentioned above, the Old and New Testament canons were substantially recognized and already established in the Christian church by the end of the second century.³ However, there is adequate Biblical and theological reason to believe that the canon of Scripture was essentially settled even in the earliest days of the church.

By the time of Jesus there existed a well-defined body of covenantal literature which, under the influence of the Old Testament prophets, was recognized as defining and controlling genuine faith. When Jesus or the apostles appealed simply to "the Scriptures" against their Jewish opponents, there is no suggestion whatsoever that the identity and limits of such writings were vague or in dispute. Confirmation of the contents of the Jewish canon is found

toward the end of the first century in the writings of Josephus (the Jewish historian) and among the rabbis of Jamnia.

The New Testament church acknowledged the canonical authority of this Old Testament corpus, noting that "...not one jot or tittle" (Matt. 5:18) of "the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms" (Luke 24:44) was challenged or repudiated by our Lord. His full submission to that canon was evident from the fact that He declared "the Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). As Paul later said: "whatever things were previously written were written for our instruction" (Rom. 15:4).

The traditional Jewish canon was divided into three sections (Law, Prophets, Writings), and an unusual feature of the last section was the listing of Chronicles out of historical order, placing it after Ezra-Nehemiah and making it the last book of the canon. In light of this, the words of Jesus in Luke 11:50-51 reflect the settled character of the Jewish canon (with its peculiar order) already in his day. Christ uses the expression "from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah," which appears troublesome since Zechariah was not *chronologically* the last martyr mentioned in the Bible (cf. Jer. 26:20-23). However, Zechariah is the last martyr we read of in the Old Testament according to Jewish *canonical* order (cf. II Chron. 24:20-22), which was apparently recognized by Jesus and his hearers.

As for the New Testament, the covenantal words of Christ — which determine our lives and destinies (e.g., John 5:38-40; 8:31; 12:48-50; 14:15, 23-24) — have been, through the power of the Holy Spirit, delivered faithfully to us by Christ's apostles: "But the Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you" (John 14:26; cf. 15:26-27; 14:16-17; 16:13-15).

The very concept of an "apostle" in Jewish jurisprudence was that of a man who in the name of another could appear with authority and speak for that other man (e.g., "the apostle for a person is as this person himself," it was said). Accordingly, Jesus told His apostles, "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent me" (Matt. 10:40). And through these apostles He promised to "build My church" (Matt. 16:18).

We know that in this way there came about a body of New Testament literature which the church, "being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone" (Eph. 2:20), came to recognize as God's own word, being the canon of their covenantal relation with Him. This recognition traces from the days of the apostles themselves, who either identified their own works as canonical (e.g., Gal. 1:1, 11-12; I Cor. 14:37), or verified the canonical authority of the works by other apostles (e.g., II Peter 3:16) and writers (e.g., I Tim. 5:18, citing Luke 10:7).

But whether or not each was given particular written attention by an apostle, the individual books of the New Testament came to be seen for what they were: the revelation of Jesus Christ through His chosen messengers. It is in this body of literature that God's people discern the authoritative word of their Lord — as Jesus said: "My sheep hear My voice, and they follow Me" (John 10:27).

To recapitulate: we know from God's Word (1) that the church of the New Covenant recognized the standing canon of the Old Testament, and (2) that the Lord intended for the New Covenant church to be built upon the word of the apostles, coming thereby to recognize the canonical literature of the New Testament. To these premises we can add the conviction (3) that all of history is governed by God's providence ("...according to the plan of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His own will," Eph. 1:11). So then, trusting Christ's promise that He would indeed build His church, and being confident in the controlling sovereignty of God, we can be assured the God-ordained recognition of the canon would be providentially accomplished — which, in retrospect, is now a matter of historical record.

To think otherwise would be, in actual effect, to deprive the Christian church of the sure word of God. And that would in turn (a) undermine confidence in the gospel, contrary to God's promise and our spiritual necessity, as well as (b) deprive us of the philosophical precondition of any knowledge whatsoever, thus consigning us (in principle) to utter scepticism.

Application of Canonicity

In terms of the previous discussion, then, what should we make of the Roman Catholic decision in 1546 (the Council of Trent) to accept as canonical the apocryphal books of "Tobit," "Judith," "Wisdom," "Ecclesiasticus," "Baruch," "I and II Maccabees"?

Such books do not claim for themselves ultimate divine authority. Consider the boldness of Paul's writing ("if anyone thinks he is spiritual, let him acknowledge that what I write is the commandment of the Lord" — I Cor. 14:37-38; if anyone "preaches any other gospel that what we preached to you, let him be accursed" — Gal. 1:8). Then contrast the insecure tone of the author of II Maccabees: "if it is poorly done and mediocre, that was the best I could do" (15:38). Moreover, when the author relates that Judas confidently encouraged his troops, that boldness came "from the law and the prophets" (15:9), as though this were already a recognized and authoritative body of literature to him and his readers. (This is also reflected in the prologue to Ecclesiasticus.) I Maccabees 9:27 recognizes the time in the past when "prophets ceased to appear among" the Jews.

The ancient Jews, to whom were

³ For a good discussion of the evidence, see Bruce Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987).

entrusted the "oracles of God" (Rom. 3:2), never accepted these apocryphal books as part of the inspired canon — and still do not to this day.⁴ Josephus speaks of the number of Jewish books which are divinely trustworthy, not leaving a place for the apocryphal books. Josephus expressed the common Jewish perspective when he said that the prophets wrote from the time of Moses to that of Artaxerxes, and that no writing since that time had the same authority. The Jewish Talmud teaches that the Holy Spirit departed from Israel after the time of Malachi. Now, Artaxerxes and Malachi both lived about four centuries before Christ, while the books of the Apocrypha were composed in the vicinity of two centuries before Christ.

When Christ came, neither He nor the apostles ever quoted from the apocryphal books as though they carried authority. Throughout the history of the early church, the acceptance of the Apocrypha was no better than spotty, inconsistent, and of ambiguous import — the bottom line being that the books never gained universal respect and clear recognition as bearing the same weight and authority as the very Word of God.

The first early Christian writer to address explicitly the question of an accurate list of the books of the Old Covenant was Melito (bishop of Sardis, about 170 A.D.), and he does not countenance any of the apocryphal books. Athanasius forthrightly rejected Tobit, Judith, and Wisdom, saying of them: "for the sake of greater accuracy... there are other books outside these [just listed] which are not indeed included in the canon" (39th festal letter, 367 A.D.).⁵

⁴ Fragments of three Apocryphal books are among extant Qumran texts, with no evidence that they were considered canonical even by the sect that produced them. Philo shows no sign of accepting them either. Sometimes appeal is made to the Greek version of the Old Testament (the "Septuagint") to suggest "the canon of the Alexandrian Jews was more comprehensive." F.F. Bruce goes on to say, "There is no evidence that this was so: indeed, there is no evidence that the Alexandrian Jews ever promulgated a canon of scripture" (*Canon*, pp. 44-45). Indeed, the Septuagint manuscripts we possess were produced by Christians much later, and extant manuscripts differ between themselves, some excluding books of the Apocrypha which Rome accepted, while others included apocryphal books which even Rome denied.

⁵ Those who study the history of canonicity will trip themselves up badly if attention is not paid to the varying and unsettled use of terms at this point in church history (late fourth century). For instance, the term "apocrypha" itself carries different import between Athanasius and Jerome. Athanasius spoke of three categories of books: canonical, edifying, and "apocryphal" — meaning heretical works to be avoided altogether. Jerome on the other hand, used the term "apocryphal" for the second category of books, those which are edifying (and Rufinus termed them "ecclesiastical," since they could be read in the church). The same is true of the early use of the term "canon." Athanasius appears to be the first to use it in the strict sense that we do

The scholar Jerome was the main translator of the Latin Vulgate (which Roman Catholicism later decreed has ultimate authority for determining doctrine). About 395 A.D., Jerome enumerated the books of the Hebrew Bible, saying "whatever falls outside these must be set apart among the Apocrypha." He then lists books now accepted by the Roman Catholic church and categorically says they "are not in the canon." He later wrote that such books are read "for edification of the people but not for establishing the authority of ecclesiastical dogmas." Likewise, many years later (about 1140 A.D.), Hugo of St. Victor lists the "books of holy writ," adding "There are also in the Old Testament certain other books which are indeed read [in church] but are not inscribed...in the canon of authority"; here he lists books of the apocrypha.

The apocryphal books were sometimes highly regarded or cited for their antiquity or for their historical, moral, or literary value,⁶ but the conceptual distance between "valuable" and "divinely inspired" is considerable.

Thus the 1395 Wycliffe version of the Bible in English included the Apocrypha and commends the book of Tobit in particular, yet also acknowledges that Tobit "is not of belief" — that is, not in the same class as inspired books which can be used for confirming Christian doctrine. Likewise, the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England (1562) names the canonical books of Scripture in one separate class, and then introduces a list of apocryphal books by saying: "And the other books the Church doth read for example of life... by yet doth it not apply them to establish any doctrine."⁷

today; naturally, such usage was not immediately inculcated by all writers. Sometimes "canonical" was used broadly and indiscriminately to include what other authors more carefully delineated as the books of highest, inspired authority (the church's standard — "canon") as well as the edifying or "ecclesiastical" books which could be read in the church. We see this, for instance, at the provincial (non-ecumenical) Third Council of Carthage in 397, which explicitly identifies "the canonical writings" with what "should be read in the church" — and includes the works deemed "edifying" by Athanasius or "apocryphal" by Jerome. Contemporary Roman Catholic scholars recognize the varying use of the term "canonical" by speaking of the apocryphal books as "deuterocanonical."

⁶ Roman Catholic apologists sometimes jump to canonical conclusions from the simple fact that the books of the Apocrypha were copied and included among ancient manuscripts or from the fact that an author draws upon them. But obviously a writer can quote something from a work which he takes to be true without thereby ascribing divine authority to it (for instance, Paul quoting a pagan writer in I Cor. 15:33).

⁷ Roman Catholic apologists often misunderstand the Protestant rejection of the Apocrypha, thinking it entails having no respect or use for these books whatsoever. Calvin himself wrote, "I am not one of those, however, who would entirely disapprove the reading of those books"; his objection was to "placing the Apocrypha in the same rank" with inspired Scripture ("Antidote" to the Council of Trent, pp. 67,68). Likewise, Luther

This is likewise the attitude of most Roman Catholic scholars today, who regard the books of the Apocrypha as only "deuterocanonical" (of secondary authority).⁸

The Protestant churches have never received these writings as canonical, even though they have sometimes been reprinted for historical value. Even some Roman Catholic scholars during the Reformation period disputed the canonical status of the apocryphal books, which were accepted (at this late date) it would seem because of their usefulness in opposing Luther and the reformers — that is, for contemporary and political purposes, rather than the theological and historical ones in our earlier discussion.

Finally, the books of the Apocrypha abound in doctrinal, ethical, and historical errors. For instance, Tobit claims to have been alive when Jeroboam revolted (931 B.C.) and when Assyria conquered Israel (722 B.C.), despite the fact that his lifespan was only a total of 158 years (Tobit 1:3-5; 14:11)! Judith mistakenly identifies Nebuchadnezzar as king of the Assyrians (1:1, 7). Tobit endorses the superstitious use of fish liver to ward off demons (6: 6,7)!

The theological errors are equally significant. Wisdom of Solomon teaches the creation of the world from pre-existent matter (7:17). II Maccabees teaches prayers for the dead (12:45-46), and Tobit teaches salvation by the good work of almsgiving (12:9) — quite contrary to inspired Scripture (such as John 1:3; II Samuel 12:19; Hebrews 9:27; Romans 4:5; Galatians 3:11).

The conclusion to which we come is that the books of the Roman Catholic Apocrypha fail to demonstrate the characteristic marks of inspiration and authority. They are not self-attesting, but rather contradict God's Word elsewhere. They were not recognized by God's people from the outset as inspired and have never gained acceptance of the church universal as communicating the full authority of God's own Word. We must concur with the Westminster Confession, when it says: "The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of scripture; and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings" (I. 3). Δ

placed the Apocrypha in an appendix to the Old Testament in his German Bible, describing them in the title as "Books which are not to be held equal to holy scripture, but are useful and good to read."

⁸ The preceding history and quotations concerning the canon can be pursued in F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, *passim*.

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ISSUE AND INTERCHANGE

The goal of this regular feature is to provide our readers with opposing arguments on topics pertinent to the Christian life. We normally omit the names of the authors in this feature, but the topic of debate for this special issue -- the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* -- is no typical inter-family-of-faith dispute, but rather it is one which challenges the foundations of any such debate. This interchange, therefore, is particularly conducive to dropping the usual practice of anonymity.

Presenting a Biblical case against *Sola Scriptura* is Gerald Matatics,

a former minister in the Presbyterian Church in America and currently a full-time staff apologist for Catholic Answers in San Diego, CA. Mr. Matatics holds a B.A. in classical, NT, and patristic Greek, an M.Div. from Gordon-Conwell Seminary, and is completing his dissertation for a Ph.D. in biblical studies at Westminster Theological Seminary. He, together with his wife and children, was received into the Catholic Church in Easter of 1986.

Presenting a Biblical case for *Sola Scriptura* is Douglas Jones, an elder

in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the editor of *Antithesis*. Mr. Jones holds a B.A. in philosophy from the University of California and an M.A. in philosophy from the University of Southern California. He currently teaches Greek at New St. Andrews College and philosophy at the University of Idaho and Lewis-Clark State College.

As usual, the burden of proof in the interchange is placed on the advocate of the affirmative, in this case Mr. Jones. For that reason, Mr. Jones opens and closes the debate.

ISSUE: Does Scripture Teach *Sola Scriptura*?

Jones: Scripture Teaches That the Word of God is the Supreme Norm

If the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* is true, then, as a system of theology, Roman Catholicism ought to be wholeheartedly rejected. This quick inference is not as simplistic as it may first appear. *Sola Scriptura* not only negates any form of authoritative tradition in Roman Catholicism, it also eviscerates any Roman Catholic doctrine or practice explicitly drawn from Scripture, since the truth of such doctrines is, according to the Council of Trent, only guaranteed by the "holy mother Church" who has the sole authority to "judge of their [the Scriptures'] true sense and interpretation."¹ Therefore, if *Sola Scriptura* precludes such ecclesiastical authority, Roman Catholic theology is unjustified and ought to be rejected.

Another reason to debate the issue of *Sola Scriptura* is that some converts from Evangelicalism to Roman Catholicism have claimed that a primary reason for their shift in theology was the absence of a Biblical case for *Sola Scriptura*. Such an astounding claim ought to lead the Protestant to query -- How can such a vast case be missed? I should rather think that the Biblical case for *Sola Scriptura* is similar to Warfield's claim concerning the basis for the infallibility of Scripture; the case over-

whelms one like a waterfall.

Though the debate over *Sola Scriptura* is often discussed in terms of "sources" of revelation or authority, I think the issue will be clearer if we focus on whether Scripture is the sole or *supreme norm* for all questions of Christian thought and practice.² Hence, the thesis for which I will argue is the same as that found in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, I:10: "The Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined... can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the scripture."

In direct contrast to the *Westminster Confession*, both the Council of Trent and Vatican II declare that there are two supreme norms for matters of faith and practice. The Council of Trent states: "[The Roman Catholic church] receives and venerates with a feeling of piety and reverence all the books of both of the Old and New Testaments, since one God is the author of both; also the traditions, whether they relate to faith or to morals, as having been dictated orally by Christ or by the Holy Ghost, and preserved in the Catholic Church in unbroken succession."³ Vatican II continues the same line of thought: "...both sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture are

to be accepted and venerated with the same devotion and reverence."⁴

Though one can quite easily demonstrate *Sola Scriptura* from the Bible, the following brief arguments are not in any sense an exhaustive case for this doctrine. Nevertheless, they ought to be a sufficient start.

Preliminary Distinctions

Though some Roman Catholic apologists assume that *Sola Scriptura* rules out any appeal to divine oral revelation, no Protestant advocate of this doctrine has ever held that view. Advocates of *Sola Scriptura* take as obvious that, at some points in the history of redemption, God has revealed His will to His people by means of oral transmissions. For example, this form of revelation was authoritatively used prior to the time of Moses and the inscripturation of the Old Testament Prophets and the New Testament writings. No advocate of *Sola Scriptura* would claim, for example, that the immediate hearers of Isaiah's pronouncements were free to disregard his prophetic revelations simply because he had not written them down. This would be a silly understanding of *Sola Scriptura*. Hence, *Sola Scriptura* incorporates the fact that, as a general pattern, God reveals His Word orally and temporarily through prophets and apostles and then subsequently inscripturates His Word. At all points in this process, God's Word is the supreme norm for Christian thought and practice. Thus, when Protestants speak of "*Scriptura*" we use it synonymously with such designations as "God's Word" (whether oral or written), a practice readily found in the New

¹ H.J. Schroeder (trans.), *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, English Translation* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, 1978), Fourth Session [p. 19]. The appeal to Trent is no mistake. Our entire debate simply ignores liberal Roman Catholic theology, since it has largely removed itself from such concerns. Conservative Roman Catholics gladly and actively defend Trent and other such traditions, though many Protestants glibly assume that no modern Catholics defend "old" Catholicism.

² This manner of framing the question in terms of norm instead of source is also the way Roman Catholic apologist Karl Keating discusses the issue (*Catholicism and Fundamentalism*, [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988], p. 134), though his remarks are otherwise quite inaccurate (e.g., "Anything extraneous to the Bible is simply wrong..." or "The whole of Christian truth is found within its pages" *Ibid.*).

³ Schroeder, *Council of Trent*, p. 17.

⁴ Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, 9.

Testament (e.g., Rom. 9:17; Gal. 3:8; Matt. 19:4-5; Mk. 7:9-13; Acts 2:16-17; Heb. 1:6-7).

Roman Catholic apologists often appeal to New Testament oral "traditions" (e.g. II Tim. 2:2; II Thess. 2:15) as immediate refutations of *Sola Scriptura*. Given the distinctions above, this is a naive move on their part. As stated for any point in redemptive history, then, the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* is the contention that the Word of God (oral or written) is the sole and supreme norm for Biblical faith. The central issue, then, which Protestants affirm and Roman Catholics deny, is the claim that the history of redemption demonstrates that God, at some points, revealed His Word temporarily in prophetic/oral form and then inscripturated this norm permanently in written form, with no subsequent authoritative appeals to oral revelation. Protestants maintain that, following inscripturation, the oral "speaking as a child" is done away with, and our only norm is the "mature," written Word of God; the latter is our current situation and, most notably, was that of the Reformers. In contrast, Roman Catholics maintain that some oral teaching authority continues as a norm on par with Scripture (though they do not claim that this Sacred Tradition is new revelation; it is only explicative).⁵

Protestants reject such a "co-supreme" norm and contend that Scripture itself teaches that the Word of God (now written) is our sole and supreme norm. We wholeheartedly reject the supreme authority of any secondary interpretations, explications, or extra-Biblical pronouncements, whether these are alleged charismatic revelations, Mary Baker Eddy's insights, or Mormon or Roman Catholic "apostolic" authorities.

I. A Biblical Case

A Biblical case for *Sola Scriptura* can be approached in numerous ways. I will begin by arguing from Biblical practices found in the Old Testament law, wisdom literature, and prophets and then from New Testament theology and practice. I will then rebut several common Roman Catholic objections to *Sola Scriptura*.

A. Old Testament

Old Testament practice clearly demonstrates that the sole and supreme authority is God's Word. Roman Catholics readily agree with this claim but reject the claim that this practice demonstrates *Sola Scriptura*, since they deem Sacred Tradition to be the Word of God as well (I will comment

on this claim momentarily). Regardless of this assertion, Old Testament practice demonstrates that the sole and supreme norm invoked is God's Word, apart from secondary interpreters, explications, or "infallible" institutions.

1. Law

In very stark terms, the central issue of the Fall was loyalty to God's revelation alone, apart from even a supernatural interpreter. God had expressly forbidden Adam and Eve to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but when they were tempted by Satan, they demonstrated their disloyalty to God's Word by considering it just another hypothesis on par with Satan's Word, which they could supposedly evaluate. In effect, Adam and Eve placed themselves as judges over God's revelation in order to reject it. God's revelation was clear; Adam and Eve needed no secondary, infallible interpreter or else their sin would have been excusable. Hence, we find *Sola Scriptura* at the very beginning of redemptive history.

Similarly, Noah was called upon to heed God's revelation without excuse. God's covenant was established directly with Noah as representative of creation (Gen. 9: 8,9). Subsequently, Ham's rebellion against God's revelation met with condemnation (Gen. 9: 22ff). Throughout, the sole standard was God's unmediated Word.

A most striking example of *Sola Scriptura* is made plain in the Abrahamic covenant. God again reveals Himself, apart from a divine expositor, and binds Himself to fulfill His covenant (Gen. 15). When Abram seeks confirmation of God's glorious promises, the Lord confirms His divine Word by His divine Word! As Hebrews 6:13 states, "since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself." No Pontiff or magisterium or Sacred Tradition is invoked to verify God's Word; the supreme authority is the Lord's own testimony to His Word. No further appeal is possible. *Sola Scriptura* reigns.

Later in Abraham's life, God further explicates His own covenant (Gen. 17) directly with Abraham (v. 9ff) and holds up Abraham as an example to his posterity for keeping "My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws" (Gen. 26:5).

As God's revelation is inscripturated in the Mosaic era, *Sola Scriptura* continues as the practice. The Lord keeps His covenant promises and further reveals Himself to His people. Moses recounts all of God's revelation to the people, and the people respond, "All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do! And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord" (Ex. 24:3,4; cf. 34:27). In these passages, we not only see the general transformation of God's Word from the temporary oral to the written, but we also see a direct "recounting" of God's Word to the people.

To the Levitical priests, the Lord revealed the sole supremacy of His Word

over against non-Christian standards: "You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt...nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you; you shall not walk in their statutes. You are to perform My judgments and keep My statutes;...I am the Lord your God" (Lev. 18:4). Hence, the priests themselves were directed to heed the (now written) Word of God alone. God's law never directs the priests or the people to give equal reverence to some ecclesiastical or priestly tradition; instead, they are repeatedly pointed back to the clear revelation of God's covenant.

In fact, the law itself explicitly prohibits Levitical priests or the people from adding another standard to God's revelation: "You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you" (Deut. 4:2; cf. Deut. 12:32; 13:1-4). Such an unequivocal prohibition clearly precluded minor priestly additions, let alone an entire ecclesiastical body of "living" tradition which would stand on par with God's Word. Moreover, this commandment was given to all of Israel (Deut. 4:1). They were expected to understand and apply God's Word so as not to adulterate it, *even if their priests did*. God alone has the authority to add to His Word, and, at this point in redemptive history, He directs them to His written Word as their supreme standard alone and not to another Biblical institution or tradition. The law, then, serves as exemplary support for the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*, and since the law serves as the standard in the historical revelation that follows Moses, we should expect to see the written Word as the standard of faith and practice there as well, and we do (cf. Josh. 1:7 - "do not turn from it to the right or to the left," II Chron. 17:7ff.; 29:15ff; II Kings 22 - Josiah: "Go, inquire of the LORD for me and the people and all Judah concerning the words of this book that has been found, for great is the wrath of the LORD that burns against us, because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us" (v. 13).

2. Wisdom Literature

Even a cursory glance at the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament will provide further support that Scripture itself directs us to look only to God speaking in Scripture as our supreme norm. Psalm 1 points to the exclusivity and supremacy of God's written Word in that the righteous will meditate on it, "day and night" (vv. 2) figuratively, there is no time to meditate on ecclesiastical traditions!). Psalm 19 declares that God's Word is "perfect," "sure," "enlightening," "enduring forever," and "true" (vv. 7-10). The Psalms nowhere place similar designations on any divine institution or secondary explications. Psalm 37 describes the righteous as one who has the law of God "in his heart" (v.31) and Psalm 119 describes the blessed as those "who walk in the law of

⁵ For example, Roman Catholic apologist Peter Kreeft claims, "the Catholic Church does not claim to be divinely inspired to add any new doctrines, only divinely protected to preserve and interpret the old ones, the deposit of faith." (*Fundamentals of the Faith* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), p. 275.

the Lord (v. 1). Psalm 119 glorifies God's written revelation as something to delight in (v. 70), love (v. 97), fear (v. 120), understand (v. 130), is everlasting (v. 160), and true (v. 142).

The Book of Proverbs repeats the solemn declaration that "every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him; *Do not add to His words*. Lest He reprove you, and you be proved a liar" (30: 5,6). This command becomes an enduring restriction on God's revelation. As God's people we are to have no other supreme authorities; no other institution or object is so circumscribed. Finally, after reflecting on the vanity of life, the Preacher of Ecclesiastes summarizes our basic duty as, "fear God and keep His commandments" (Eccl. 12:13).

3. Prophets

Sola Scriptura is the prevailing assumption of all the prophetic discourses in that the prophets conveyed God's Word directly to the people; the hearers were required to understand, interpret, and change their ways without any Mother Church infallibly interpreting the prophetic discourses. Moreover, at various times, the prophets pronounce curses upon the people for their failure to heed God's written Word; they rebelled against His covenant standards.

More particularly, Isaiah rebukes the false diviners in accord with the earlier prohibition from Deuteronomy 13: 1-4 ("you shall not listen to the words of that prophet....You shall follow the Lord...and...keep His commandments"), when he declares "to the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Is. 8:20).

Jeremiah declares that the coming New Covenant will be one, not in which Sacred Tradition reigns, but in which the Lord will place His "law within them" (Jer. 31:31).

Ezekiel gloriously testifies to the coming Christ who will reign over a future people who walk in accord with God's written Word (Ez. 37:24) in an everlasting covenant.

In Daniel 3, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego appeal supremely to the first commandment in their defiance of Nebuchadnezzar's wicked directive.

Repeatedly, we see that the Old Testament practice is to revere God's Word, most often in its written form, as the sole and supreme norm for thought and practice. The law, wisdom literature, and prophets direct us *only* to the Word of God in this manner. The Lord repeatedly speaks His Word directly to His people, who are expected to understand and apply it faithfully. The Old Testament simply has no place for secondary infallible explications or institutions, instead, it is saturated with the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*.

B. New Testament

The doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* is not only at the heart of the Old Covenant church; it also continues in the practice of the New Covenant church. At the time of Christ, we see that the Old Testament oral revelation was finally inscripturated in such a manner that Christ can refer to it as a completed whole (Lk. 16:16; 24:44; Matt. 7:12). Given the history of revelation, we should expect that the new oral revelation from Christ and the apostles would be followed by a final written collection of God's Word as well.

1. Assumption of Old Testament Standards

One very basic argument for *Sola Scriptura* is that New Testament teachings assume Old Testament standards and practices, unless otherwise specified. Christ Himself directs us to obey the teachings of the Old Testament (Matt. 23:2,3; 22:37-40), for "the Scripture cannot be broken" (Jn. 10:35) and its standards are everlasting (Matt. 5:18; Lk. 16:17).

Similarly, the apostles direct us to heed the Old Testament standards. Peter instructs us to heed the teachings of the prophets as "a lamp shining in a dark place" (II Pet. 2:19). Paul teaches that Old Testament practices were "written for our instruction" (I Cor. 10:11; cf. Rom. 15:4), and that all Scripture is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction" (II Tim. 3:16 — even Roman Catholics will concede this verse at least applies to the Old Testament Scriptures).

Thus, if the New Testament assumes the continuation of Old Testament teachings, and the Old Testament teaches *Sola Scriptura* (as above), then the New Testament teaches *Sola Scriptura* as well.

For example, if the Old Testament law, wisdom literature, and prophets direct us only to the Word of God as the supreme norm and not to ecclesiastical or priestly explications, then the New Testament teaches the same. The burden is on opponents of the doctrine to demonstrate that God has rescinded His previous standards.

Similarly, if Deuteronomy 4:2 prohibits *adding* anything to God's Word, and the New Testament assumes that this sort of teaching continues, then the prohibition also applies to adding anything to God's Word (oral or written) in the New Testament. We see this argument confirmed in the New Testament writings themselves. Paul most emphatically condemns those who would teach contrary to apostolic doctrine (Gal. 1:8,9), and the Holy Spirit speaking through John applies the same prohibition to the words of Revelation: "If anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book..." (Rev. 22:18,19).

Given this general norm, Protestants do not beg-the-question against Ro-

man Catholicism by arguing that Christ's condemnation of Pharisaical traditions (e.g., to Matt. 15:3) also applies to Roman Catholic traditions. The usual Roman Catholic retort to such appeals is to argue that Christ only rejects human traditions and not allegedly divine traditions as provided by the Roman church. But if the normal Biblical practice is to reject any secondary explications or traditions, then the burden is on the Roman Catholic apologist to prove that Christ now approves of secondary traditions. In short, the Roman Catholic apologist has the burden of demonstrating that God has now changed His normal practice and established an infallible and authoritative explicator of His Word. If he does not meet this burden, then Christ's condemnation of the Pharisees applies directly to Roman Catholic traditions.

2. New Testament Practice

Not only does New Testament theology endorse the ancient teaching of *Sola Scriptura*, but so does the practice of the New Testament church. As in the past, God's people may discern truth by going directly to the Scriptures: "they have Moses and prophets; let them hear them" (Lk. 16:29). Christ even rejects authoritative ecclesiastical opinion as a norm beside God's Word: "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures, or the power of God" (Matt. 22:29; cf. Matt. 23:24).

Though the apostles were the legal witness-bearers of Christ, thus making their words the Word of God (cf. Lk. 10:16; I Cor. 2:13; 7:12; 14:37; II Cor. 13:3; I Thess. 2:13; II Thess. 2:15; II Pet. 3:2), they still in practice regularly appealed to written revelation as supreme norm to confute, persuade, and settle differences (Acts 1:20; 2:17ff.; 7; 13:47; 15:16ff.; Rom. 9,10,11; Gal. 3; Hebrews). Like Christ, they do not direct believers to secondary explications or extra-Scriptural Hebrew traditions (though plentiful) as authoritative norms but to examine the Word of God itself (Rom. 15:4; Eph. 6:17; II Tim. 3:16; II Pet. 1:19; Rev. 1:3). Scripture exalts those who examine the written revelation of God ("noble-minded" Acts 17:11) and assumes that God's people have the ability to rightly judge and interpret it apart from an infallible interpreter (II Tim. 2:15; Acts 17:11). Hence, even this cursory review of the teachings of Christ and the apostles suggest that, just like the Old, the New Testament is saturated with the teaching of *Sola Scriptura*.

II. Roman Catholic Objections to *Sola Scriptura*

A. *Sola Scriptura* is Unbiblical

As noted previously, several Roman Catholic apologists have attempted to offer a Biblical case against the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* by arguing that (1) New Tes-

tament references to oral "tradition" (II Thess. 2:15; II Tim. 2:2; II Cor. 11:2) demonstrate the unbiblical nature of the doctrine and (2) Scripture nowhere teaches the doctrine.⁶ The first argument rests on a naive understanding of *Sola Scriptura* in that it presupposes the doctrine to imply, as noted earlier, that the teachings of Isaiah or Christ were not the sole and supreme norm when spoken. The real trick would be to find some advocate of *Sola Scriptura* who has ever held this view. Hence, this argument attacks a straw man. In response to the second argument, I offer the non-exhaustive case presented above. Scripture teaches *Sola Scriptura* from beginning to end.

B. *Sola Scriptura* is Unhistorical

Hahn, Kreeft, Matatics, and others contend that the fact that "the first generation of Christians did not have the New Testament, only the Church, to teach them"⁷ is a serious blow to the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*. Moreover, Hahn claims that the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* is improbable, since it had "no single defender for the first thirteen centuries of the church" (i.e., Hahn: "Is it really the case that for fourteen centuries the Holy Spirit could guide no one to see the formal principle of the Reformation?"⁸).

Though I maintain that such historical claims are false,⁹ this is beyond our current question. Nevertheless, this "unhistorical" objection fails for other reasons. First, even if we grant the truth of the historical claim, the objection still assumes a very truncated view of church history. Most of those who present this argument speak of the church as beginning in the first century, and simply ignore church doctrine in the Old Testament. By narrowing the scope of history, the issue, deceptively, appears to be large. As seen above, if we mark church history from the beginning of covenant history as Scripture itself does, and readily find the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* from the very beginning of time, then Roman

Catholic teaching is aberrant in the history of redemption, and accordingly should be rejected.

Secondly, the "unhistorical" objection suffers from a common malady in church history; the view that the current age is the peak of church history. Again granting the historical claims of the objection for the sake of argument, *Sola Scriptura* only appears to be unhistorical if we are very near the end of time. If, however, we have another five thousand or so years to go and the Roman Catholic church dissolves and joyously becomes Reformed in the next one hundred years, then its current teaching is clearly unhistorical. Hence, the "unhistorical" objection fails apart from its dubious historical claims due to a very truncated view of history (on both ends).

C. *Sola Scriptura* is Illogical or Incoherent

Various objections can be grouped under this heading; they all attempt to refute *Sola Scriptura* by means of an internal logical flaw.¹⁰ Some Roman Catholic opponents argue that *Sola Scriptura* is unreasonable because (1) it demands a closed canon, but Scripture never specifies what books are actually included in that canon, and/or (2) it requires self-authentication, but as Hahn contends, "no book can authenticate its own inspired status."¹¹

Both arguments assume that God cannot or does not authenticate His own Word, apart from some human testimony. This is false as per Hebrews 6:13, but it also belies a very deficient view of God in that, though He is supposedly all sovereign, he requires human testimony to confirm His Word. On a view which better acknowledges the sovereign authority of God, the church did not determine what to include in the canon; it merely recognized the canon inherent in God's Word from the start. By analogy, John the Baptist did not make

Jesus the Christ by testifying to Him; he merely recognized Christ's glorious status, and the church later recognized the Shepherd speaking to His people in the Scriptures (John 10:4,16). Moreover, those who raise this objection have yet to demonstrate how their claims for the authority of the church withstand the same objection.¹² Therefore, this general objection does not tell against *Sola Scriptura* at all.

D. *Sola Scriptura* is Impractical

A final Roman Catholic objection is the claim that *Sola Scriptura* is false because it leads to denominational anarchy: "private interpretation leads to denominationalism. Let five hundred people interpret the Bible without Church authority and there will soon be five hundred denominations. But [this] is an intolerable scandal by Scriptural standards (cf. Jn. 17: 20-23 and I Cor. 1:10-17)."¹³

First, this objection assumes, as many Roman Catholic arguments do, that Biblical unity is identical to institutional unity, as opposed to unity in truth. The Roman Catholic assumption about unity implies that we would be in a superior situation even if we had, for example, one corrupt church, and a hundred fruitful denominations agreeing in doctrine. Secondly, it assumes that the mere exercise of "church authority" genuinely resolves doctrinal differences instead of just judiciously obliterating them. Thirdly, and most importantly, it fails simply because it begs-the-question by assuming the falsity of *Sola Scriptura*. *Sola Scriptura* simply precludes the type of institution assumed by the objection. If *Sola Scriptura* is indeed God's design for His people, then this objection attacks God's plan itself. Hence, this objection should be jettisoned.

In all, then, none of these objections succeeds. They each fall prey to simple fallacies. Though I believe I have met my burden by providing arguments which demonstrate that *Sola Scriptura* is the teaching and practice of the Old and New Testaments, my next step might be to close out my case by going on to refute Catholic arguments for the claim that God has provided an infallible interpreter to explicate His Word to His people. But such arguments are Mr. Matatics' burden, and so I will await his response for that opportunity.¹⁴

⁶ e.g. Keating, *Catholicism*, p. 136; Kreeft, *Fundamentals*, p. 275; Scott Hahn in "The Authority/Justification Debate, Scott Hahn vs. Robert Knudsen" (Catholic Answers, P.O. Box 17181, San Diego, CA 92117). Interestingly, Hahn claims that even after several years of struggle he could not find an answer to the question, "Where does Scripture teach *Sola Scriptura*?" "I even called two or three of my seminary professors...but I didn't come up with a satisfying answer."

⁷ Kreeft, *Ibid*.

⁸ Hahn, "Authority Debate."

⁹ cf. Oberman, H., *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1963); Turretin, F., *The Doctrine of Scripture: Locus II of Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, Beardslee, J. (ed. & trans.), (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981); Chemnitz, M., *Examination of the Council of Trent, Pt. I*, Kramer, F. (trans.), (Missouri: Concordia Publ. House, 1971).

¹⁰ Some of the objectors appear confused on this point. For example, Kreeft claims that *Sola Scriptura* is self-contradictory but in fact he only argues that the doctrine is unjustified, not internally contradictory (Kreeft, *Fundamentals*, p.275). Similarly, Hahn claims that the doctrine is "illogical" but doesn't produce a logical problem inherent in it; instead he raises an epistemological question regarding the formation of the canon. Moreover, some of the objections that could be placed in this category are simply too far from the mark to consider seriously. For example, Marshner ("The Development of Doctrine," *Reasons for Hope*, [Virginia: Christendom College Press] pp. 177-196) offers a logically detailed argument to refute the alleged Protestant claim that Scripture presents a set of dogmas which have no further implications. Since Protestants, especially in the Westminster Confession tradition, explicitly affirm the very opposite, Marshner's logical detail is all built upon a straw man.

¹¹ Hahn, "Authority Debate."

¹² Keating (*Catholicism*, p. 125ff.) interestingly attempts to offer a non-circular argument to this effect by using a Montgomery/Evidentialist line of reasoning, but he begs-the-question by assuming the truth not only of theism but of Roman Catholicism as well by taking the Scriptures as "purely historical material" and "[f]rom that we conclude an infallible church was founded."

¹³ Kreeft, *Fundamentals*, *Ibid*.

¹⁴ My thanks to David Hagopian and Doug Wilson for comments on an earlier version of this essay.

Matatics: The Word of God is the Supreme Norm, but According to Scripture Itself, God's Word is Not Entirely Contained Within Scripture Alone

When a widower friend remarried shortly after the death of a wife with whom he'd been very unhappy, Samuel Johnson described it as "the triumph of hope over experience."

I can relate. Whenever I've asked evangelicals to defend the notion of *Sola Scriptura*, my experience has been one of unremitting disappointment. With wearisome predictability the same Protestant pearls are flung before this sacerdotalist swine, the same logically-flawed, historically-uninformed, and exegetically-untenable arguments. Yet hope springs eternal, as Pope would say,¹ and when Doug Jones asked me to debate *Sola Scriptura* within the pages of *Antithesis*, hope arose, phoenix-like, from the ashes of my dialogic disillusionment. Now, at last, I'd hear a daunting defense of this doctrine at the hands of an advocate of Reformed theology!

I approached *Antithesis* with affection, for its point of view was, poignantly, once my own.² As a Presbyterian I was particularly fond of the formal principle of the Reformation,³ and privileged to have as professors and (in some cases) colleagues such stalwarts of *Sola Scriptura* as J.I. Packer, R.C. Sproul, Roger Nicole, John Gerstner, James Montgomery Boice, and Gordon Clark. I looked to these men as models; I worshiped the water they walked on. They impressed upon me that Scripture must always be submitted to *a priori*, however unlooked-for or unsettling the results.

Ironically, this was borne out when I went so far as to weigh in the Biblical balance the "Bible only" doctrine itself, only to find it wanting. While pursuing a Ph.D. in Biblical Interpretation at Westminster Theological Seminary, I came to the unexpected conclusion that *Sola Scriptura* was utterly unscriptural. Becoming persuaded

other Protestant principles were unbiblical, too, I ultimately embraced the ancient understanding of the Christian faith known as Catholicism.

So I have a firsthand familiarity with Mr. Jones's mindset. I once believed just as he does and advanced the same arguments as he. Debating him is rather like debating my own ghost, from my own Protestant past.

I prefer being positive to being negative. Rather than engage in an elaborate dissection of Mr. Jones's essay, I'll offer instead a Biblical case against *Sola Scriptura*, in contrast to his Biblical case for the concept, and allow the reader to weigh their relative merits. Mr. Jones has rightly reminded us that "the Word of God" must never be nullified by "the traditions of men" (Mt 15:1-9). That is exactly why the Catholic Church pronounced a pastoral warning against the "tradition of men" known as *Sola Scriptura*, a tradition found neither in Scripture nor in the first nearly 1400 years of Christian teaching. *Sola scriptura* contradicts the clear teaching of God's Word that there exists, alongside Sacred Scripture, a divine Tradition and a Teaching Authority (the Magisterium of the Church) which must equally be heeded and without which Scripture is inevitably misinterpreted. To meet Mr. Jones on his own ground, I shall demonstrate these truths from Scripture alone.

The Biblical Case Against *Sola Scriptura*

1. The Biblical doctrine of Scripture is a subset of the larger doctrine of revelation. Scripture, in other words, is but part of the entire process of divine disclosure.

2. This process was never restricted to writing, but was initially and even primarily one of speaking. Speaking is how the Lord created, and entered into covenant with, the cosmos and communicated his covenant to the pre-Mosaic patriarchs (Adam, Noah, Abraham, etc.). The later development of providing a written document, therefore, while valuable, was no *sine qua non* of a covenant, no necessary instrument to its implementation or administration.

3. So far as we can tell, the command to write down God's words first came to Moses.⁴ Alongside the production of these Scriptures, however, God continued to speak to men and *through* men (prophets) in an oral fashion. Some of these prophets, like Moses, recorded their oracles in written form;⁵ others did not.⁶ Even among those prophets who *did* author inspired books,

we're not told they wrote down everything they ever uttered.⁷ In every case, however, their unwritten word was as fully inspired, authoritative, and efficacious as the written word.⁸

4. When it came time for God to reveal himself definitively, he did so, not in the *written* words of a book, but in the *spoken* words of a person, the incarnate Second Person of the eternal Trinity.⁹ Christ, the Word made flesh, the fullest revelation of God,¹⁰ carried out his revelatory mission in an exclusively oral form,¹¹ without writing a single word.¹²

5. When it came time for Jesus to ensure his Word would continue in the world after his departure, he did so, not by writing a book, but by doing exactly what his Father had done, "because whatever the Father does the Son also does."¹³ The Father had selected a Person, endowed him with the Spirit (i.e. inspiration), invested him with full teaching authority, and sent him forth to preach a living, spoken Word in which men would hear God directly speaking to them. Christ therefore did the same, only with *twelve* persons: the apostles.¹⁴

6. Notice that Christ commanded

7 Is the one oracle preserved in the brief (21 verses long) book of Obadiah, for example, the only inspired thing he ever uttered in his life? On the contrary, these prophets exercised a far broader ministry than can be gleaned from the brief vignettes and select oracles recorded. This holds true for the OT as a whole; doubtless there were other times God spoke to Adam, the patriarchs, Moses, which were not included in the highly abridged accounts we have. If the NT didn't need to provide a complete record of all that the incarnate Son of God did and taught (Jn. 20:31; 21:25), there's even less reason to require such encyclopedic comprehensiveness of the OT; if "the world couldn't contain the books," had everything been recorded that Christ did and said during the relatively brief span of three years, this would be true *a fortiori* of the words and deeds of the Lord during the millennia spanned by the OT.

8 Is. 40:8; 55:10-11; Jer. 1:9-10; 5:14; 23:28-29; Hos. 6:5.

9 Heb. 1:1-2.

10 Col. 1:19; 2:3, 9, 10; cf. Jn. 1:14-18.

11 Jn. 3:34; 7:16-18; 8:26, 28, 38; 12:48-50; 14:10, 24; 17:8, 14; cf. Mt. 7:24, 28-29.

12 Except whatever he wrote on the ground in John 8:6, 8.

13 Jn. 5:19.

14 Consider the following three paradigmatic passages. In Matthew 10 Christ selects and sends forth the apostles to *preach* (v. 7); their words were *efficacious* in bringing about salvation or damnation (vv. 12-14; cf. 16:19; 18:18) and were in fact inspired (vv. 19-20), so that whoever received the apostles was actually receiving the Christ who had sent them, just as in receiving Christ they were receiving the One who had sent him (v. 40; cf. Lk. 10:16).

Mk. 16:15-20 makes the same points: Christ commands them to "go forth and preach;" their preaching would be efficacious to their listeners salvation or damnation (v. 16); their

¹ Forgive the subliminal advertisement for papal pronouncements.

² If I might be permitted a Paul-like plugging of my pedigree, I too was circumcised (by the new birth) on the eighth day, of the people of Protestantism, of the tribe of Evangelicalism, a Calvinist of Calvinists; in regard to the law, a theonomist; as for zeal, persecuting the [Roman Catholic] Church; as to reconstructionist righteousness and Van Tilian virtue, flawless (Phil. 3:5-6 [New Ironie Version]).

³ The Reformers referred to *sola scriptura* and *sola fide* as the *formal* and *material* principles of the Reformation, respectively, employing a classic Aristotelian and medieval distinction. They meant *sola fide* was the "stuff" or "matter" of the Christian message, while *sola scriptura* provided its parameters, or "form." Catholicism rejects both principles as well-intentioned but misguided misunderstandings of what Scripture teaches on these two topics. In my own experience, when, upon deeper study, Scripture, Samson-like, leaned against these two principal pillars, the palace of Protestantism came crashing down.

⁴ Ex. 24:4; 34:27; Num. 33:2; Dt. 31:9, 24.

⁵ Jeremiah, for example (Jer. 30:2; 36:2,4).

⁶ Elijah and Elisha, for example.

them to "go forth and preach" (see previous footnote); there is no explicit command to "go forth and write." The former was necessary to the accomplishment of their mission; the latter was not, which explains the following stumbling blocks to *Sola Scriptura*:

a) Most of the apostles, like their Lord before them, never wrote a word, so far as we know.

b) Those who did (e.g. John) didn't write down everything they knew and taught.¹⁵

c) Even the apostle Paul, who wrote more than all the others, preached and taught far more than he ever wrote, as the book of Acts alone makes clear.¹⁶

d) Even in his writings, Paul wasn't always as explicit as we'd like,¹⁷ because he could presuppose on the part of his readers a familiarity with his previous oral instruction, which spelled things out more fully. The result for us is that "his letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction."¹⁸

For the vast majority of the apostles' disciples, then, the "Word of God" was largely an oral entity; faith came by *hearing* it.¹⁹ The apostles were conscious of possessing inspired, infallible, teaching authority not just, or even primarily, when they wrote,²⁰ but primarily when they preached.²¹

7. Scripture nowhere states that all the oral tradition—or even all the oral tradition God intended to preserve—would eventually become Scripture. The idea that inscription is the only way to permanently preserve revealed truth is a Protestant presupposition without the slightest scrap of scriptural warrant.

preaching was in fact inspired (v. 20).

Jn. 20:21-23 is similar: Christ sends forth the apostles as the Father had sent him forth (v. 21), and inspires them with the Holy Spirit (v. 22), making their words supernaturally efficacious (v. 23; cf. Jn. 13:20; 14:16-17; 15:26-27; 16:1, 12-15; 17:18).

¹⁵ Jn. 20:30; 21:25; II Jn. 12; III Jn. 13-14.

¹⁶ For example, Paul spent three years in Ephesus teaching "day and night," with the result that he could leave "innocent of the blood of all men" because he had proclaimed to them "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:26-31). His six-page letter to the Ephesians, which we have in the NT, could hardly contain a hundredth of all he had imparted to them in oral form. (Note, too, that in Acts 20:35 Paul quotes a saying of Jesus that was not recorded in the gospels [technically known as an *agraphon*]; doubtless he knew of others; cf. Mt. 24:35.)

¹⁷ II Thess. 2:5-6 and I Cor. 15:29 come to mind as two tantalizing examples for the modern reader.

¹⁸ II Pet. 3:16.

¹⁹ Rom. 10:17.

²⁰ Though they were conscious of it there: see, e.g. I Cor. 14:37; Eph. 3:3-5; II Pet. 3:15-16.

²¹ See, e.g., I Cor. 2:13, 16; Gal. 1:8, 12; I Thess. 2:13; 4:2; I Pet. 1:23-25.

8. Instead, the Scriptures command us to pass on not only the apostolic Scriptures, but also the equally-inspired apostolic tradition which was not written down.²² This command wasn't qualified by any indication that the transmission of oral tradition was only temporary until the last Scripture was written or the canon completed. Given the standing command, the burden of proof is clearly on Mr. Jones to show us why this command is no longer in force.²³ Unless he can provide this proof, *Sola Scriptura* (the notion that the Word of God has come down to us today only in the written Scriptures) appears to be not only a gratuitous assumption, but an unbiblical and even antibiblical idea.

9. Note how the apostles ensured their teaching would continue after them: not by feverishly scribbling it all down, under the mistaken impression that only in this way could God preserve the purity of their doctrine. Instead, they did what the Father had done with Christ and what Christ had done with them: they appointed personal successors (the bishops), entrusted to them the apostolic doctrines, and invested them with full authority to teach,²⁴ including a special endowment of the Spirit.²⁵

²² II Thess. 2:15. Texts (Mt. 15:1-9; Col. 2:8) which condemn mere "human traditions which men devise to contradict God's Word (oral and written) cannot serve as proof-texts for *sola scriptura*, then. The word "Tradition" (Gk, *paradosis*) is also used in a positive sense to refer to God's Word as taught by the apostles and *passed on*, whether in written or oral form (I Cor. 11:2; II Thess. 2:15; 3:6). The corresponding verb, *paradidomi*, is used in this sense also (I Cor. 11:23; 15:3; II Pet. 2:21; Jude 3).

²³ I find the inconsistency rather amusing that Jones, who argues that even OT commands are still in force unless specifically revoked in the NT, here argues that a NT command (II Thess. 2:15) is no longer in force, though it is nowhere revoked!

²⁴ The apostles addressed these successors as their "true sons in the faith" (I Tim. 1:2, 18; II Tim. 1:2; 2:1; Tit. 1:4; cf. I Cor. 4:17; Phil. 2:22), since the succession to office was conceived of as dynastic succession and filial inheritance. To these successors the apostles passed on their full teaching in oral form, as a rule of faith (II Tim. 1:13-14; 2:2; cf. the "untrustworthy sayings" listed in I Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; II Tim. 2:11; Tit. 3:8). But they also passed on their *teaching authority* as well (I Tim. 1:3; 4:6, 11-16). This succession was transacted in an official ceremony (II Tim. 1:6; cf. I Tim. 1:18, 4:14).

²⁵ This endowment was *not* inspiration, however. This is a significant difference between the apostles and their successors. The apostles (like Christ before them) had been directly inspired and therefore infallible, and their ability to work miracles was God's supernatural yet verifiable attestation to the divine origin and character of their doctrine (Mk. 16:20; II Cor. 12:12; cf. Jn. 3:2; 10:38; 14:10-11; Acts 2:22). Since the apostles passed on to their individual successors their teaching authority but not their gift of inspiration (Catholics agree with Reformed Christians that this gift, and the revelation of new truth it made possible, ceased with the death of the apostles), their successors could not teach new doctrines. There is thus and emphasis upon the successor (indeed, any church officer; I Tim. 3:9-10) being

These successors functioned as guardians of the faith, to exclude misunderstanding and heresy and preserve doctrinal purity and unity. Given the difficulty of much of Scripture, people need such a sure guide.²⁶ As these apostolic successors (collectively known as the Magisterium of the Church) maintain fidelity to the Faith entrusted to them and solidarity with one another, especially with the successor to Peter, who was given special privileges,²⁷ they provide the Church with its needed character of infallibility. If the Church could officially teach heresy, how could it be

faithful (I Tim. 4:15-16; 5:21; 6:14; II Tim. 1:13-14; 3:14; Tit. 1:9; 2:1) to what the apostle had publicly charged him to hold fast to in the presence of many witnesses (II Tim. 2:2; cf. I Cor. 4:17).

²⁶ Acts 8:30-31; II Pet. 3:16.

²⁷ Matthew 16:13-19 shows that when there was controversy among Jesus's followers as to who Jesus was, God sovereignly chose Simon to utter the inspired verdict, the authoritative creed, the normative Christological confession. Based on this supernatural revelation made directly to Simon, and *through him* to the others, Jesus identifies Simon as the Rock, i.e. the *eben shetthiyeh* (the primal "foundation stone") from which, according to rabbinic tradition, the beam of light burst forth to dispel the darkness. Go there, threw this rock over the mouth of the abyss ("the gates of Sheol") though which the waters of chaos were gushing to engulf the world. As the waters abated, upon this rock, the high point of the earth atop the holy mountain, God proceeded to build the Garden of Eden sanctuary in which Adam and Eve would worship him. This foundation stone reappears significantly in Scripture (Gen. 28:11-22), often as a significant threshing floor (e.g. Gen. 50:10; II Sam. 6:6; 24:15-25; I Chron. 21:14-30; cf. Ruth 3:2-14; I Kings 22:10) over which the Solomonic temple is eventually erected (I Chron. 22:1; II Chron. 3:1). In Isaiah 51:1, Abraham is described in terms of this rock, in that the living temple of Israel was built upon him. Jesus thus declares his intention to build this New Covenant Temple upon Simon, as upon a new Abraham, a new patriarch of father figure to the Church.

The language of the keys in Mt. 16:19 show Jesus also has in mind the high office of chief steward of the house of David. Isaiah 22:15-25 (whose language is borrowed from the office's inaugural ceremony), corroborated by other biblical and historical data, demonstrates that the chief steward wore priest-like vestments, had a patriarchal status, oversaw as prime minister the king's other ministers, possessed plenipotentiary power from the king to administer the affairs of the palace and the kingdom as vicar or viceregent, and possessed his office as a see with dynastic succession, just like the king's. Jesus, the Son of David, thus indicates that the Church, as the New Covenant form of Davidic kingdom, still requires a chief steward (Peter and his successors; here the succession, in keeping with the whole tenor of the New Covenant, is spiritual, not physical; cf. Paul's greetings to Timothy and Titus, mentioned above).

Other passages (e.g. Lk. 22:31-32; Jn. 21:15-19; Gal. 1:18) shed further light upon this Petrine primacy, but we cannot go into this issue here — nor do we need to. The debate is on whether Scripture teaches *sola scriptura*, and the burden of proof is on Mr. Jones (since he takes the affirmative) to demonstrate beyond any reasonable doubt that it does; if he cannot do so, he loses, whether or not I can make a convincing case for the papacy, or any other aspect of the Catholic alternative to *sola scriptura*.

the pillar and foundation of the truth, a house built upon a rock which cannot fall, a Church against which the gates of hell cannot prevail?²⁸

Having laid out my case, let me briefly suggest a few problems in Mr. Jones's own, beginning with the general principles he propounds in his prolegomenary paragraphs, and then moving on to his specific examples.

The Case of the Begged Question

To the question, "Does Scripture teach *Sola Scriptura*?" Mr. Jones answers, "Scripture teaches that the *Word of God* is the supreme norm" [emphasis mine]. This is hardly fair. The Roman Catholic, no less than the Reformed Christian, affirms the Word of God as our supreme norm. For Advocate One to arrogate this assertion to himself, as though Advocate Two denies it, is unfair and prejudicial. What the Catholic denies is that "*Scripture alone* is the supreme norm." He rejects the Protestant assumption that the concepts "Word of God" and "Scripture" are always interchangeable. Mr. Jones must demonstrate the identity of these terms, not assume it *a priori*, or he is simply begging the question.

The Case of the Exotic Equivocation

Mr. Jones might defend himself from the charge of question-begging by pointing out that he later stated: "When Protestants speak of '*Scriptura*' we use it synonymously with such designations as 'God's Word' (*whether oral or written*)...the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* is the contention that the Word of God (*oral or written*) is the sole and supreme norm for Biblical faith" [emphasis mine]. The idea was, I suppose, by this definition to steal the Catholic's thunder.

Unfortunately, neither Latin, English, nor any of his proffered proof texts supports this idiosyncratic sense of the word *scriptura*, which means something *written*. Mr. Jones can thus avoid being guilty of one logical fallacy (begging the question) only by becoming guilty of another (equivocation²⁹). Besides, redefining the term is not only unwarranted, but worthless for the purposes of the debate, since it obliterates the distinction between the Catholic and Protestant view. If *scriptura* includes oral as well as written teaching, then there is nothing left to argue about: Catholics can now affirm *Sola Scriptura* too!

Return of the Begged Question (Co-Starring *Ipsa Dixit*)

Mr. Jones can avoid the charge of equivocation by claiming that he only means to acknowledge the existence of oral tradition in an earlier stage of redemptive history, prior to the closing of the canon, not as

something we still have access to today. He seems to have this in mind when he states, "*Sola Scriptura* incorporates the fact that, as a general pattern, God reveals His Word orally and temporarily through prophets and apostles and then subsequently inscripturates His Word" [emphasis mine].

Since the burden of proof is always on the one who asserts, Mr. Jones surely cannot expect anyone to accept this *ipse dixit* without a single scriptural statement in substantiation, *especially since this is the very issue in question: Does the Word of God still come down to us apart from Scripture?* Unfortunately he produces no proof-text showing that after an oracle was reduced to writing, God prohibited its continued transmission in oral form. No such proof-text, in fact, exists.

Mr. Jones could *infer* a divine prohibition, or at least a divine disinterest in providentially preserving unwritten tradition, by assuming (which I think is what he does) that no unwritten oral teachings of prophets or apostles have in fact survived. But not only is this another form of *begging the question*, how would he *prove* this (as opposed to just assuming it)? To prove a negative such as "No Word of God still survives in only oral form" is notoriously difficult. Some might even say it requires omniscience—either one's own, or God's, supplied in some scriptural proof-text. But again, no such proof-text exists. He does have some terribly inconvenient texts which seem to say that none of God's words would be lost,³⁰ and they (darn it) don't restrict this to the written words, or even say that all the oral ones will be preserved precisely by being written down.

Revenge of the Son of Begged Question

Still another form in which the begged question returns yet again (you just can't keep a good begged question down!) is in the false antithesis Mr. Jones indulges in at the outset of his section on the Old Testament, in which, he says, "the sole and supreme norm invoked is God's Word, apart from secondary interpreters, explications, or 'infallible' institutions."

He *assumes*, in other words, that anything falling into any of these categories *by definition* could not be part of God's Word, but must be extrinsic to it. But even if God's Word were understood to mean Scripture alone he couldn't exclude these types of material. The Bible itself is full, in its later books, of secondary interpreters and explications of its earlier materials. And as for an infallible institution, if the office of inspired prophet wasn't, I don't know what was.

The Case of the Missing Waterfall

What, finally, of Mr. Jones's claim that the Biblical case for *Sola Scriptura* "overwhelms one like a waterfall"? I know

no such Niagara, but patiently I permitted Captain Jones to pilot his tour-giving tug-boat³¹ around the foot of these furtive falls, wondering whether this Calvinistic cataract would come clearly into view.

The first floodgates from which *Sola Scriptura* streams forth, according to Mr. Jones, are found in the Garden of Eden, where "we find *Sola Scriptura* at the very beginning of redemptive history." We have already seen, though, that there was no Scripture during the patriarchal period. Adam and Eve, Noah, and Abraham can therefore hardly serve as examples of *Sola Scriptura*, only of *nulla scriptura*.

If by *Sola Scriptura* Mr. Jones means *absence of any magisterium*, again he's wrong. Adam, who was prophet as well as priest and king, was certainly a "secondary interpreter" of God's Word³² to his wife (who hadn't heard, for one thing, God's original prohibition of the tree of knowledge³³), his children, and subsequent generations.

So was Noah: God communicated with him directly,³⁴ and he in turn functioned as prophet to his contemporaries as well as his descendants.³⁵ Mr. Jones's verdict on the Noahic period that "throughout, the sole standard was God's *unmediated* Word," therefore seems a trifle off the mark.

Abraham is also "a most striking example" (Mr. Jones's words)—not of *Sola Scriptura*, alas, but of the role of covenant head as mediator of the Word to the community. How, for example, did Isaac know he was fulfilling God's will in allowing himself to be bound and laid on the altar? He had neither Scripture to consult nor personal oracle addressed to him. How did he hear God's Word? *He asked his father.*³⁶

Even when we get to Moses and the era of covenant inscripturation, we cannot claim *Sola Scriptura*, because the written word never entirely supplanted the oral. Mr. Jones says that "the priests themselves were directed to heed the (now written) Word of God alone," but the very book of Leviticus he presumes functioned as their *Sola Scriptura* is filled with statements devastating to his theory.³⁷

³¹ Like *The Maid of the Mist*, at the real Niagara Falls.

³² And a "supernatural" one before the Fall at least (his intellect being infused with grace).

³³ Gen. 2:16-17.

³⁴ e.g., Gen. 6:13; 7:1; 8:16. God apparently does not address Noah's sons directly until after the flood (Gen. 9:1,8).

³⁵ II Pet. 2:5; Gen. 9:25-27.

³⁶ Gen. 22:7-8. Notice what Gen. 18:19 says, too.

³⁷ "The Lord said to Moses, 'Say to Aaron and his sons: 'These are the regulations'...Speak to Aaron and his sons and to all the Israelites and say to them: 'This is what the LORD has commanded'...Say to them...Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them...Say to Aaron...Tell Aaron and his sons...Say to them...Speak to Aaron and his sons and to all the Israelites and say to them...' (Lev. 6:25; 17:2,8; 21:1,16; 22:2-3, 18; cf. 1:1-2; 4:2; 7:23, 29; 11:2; 12:2; 15:2; 19:2; 20:2; 23:2, 34; 25:2, 20; 27:2).

²⁸ I Tim. 3:15; Mt. 7:24-25; 16:18.

²⁹ I use the term, of course, in its logical, not moral sense.

³⁰ Is. 40:8; Mt. 24:35, among others.

He also presents another false antithesis here between "God's law" and "ecclesiastical or priestly tradition." The historical fact is that subsequent generations of priests and Levites learned the requirements of their sacerdotal office from their predecessors by oral instruction, not by each possessing his own personal copy of the Bible and studying it in a *Sola Scriptura* fashion according to his own private interpretation. "Priestly tradition" in fact mediated the Scriptures, as well as their meaning.³⁸

The well-known prohibitions of Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32, and 13:1-4, which Mr. Jones cites next, merely prohibited tampering with the text of Scripture;³⁹ they neither precluded subsequent revelation (either oral or written),⁴⁰ nor forbade the continued transmission of God's Word in oral form. On the contrary, Deuteronomy commanded the Israelites to orally pass on God's laws.⁴¹

These same accusations of question-begging, equivocation, false antithesis, absence of proof, and basic failure to factor in the Catholic counterargument can be levelled at Mr. Jones's arguments drawn

from the wisdom and prophetic literature; there is no need to go *ad nauseam* through each one. Furthermore, half of his arguments backfire on him (e.g. I could use Jeremiah 31:31 to exclude from the New Covenant not just Sacred Tradition, but Scripture as well!).

The same goes for his NT case, which doesn't deal with the kind of data I explored in depth in my case above. The assertion that the canon was closed at the time of Christ, even if true, is only relevant if you assume that this entailed the extinction of any inspired oral tradition. The assertion that the NT assumes OT standards is fruitless, since we have already seen that those standards don't help the advocate of *Sola Scriptura*. From NT references to the authority of OT Scripture⁴² it's a *non sequitur* to infer that *only* the Scripture in question possesses such authority.⁴³ The assertion that NT and OT "direct us only to the Word of God as the supreme norm" [emphasis mine], is worthless unless we grant him the same old question-begging assumption that "Word of God = Scripture."

⁴² Mt. 5:18; 22:29; Lk. 16:16-17; Jn. 10:35; II Tim. 3:16-17; II Pet. 2:19.

⁴³ And, as Newman pointed out long ago, if these texts prove the sufficiency of the Scripture in question, and exclude all else as unnecessary and unauthoritative, then they prove the sufficiency of the OT, and exclude as necessary or authoritative, not only Sacred Tradition, but the NT as well. This is the epistemological equivalent of cutting of one's head to cure a nosebleed.

³⁸ See II Chron. 15:3.

³⁹ Cf. Rev. 22:18-19, another oft-cited Protestant "proof-text" which has no more relevance to the issue of oral tradition than do the verses in Deuteronomy.

⁴⁰ If they did, Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, et al. were all false prophets!

⁴¹ Dt. 4:10; 6:7.

All the prohibitions against adding to the Word of God, preaching another gospel, "secondary explications or traditions" are equally question-begging, for the reasons already articulated above. Nowhere does he produce a single verse that positively teaches that at any point in redemptive history, oral tradition ceased to be a vehicle for the transmission of revealed truth. Nor does he offer any refutation of the Catholic Church's Biblical case for an infallible magisterium, or an alternative explanation of just what Jesus meant in Matthew 16:17-19, or Paul in the passages from the Pastorals cited above, that would hold water for five minutes in the face of the self-evident fallibility and confessional chaos and relativism endemic to Protestantism.

And so, speaking of water, I at least find no Niagara. A more accurate aquatic analogy for what we do find might be the brook Kerith during the drought (I Ki 17:1-7), for the torrent of texts promised by Mr. Jones at the outset of his arguments has slowed to a trickle and turned at last to a dried-up, dusty gulch. Perhaps that boat should be rechristened, *The Maid of the Missed*, since I've yet to see the falls.

There are other arguments I've made in the past against *Sola Scriptura*—arguments Mr. Jones has heard me make, and has alluded to himself: that it is unreasonable, unhistorical, unworkable, and unreal. I intend to make these arguments in my second piece. But the most damning argument of all, given the doctrine itself, is the fact that *Sola Scriptura* is unscriptural.

Jones Responds

Experience is a strange animal. Some animals are big and hairy. Big and hairy animals tend to follow habitual patterns of behavior and miss out on the finer points of life. My concern is not with Mr. Matatics' person but his appeal to his experience. As Senator Bentsen might say, "I know big and hairy animals, and Mr. Matatics is no big and hairy animal." My thought is that for all of Mr. Matatics' professed disillusionment with Protestant arguments, we should not necessarily follow his lead and infer that the arguments for *Sola Scriptura* are unsound or even weak. His experience, like a big and hairy animal, might have trapped him in patterns of thought which only serve to confirm his suspicions against rather obvious matters. Hence, experience, like big and hairy animals, leaves unmanageable messes all over the place.

Nevertheless, since Mr. Matatics has seen fit to rehearse some of his personal experience to buttress his case, he can't complain if I dispute that background. My overriding response to Mr. Matatics' entire essay is that he so misunderstands *Sola Scriptura* that I find it hard to be persuaded of his "pedigree" that he was "of the people of Protestantism, of the tribe of Evangelicalism, a Calvinist of Calvinists." For example, how could a "Calvinist of Calvinists" genuinely maintain that the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* implies that oral

revelation was not normative prior to inscripturation? I tried to guard him from this error, but since I misplaced my collection of papal pronouncements, my warnings were apparently of no effect. In my previous essay, I explained that "no advocate of *Sola Scriptura* would claim, for example, that the immediate hearers of Isaiah's pronouncements were free to disregard his prophetic revelations simply because he had not written them down. This would be a silly understanding of *Sola Scriptura*." Yet this is the view Mr. Matatics insists on attacking. I can readily join him in that cause, though I think we might better spend our time at the movies, since no Protestant holds that view, except apparently Mr. Matatics prior to his conversion. For his sake, I genuinely hope his misconception of *Sola Scriptura* was not instrumental in his conversion.

Nine Steps to Maybe Scriptura

In his opening case, Mr. Matatics offers nine steps against *Sola Scriptura*. Evidently, these steps are not distinct arguments against the doctrine, since some are mere explanations and others are reassertions of aspects of my case for *Sola Scriptura* (and thus not contrary to my case). In fact, none of Mr. Matatics' "case against" *Sola Scriptura* contradicts my thesis, though he comes closer in

the eighth step, which ironically says that I must fill in some of his argument!

Accordingly, we should take Mr. Matatics' case against *Sola Scriptura* as evidence of my claim above regarding his basic misconception of the doctrine, since it assumes a bizarre view common to Roman Catholic apologists (though really inexcusable in this case) that *Sola Scriptura* precludes all forms of oral revelation.

Despite the strange fact that his nine steps don't contradict my case, Mr. Matatics goes on to claim that these steps demonstrate that "*Sola Scriptura* contradicts the clear teaching of God's Word that there exists, alongside Scripture, a divine Tradition and a Teaching Authority (the Magisterium of the Church) which must be equally heeded and without which Scripture is inevitably misinterpreted." For the sake of easy reference, I'll call this the "Matatics Magisterium" conclusion. Since this conclusion is much bolder than his more amenable nine steps, let's evaluate the steps in turn so that I won't be accused of shirking my duty.

1. Mr. Matatics asserts that the doctrine of Scripture is a subset of the doctrine of revelation. All advocates of *Sola Scriptura* hold this view as well. It alone obviously doesn't entail the Matatics Magisterium conclusion.

2. Mr. Matatics argues that the process

of revelation was initially and primarily one of speaking and from that infers that the development of a written document was not necessary. Again, I argued for the premise (not the inference) in my opening essay; it doesn't count against *Sola Scriptura* and why should it? His inference, though, is obviously fallacious. God's speaking only makes Scripture unnecessary in the trivial sense that He could have used holograms to record His revelation if He so chose, but Mr. Matatics' inference needs more content than this. God, in His wisdom, deemed inscription necessary, and so it becomes so (Ex. 17:14; 24:4; 34:1; Is. 30:8; 34:16; Jer. 25:13; 30:2; 36:1-32). Does Mr. Matatics deny this necessity? Moreover, this step doesn't entail the Matatics Magisterium conclusion.

3. Mr. Matatics again reiterates claims I made in defense of *Sola Scriptura* regarding oral revelation of the prophets. Yet, a contradiction arises only if we mistakenly take *Sola Scriptura* to somehow rule out all oral revelation. Moreover, this step doesn't entail the Matatics Magisterium conclusion.

4. Mr. Matatics argues that God definitively revealed Himself in a person, Christ, and not the words of a book. Where is the contradiction with *Sola Scriptura*? All agree that the incarnation is the glorious event of history, but it doesn't support the false dichotomy Mr. Matatics draws between the words of a book and those of a person. This Saussurean-like denigration of the written word is particularly disturbing for those of us Protestants following Peter's lead (II Pet. 1:20) who teaches that the person of the Holy Spirit speaks in Scripture. And, nevertheless, where is the support for the Matatics Magisterium conclusion?

5. Mr. Matatics maintains that Christ, in accord with John 5:19 ("whatever the Father does the Son also does"), also sends the apostles as a "living, spoken word" so that "men could hear God directly speaking."

First, this alone also doesn't tell against *Sola Scriptura*, unless one mistakenly assumes *Sola Scriptura* precludes the work of Christ.

Second, Matatics again assumes that Scripture is a collection of dead symbols, yet every Protestant is familiar with Hebrews 4:10 – "the word of God [oral or written] is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword." A living person does actively speak to us in Scripture.

Third, in order for Mr. Matatics' argument to carry any weight, we need a very literal understanding of John 5:19, but if we do so, then embarrassments arise. For example, Mr. Matatics would also have to maintain that when Christ walked on water (Jn. 6:19), He was imitating the Father who was walking on water. Similarly, we would have to believe that when Christ allowed Mary to pour ointment on His feet (Lk. 7:38,39) the Father was doing the same thing in heaven.¹ But these are absurd, and hence, Mr. Matatics' interpretation is false.

Fourth, this step doesn't entail the

Matatics Magisterium conclusion.

6. In this step, Mr. Matatics claims that Christ commanded the apostles to preach, not to write, and then lists several "stumbling blocks," which point to the fact that not all oral revelation was inscripturated.

First, the initial claim is a fallacious argument from silence.

Second, it is strange for someone who claims that much revelation was left unwritten to make the universal generalization that "there is no explicit command to 'go and write.'" How could he know such a statement was not said, given his outlook?

Third, the claim is irrelevant given the Protestant understanding of *Sola Scriptura*. There are indeed many things that the Lord, in His perfect wisdom, did not choose to inscripturate. So what? Whatever God gave choice to inscripturate is sufficient (II Pet. 1:2f; II Tim. 3:16,17; cf. Heb. 1:1-3; 2:1-4).

Fourth, this step doesn't entail the Matatics Magisterium conclusion.

One final point. Many Roman Catholic apologists use this appeal to the unwritten revelation which "the world itself would not contain the books which were written" (Jn. 21:25) as a stock refutation of *Sola Scriptura*. Such an appeal not only misconstrues the doctrine, but it can be easily turned on Roman Catholics. Have they collected in oral form all the unwritten revelation uttered by Christ? Do they have the contents of all of Paul's sermons? No, they obviously can't, given John's statements. Hence, the argument should also tell against their woefully "incomplete" collection of oral tradition.

7. Mr. Matatics claims that Scripture nowhere states that all oral tradition would eventually become Scripture and that the preservation of God's Word through inscription is a Protestant presupposition "without the slightest scrap of scriptural warrant."

First, even granting the truth of Mr. Matatics' bold assertion, it does not contradict the claim that Scripture is the supreme norm.

Second, even at that, the repeated Biblical precedent of transforming oral revelation into written form has a wide range of Scriptural support which is summarized in my previous essay.

Third, this argument does nothing to support the Matatics Magisterium conclusion, since it would then be an argument from silence.

Fourth, the claim that "inscripturation is the only way to permanently preserve" revelation is a straw man; who would deny that God could, if he so chose, preserve His word on video tape, but He didn't.

Fifth, Mr. Matatics appears ignorant of the fact that God Himself directed inscription of His revelation to preserve it for future generations. For example, He directed Isaiah, "Now go, write it on a tablet before them and inscribe it on a scroll, that it may serve in time to come as a witness forever" (Is. 30:8; cf. 8:1; 34:16). Notice how the Lord, in this text, places great emphasis on the permanence of written revelation, with no thought of a permanent oral transmission. Similarly, the Lord directed Jeremiah, "Take a scroll and write on it all the words which I have spoken to you concerning Israel, and Judah, and all the nations....Perhaps the house of Judah will hear all the calamity which I plan to bring on them, in order that every man will turn from

his evil way" (Jer. 36:2,3; cf. 25:13; 36:1-32; 51:60). There are plenty of scraps along these lines to rebut Mr. Matatics' claim.

Sixth, this step doesn't entail the Matatics Magisterium conclusion.

8. Mr. Matatics claims that there is a standing command to pass on oral apostolic tradition and that the burden is on Protestants to show that this is repealed.

First, given the burden I bore in my first essay to the end that covenant history in Scripture is one long precedent for the claim that oral revelation regularly ceases and becomes inscripturated, I could simply point out that Mr. Matatics truly bears the burden of demonstrating why this precedent now changes. But because some might deem this legitimate move as a cop-out, I will bear this unnecessary burden anyway.

Mr. Matatics is amused that I argue for the continuation of Old Testament standards unless revoked by God but then apparently abandon that principle. To begin with, Mr. Matatics fails to see that the apparent inconsistency vanishes due to the fact that I and all advocates of *Sola Scriptura* maintain that II Thessalonians 2:15 is still in force. Paul declares that we are to "hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us." So please, Mr. Matatics, find me an apostle of Christ, and I will heed his oral revelation! What this response brings out is the fact that Mr. Matatics has slipped in the assumption of apostolic succession in order to generate the alleged inconsistency. He can't invoke such a premise without proof, and I reject apostolic succession as a contradiction in terms. The New Testament describes the church as being "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Eph. 2:20), the twelve foundation stones (Rev. 21:14) of the "bride, the wife of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:9). A foundation is a base, non-successive structure. It does not recur at every level of the building as the Roman Catholic mincing of this imagery demands (i.e. on New Testament teaching, "apostolic succession" turns out to be "foundational non-foundation"!)

Hence, as it stands this step neither counts against *Sola Scriptura*, nor supports the Matatics Magisterium conclusion.

Nevertheless, the same argument can be turned on Mr. Matatics. Even though he imagines that apostolic authority continues, he explains in footnote 25 that the inspired revelation of the original apostles is not reproduced by their alleged successors. So, he does not even practice II Thessalonians 2:15 in the manner Paul teaches.

9. Mr. Matatics closes out his case by arguing that the apostles ensured the permanence of their message by appointing faithful guardians who make up an infallible church. Mr. Matatics supplies the basis for this claim in footnotes 24-27.

First, Mr. Matatics offers Scriptural support for basically uncontroversial claims regarding ordination, preaching and teaching authority, etc., but he fails to do so on the key point, namely, that "succession to office was conceived of as dynastic succession and filial inheritance." Without substantiating this key claim (which he may yet provide), his argument proves nothing that would be denied by the Reformers.

Second, Mr. Matatics' arguments for Papal authority are missing too many premises

¹ In footnote fourteen, Mr. Matatics attempts to prove that the texts he cites support the Roman Catholic understanding of the church, but the very same texts are used by the Reformers and Reformed standards to describe the ordained offices in Protestant churches. Hence, Mr. Matatics does not offer any distinctive proof for the Roman Catholic position.

to be taken seriously in their present mystical, Tyler-like, form.

Third, the one argument for the ninth step that he does complete is the traditional Roman Catholic appeal to the church as the "pillar and support of truth" (1 Tim. 3:15) against which the gates of hell cannot prevail (Matt. 16:18). Why does Mr. Matatics think these count against Protestant interpretations? Neither necessarily implies an infallible church, unless you sneak in hidden assumptions about institutional unity.

In response to Mr. Matatics' query whether the church could teach heresy and still be the foundation of truth, we simply need to reflect on the Old Covenant church (Acts 7:38) to realize that even though she was the foundation of truth, the "rich root of the olive tree" (Rom. 11:17), onto which the New Covenant church was grafted (Rom. 11:18), she was unfaithful to her Lord and "multiplied her harlotries" (Ezek. 16:26). Nevertheless, God did not abandon her but promised to remember His covenant with her, though she permitted false shepherds to teach false doctrines (Ezek. 34ff.).

Fourth, this step doesn't entail the Matatics Magisterium conclusion.

Hence, the problem with Mr. Matatics Biblical case against *Sola Scriptura* is basically fourfold. One, his case doesn't contradict my thesis at all, except for coming close to doing so in step eight, but, as demonstrated above, his argument only succeeds if he assumes the legitimacy of apostolic succession. Two, he repeatedly assumes the false view that *Sola Scriptura* precludes oral revelation. Three, none of the steps individually or as a whole comes close to entailing the bold Matatics Magisterium conclusion. And four, most of the steps fail on their own account due to fallacious inferences.

The Invasion of Big and Hairy Experience

After attempting his Biblical case against *Sola Scriptura*, Matatics turns to suggest other problems in my essay. This falls into two sections. The first section focuses on his objections to how I state my thesis, and the second responds to various Biblical evidence I raised.

Objections to the Statement of the Doctrine

I greatly appreciate the way Mr. Matatics refutes himself by first raising objections and then reiterating how I had already solved the very objections he raises. For instance, after several charges of begging-the-question and equivocation, Matatics demonstrates how the charges simply don't apply to my case.

As noted at the outset of this essay, Mr. Matatics is committed to the false understanding of *Sola Scriptura* which precludes any oral revelation as normative. Again, no Protestant has ever held this, since it's rather silly. Yet his insistence on this view comes out most clearly in this section. For example, he exclaims, "If *scriptura* includes oral as well as written teaching, then there is nothing left to argue about: Catholics can now affirm *sola scriptura* too!" Does Mr. Matatics genuinely maintain that Protestants believe that the divine proclamations of the prophets, apostles, and Christ were not absolutely normative for

their hearers? If so, say it louder and clearer, so at least we can move onto to other subjects, since no Protestant would defend such a view.²

As stated in my previous essay, the central issue which Protestants affirm and Roman Catholics deny is the claim that the history of redemption demonstrates that God at some points revealed His word temporarily in prophetic/oral form and then inscripturated this norm permanently in written form, with no subsequent authoritative appeals to oral revelation. This, based on the record of Biblical history, implies that the sole and supreme norm is God's Word (temporary oral or written), apart from secondary interpreters, explications, or "infallible" institutions. Hence, Protestants maintain that, following inscripturation, the oral "speaking as a child" is done away with, and our only norm is the written word of God.

Mr. Matatics is upset with these claims.

First, he complains that I simply assume that "infallible institutions" are not part of God's written word. In his apparent haste, he failed to note that these statements are not assumed, as he asserts, but, as I previously stated, derived inductively from "the Old Testament practice discussed below."

Secondly, the Old Testament does not contain anything close to a body of authoritative tradition or an infallible institution on par with Scripture. Nowhere in the Old Testament will you find a body of living tradition like that advocated by Roman Catholicism, i.e. a non-revelatory, secondary explication à la Matatics' footnote 25. This sort of arrangement is unknown in the Old Testament. Nowhere will he find the people of God appealing

² For those in doubt regarding other claims in this section, I offer the following thoughts so as not to shirk my duties. (1) Matatics claims I am unfair for, in a sense, not stating my thesis in accord with a false notion of *Sola Scriptura*. My thesis is only unfair if one misconceives the radical break between Protestants and Roman Catholics. (2) I don't assume that the "Word of God" and "Scripture" are always interchangeable, but they often are, and I offered Scriptural proof for this point, though Mr. Matatics responds that I assume it *a priori*. (3) Strangely, Mr. Matatics wants to refute a technical term for a theological doctrine, *Scriptura*, by conducting a word study. The doctrine is defined in the manner Protestants have explicated it, regardless of word studies, and I have simply reiterated the doctrine as stated in the Reformers and such standards as *The Westminster Confession of Faith*. (4) Mr. Matatics complains of my apparently dogmatic statement that "God reveals His word orally and temporarily...and then subsequently inscripturates" it. Far from not producing "a single scriptural statement in substantiation, I have readily met this genuine burden in my recounting of Biblical history on the matter. The precedent is based squarely on the texts cited. (5) Mr. Matatics wants a prooftext showing "that after an oracle was reduced to writing, God prohibited its continued transmission in oral form." This is not my view, and I don't know why Mr. Matatics imagines that a Protestant would think God prohibits, for example, me from transmitting Paul's letter to the Ephesians by phone to a friend in Africa. Mr. Matatics needs to clarify his objection. (6) My arguments have no need to infer, assume, or prove that "no unwritten oral teachings of prophets or apostles have in fact survived." Mr. Matatics is wasting space.

to non-revelatory interpretations or institutions as a norm on par with Scripture. Now he can deny it was necessary for that time or that it developed after the New Testament, but that sort of admission only supports my case.

Objections to the Scriptural Evidence: Old Testament

This is the fun section, for Mr. Matatics appears to lose his cool and let his rhetoric fly ("Calvinistic cataract," "Captain Jones," "nulla scriptura," "ad nauseam," "confessional chaos," "relativism endemic to Protestantism," "slowed to a trickle," "dried-up dusty gulch," "Maid of the Missed," etc.). Quaint, but I think he doth protest too much. If we ignore the rhetorical pandering, we see that the same mistakes arise as before.

First, his responses to the evidence from Pre-Mosaic and Mosaic revelation generally fail, because they attempt to force Mr. Matatics false view of *Sola Scriptura* onto the data. Moreover, Mr. Matatics cannot seriously contend that Adam functioned as an infallible Magisterium with the "privilege of infallibility" which "does not admit of appeal to any other tribunal!"³ This, after all, was the heart of Adam's sin, not his virtue.

Second, regarding Noah, Mr. Matatics concedes that Noah and his sons did not need an interpreter of God's Word, but then implies that Noah stood as a standard on par with God's Word. Where is this in the text? Prophets reiterate God's word on pain of judgment for mixing their own messages with God's. There is thus only one standard in Noah's time.

Third, as concerns Abraham, Mr. Matatics chooses to ignore the fact that God self-authenticates His word apart from human institutions. Mr. Matatics' concerns regarding Isaac are irrelevant to my claims given Abraham's prophetic status.

Fourth, regarding Levitical priests, one will look in vain in the passages Mr. Matatics cites for "devastating" evidence against *Sola Scriptura*. God reveals His commands to His prophet who faithfully conveys God's words, not a secondary body of infallible priestly explications, to Aaron and the priests. Moreover, Mr. Matatics may be using these citations as evidence of oral tradition in the Mosaic era, but, as before, this would be based on his ongoing misconception.

Fifth, Mr. Matatics claims that "priestly tradition" mediated (infallibly interpreted?) the Scriptures, but, in order to prove such a bold-faced claim, he needs to do much better than appealing to a citation which only speaks of the absence of "teaching priests" (II Chron. 15:3). Moreover, where is this body of priestly tradition? Give examples of authoritative appeals to it. Prove that it held a position on par with Scripture.

Sixth, Mr. Matatics incorrectly reads me as invoking Deuteronomy 4:2 as naively prohibiting further revelation. If he would step out of his immediate debate-mode responses to any appeal to these verses, he would see that my argument is not as he contends but rather in support of the narrower conclusion that no one was to add or remove the commandments found in the covenantal document. This does in fact preclude oral additions or deletions to the regulations in this document (Surely Mr.

³ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, III, 25.

Matatics does not contend that God condones adding oral regulations contrary or in addition to those given even if those persons in question didn't tamper with the physical text!). Moreover, Mr. Matatics chooses to ignore the fact that these commandments were read directly to the people who were expected to understand and apply God's word so as not to adulterate it, even if their priests did. Where is the infallible interpreter in this situation?

Seventh, Mr. Matatics claims that my arguments from the wisdom and prophetic literature fail or backfire, but my suspicion is that he has read them through his misconception of the doctrine.

Objections to the Scriptural Evidence: New Testament

First, Mr. Matatics believes that the close of the Old Testament canon is irrelevant, but he really needs to do better than that. The completion of the Old Testament canon stands as a strong precedent in my case, and it does

not assume the extinction of any inspired oral tradition, since it is an inductive conclusion. Instead, he needs to provide opposing inductive evidence that such a body of co-supreme oral traditions existed (embarrassingly, Pharisaical tradition would be a candidate for such evidence). Please describe this authoritative tradition. Point to New Testament appeals to it which set it on par with Scripture.

Second, Mr. Matatics brushes passed my theological argument from the New Testament on the basis of his analysis of the Old Testament passages, but his analyses are now seen to fail, and so my argument holds.

Third, Mr. Matatics misconstrues my use of various New Testament passages which speak of Old Testament Scripture, since I don't use them to demonstrate *Sola Scriptura*.

Fourth, his remaining misguided concerns about question-begging and oral tradition, I have refuted previously.

Fifth, Mr. Matatics claims that I had not refuted the Catholic church's case for an

infallible magisterium, but he now stands corrected, though this is not my burden. Moreover, I have argued that his treatment of Matthew 16 is not developed enough to refute it. He needs more premises to qualify as needing a refutation, though this is not our topic.

In conclusion, much of Mr. Matatics' negative case fails simply because of his earlier misconceptions. He does not want to allow Protestants to define their own doctrines, since that removes many of his objections. Nevertheless, we simply don't hold to the views he imagines we hold. Moreover, he has yet to provide anything in the Old or New Testaments which resembles the body of living tradition and infallible interpretations he so relishes in Roman Catholicism. The arguments against *Sola Scriptura* are simply not there, but the waterfall of Scripture in support of *Sola Scriptura* remains. Mr. Matatics simply has to be facing the right direction.

Matatics Responds

I know from my evangelical years that it's possible to thoughtfully and sincerely believe in *Sola Scriptura*. I see no need, therefore, to question either Mr. Jones's¹ intelligence or his integrity, or to suspect some pathological reason for his position. I only regret Jones does not return the courtesy.

According to Jones, my "disillusionment with Protestant arguments" is only "professed." Rather, my "experience," like a "big and hairy animal" which "tend[s] to follow habitual patterns of behavior and miss out on the finer points of life," may have "trapped [me] in patterns of thought which only serve [to] confirm [my] suspicions against rather obvious matters," thus leaving "unmanageable messes all over the place."

But what "habitual patterns of behavior" made me "miss out on the finer points of life," and what are those finer points of life — the subtleties of Reformed theology? What "suspicions" does this amateur psychoanalysis suspect? And what does the impenetrable murk of this mumbo-jumbo mean by "matters" which are "rather obvious" (not obvious enough, it seems)? The "big and hairy animal" analogy might more correctly characterize the cryptic code Jones speaks on this speculative safari. His simian simile, like some scatological Sasquatch, has left such an "unmanageable mess" that it has utterly obscured his meaning, at least for me. Being no hermeneutical Hercules, I feel unable to unmuck these Augean stables.

Jones says his *ad hominem* attacks are appropriate because in my opening paragraphs I "appeal to [my] experience...to buttress [my] case." My autobiographical remarks weren't advanced as an argument, though, my conversion to Catholicism no more proves Catholicism is true than Catholics converting to evangelicalism prove evangelicalism true, or Calvinists becoming atheists prove atheism true. I simply wanted readers to know where I was coming from and that I understood *Sola*

Scriptura, having once held it myself.

Jones begs to "dispute that background." Apparently I "so misunderstand *Sola Scriptura*" that he finds hard to believe that I was ever an evangelical Protestant, let alone a Calvinist: "How could a 'Calvinist of Calvinists' genuinely maintain that the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* implies that oral revelation was not normative prior to inscription?" The reader, though, will search my essay in vain for any evidence that my "case against *Sola Scriptura*...assumes a bizarre view common to Roman Catholic apologists...that *Sola Scriptura* precludes all forms of oral revelation," or that I held this view (the only Protestant to do so, mind you) prior to my conversion to Catholicism.

If there's one thing worse than seeing someone flog a dead horse, it's seeing someone repeatedly flog the wrong dead horse. Once and for all, Mr. Jones: There is no dispute between Protestants and Catholics that oral revelation occurred, that it was inspired, that it was normative. Protestants don't deny this, and Catholics don't claim they do. What Protestants do deny is that anyone has access to this oral revelation today apart from Scripture. Catholics disagree with this denial because under both covenants God commanded that revealed truth be passed down in oral as well as written form. If Jones wishes to address the issue rather than waste time attributing to Catholics critiques they do not in fact make, then he needs to produce some proof-text that rescinds these commands.

After contesting the genuineness of my Protestant past, Jones proceeds to critique my nine-step survey of the phenomenon of revelation in redemptive history. Though he initially seems to grasp that "these steps are not distinct arguments against the doctrine [of *Sola Scriptura*]" taken individually, he nevertheless insists on ending his assessment of each step with the antiphon, "This step [too] doesn't entail the Matatics Magisterium conclusion." I actually didn't expect him to contest any of the points until we got to the close of the canon (points 7-9). The previous points (1-6) merely laid down the trajectories of revelation

to demonstrate that the Catholic conclusion is in line with these trajectories, while the Protestant concept of *Sola Scriptura* is not.

1. My first point, for example, was simply a reminder that God has revealed himself in ways other than writing. Of course "advocates of *Sola Scriptura* hold this view as well;" I didn't imply otherwise.

2. If Jones agrees that God's covenants with creation and the patriarchs involved only oral revelation, how can he find "obviously fallacious" my "inference" that "a written document...while valuable, was no *sine qua non* of a covenant, no necessary instrument to its implementation or administration"? "Holograms" have nothing to do with it, Mr. Jones: Adam, Noah, Abraham, and others possessed no Scripture, yet they possessed and passed on God's covenant Word. That Word can thus be competently conveyed in an oral mode, and any prejudice against that mode is contrary to Scripture.

3. Jones tries yet again the trumped-up charge that my point must "mistakenly take *Sola Scriptura* to somehow rule out all oral revelation."

4. Jones accuses me of a "Saussurean-like denigration of the written word" by drawing a "false dichotomy...between the words of a book and those of a person." But my fourth point provides no basis whatsoever for these irresponsible accusations.²

5. Jones claims that my fifth point works against *Sola Scriptura* only if I "mistakenly assume *Sola Scriptura* precludes," not just oral revelation now, but "the work of Christ" himself, but again no evidence is furnished for this, or for the equally spurious charge that "Matatics...assumes that Scripture is a collection of dead symbols."³

² By the way, Protestants are not alone in "following Peter's lead." Catholics do so, too — *a fortiori*.

³ Is Mr. Jones's [hyperbolic] remark that "every Protestant is familiar with Hebrews 4:10" [it's actually verse 12] intended to imply that Catholics aren't?

¹ Hereafter, "Jones," not to be disrespectful but to save space.

Nor is it true that "in order for Matatics' argument to carry any weight, we need a very literal understanding of John 5:19." My citation of John 5:19 was illustrative and incidental, not argumentative. Whether or not Jesus was in this instance following the Father's example (and he was), my point was that he provided for the continuation of his word by sending forth speakers, not assigning writers.

Furthermore, in his attempted *reductio ad absurdum* of what "a very literal understanding of John 5:19" would entail, Jones commits an unfortunate (but very common) logical blunder: The statement "Whatever A does B does also" doesn't yield the reverse conclusion that "Whatever B does, A does," yet this is the form his two "refutations" take.

In addition to these two errors, Jones's examples in fact pose no problem whatsoever to a "very literal understanding of John 5:19." The truth is that Christ walked on water precisely to imitate the Father (Job 9:8; Ps. 77:19) and thus furnish an indication of his divinity, and any standard Protestant commentary will say so. And "when Christ allowed Mary to pour ointment on his feet (Lk 7:38, 39) the Father was doing the same thing in heaven," i.e. allowing Mary to do this to Christ. Nothing happens expect the Father allows (Mt. 10:29; Jn. 19:11). Where is the problem Mr. Jones?⁴

6. Jones makes five points here, all of them invalid. First, not all arguments from silence are fallacious, as Jones himself says elsewhere. He needs to show why this one is.

Second, I nowhere claim that because Scripture doesn't record Christ commanding the apostles to write, he therefore never did. I simply pointed out that Scripture's silence on this point is deafening, which seems odd if *Sola Scriptura* is the fundamental of the faith Protestants think it is.

Third, Jones once again begs the question by sneaking in as a premise what he needs to demonstrate, namely that "whatever God chose to inscripturate is sufficient." None of his "prooftexts" support the premise: II Peter 1:2f and Hebrews 1:1-3 and 2:1-4 don't even mention Scripture, and II Timothy 3:16-17 fails as a prooftext for *Sola Scriptura* on several counts.⁵ It is unfortunate that Protestant

polemicists go on citing, century after century, texts they've been told prove their point, without stopping to see if they really do or not.

Fourth, Jones's recurring refrain that this point does not single handedly establish my conclusion has already been answered.

Fifth, Jones misconstrues the Catholic's motive for adhering to Tradition as a desire for exhaustive knowledge of all that Christ or the apostles ever said. He misconstrues our appeal to John 21:25, which Catholics cite merely to prove that not everything was written down, not that everything that wasn't written down is contained in Tradition. Catholics "hold fast to tradition" not because Scripture plus Tradition bring all that was ever said, but because Scripture plus Tradition bring us all that we're required to know (II Thess. 2:15). Scripture alone does not.

7. Jones misquotes my seventh point. I never said "the preservation of God's word through inscripturation is a Protestant presupposition 'without the slightest scrap of scriptural warrant' What I said was 'The idea that inscripturation is the *only* way to permanently preserve revealed truth is a Protestant is a Protestant presupposition without the slightest scrap of scriptural warrant' [emphasis added]. There's a big difference.

Jones says I appear "ignorant of the fact that God Himself directed inscripturation of His revelation to preserve it for future generation," but he can't really believe I'm ignorant of the Bible verses he cites — especially since I cite some of them myself in my first essay. In any case, his appeal to "the repeated Biblical precedent of transforming oral revelation into written form" is inadequate to prove his point. That God commanded inscripturation no one disputes. What Catholics dispute is the Protestant presumption that everything God wanted preserved was inscriptured and that such inscripturation was intended to replace oral tradition rather than be passed on alongside it as II Thessalonians 2:15 commands. Where are the prooftexts for these presumptions? Answer: nowhere.

What's more, when I attack the view that inscripturation is the only way to preserve revelation, I'm attacking a "straw man," says Jones, because "God could, if he so chose, preserve His Word on videotape, but He didn't." Jones often mentions "silly understandings of *Sola Scriptura*;" is this an example of a silly understanding of the Catholic case against *Sola Scriptura*? Does any Catholic deny that writing is the sole mode of preservation of God's Word on the grounds that videotape

would do the trick? The issue is not what other recording mediums God could have used, but whether in addition to recorded materials of any sort God provided for ongoing oral tradition. Rebutting this is Jones's real task, not the multiplication of false dichotomies (writing versus videotape), all the more false for one of the terms not even being an option until the twentieth century.

8. On my eighth point, that "there is a standing command to pass on oral apostolic tradition and that the burden is on Protestants to show that this is repealed," Jones states, "Given the burden I bore in my first essay to the end that covenant history in Scripture is one long precedent for the claim that oral revelation regularly ceases and becomes inscriptured, I could simply point out that Mr. Matatics truly bears the burden of demonstrating why this precedent now changes." Sorry, Mr. Jones: I can't allow you to get away with such a burden-of-proof-shifting. The fact of the matter is that you have yet to produce one prooftext for your presumption that inscripturation *ipso facto* retires oral revelation. Until you do, the burden of proof rests squarely on your shoulders.

To show that even Protestants can perform works of supererogation, Jones gallantly volunteers to "bear this unnecessary burden" anyway, but does not better job of delivering it that he did in his first essay. He claims that he "and all advocates of *Sola Scriptura* maintain that II Thessalonians 2:15 is still in force," then turns around and says that there is no way to obey the command to hold fast to the oral tradition because there aren't any apostles around!

Jones plea, "Please, Mr. Matatics, find me an apostle of Christ, and I will heed his oral revelation!" is a glib way to sidestep the force of this command. Suppose some skeptic were to say to Jones, "Find the autographs written by an apostle of Christ, and I will heed his written revelation!" What would Jones say? He'd say, "We can still obey God's command to heed the written word, without the autographs, because we believe, on good evidence, that the copies of copies of copies that we possess faithfully preserve the wording of the original." Exactly, Mr. Jones! And I can equally respond, "We can still obey God's command to heed oral apostolic teaching, without the apostle himself present, because we believe, on good evidence, that we have in Sacred Tradition a faithful transmission of the original."

The problem is thus not that "Mr. Matatics has slipped in the assumption of apostolic succession in order to generate the alleged inconsistency;" on the contrary, I did not assume, but argued for, apostolic succession on the basis of Scripture (see my first essay, point 9). The problem is rather that Jones has slipped in the assumption that we somehow have grounds for believing in the reliable transmission of the Biblical text that are separable from any grounds for believing in the reliable transmission of oral tradition. What such grounds are there, Mr. Jones? Scripture nowhere states that there would be a providential preservation of the written text to function in subsequent ages as a trustworthy link to apostolic doctrine. (Statements to the effect that the Word of God abides forever or that Christ's words won't pass away don't

⁴ Perhaps Mr. Jones was thinking that a "very literal interpretation of John 5:19" would entail the Father allowing Mary to anoint the Father's feet, or, alternatively, the Father anointing Christ's feet. If so, he is (yet again) reading Scripture in a sloppy fashion: John 5:19 doesn't say that whatever people do to Christ they do to the Father, nor that whatever people do to Christ, the Father does to Christ. Jones was right in stating that when it comes to John 5:19, "embarrassments arise," but the embarrassments are all his.

⁵ Protestants like to point out that Paul says the Scriptures can make Timothy "perfect" (KJV) or "complete" (RSV). But the Scriptures Timothy was to "continue in" to become a "complete" man of God were those he had known "from infancy," namely the Old Testament. If Paul was excluding anything else as necessary to achieving this "perfection," he was therefore excluding not only oral tradition but subsequent Scripture (i.e. the New Testament) as well. If Timothy could become "complete" without having to read, say, the Gospel of John or the Book of Revelation, then so could someone today. Secondly, James says that the virtue of "steadfastness" makes one "per-

fect and complete" (James 1:4, RSV). Which is necessary: Scripture or steadfastness? Clearly both of them, as well as such other things as faith, hope, and love. While II Timothy 3:17, James 1:4, and a host of similar statements says that "X" brings about perfection, none of them says that "X alone" brings about perfection. The same goes for the other attributes of Scripture listed in II Timothy 3:15-17: Paul nowhere says that Scripture alone inculcates salvific wisdom, is inspired, trains us in righteousness, and so forth — as if these things wouldn't be true of preaching, for example. Protestants subconsciously add the word "sola" to Paul's description of "scriptura," but it's as exegetically illicit as was Luther's addition of "sola" to "fide" in Romans 3:28.

restrict this to a written word, so quoting these only engages in the same unhelpful question-begging as before, since this assumes what the Protestant needs to prove: that God promises to preserve only Scripture.)

The fact is that the only ground anyone — Protestant or Catholic — has for confidence in the trustworthiness of our Biblical manuscripts is the general ground that Christ would preserve the faith in his Church. But this ground not only does not exclude oral tradition, it undermines the Protestant presumption that the Church fell into serious doctrinal error in the post-apostolic era. If the Church was incompetent to preserve the faith, on what ground can one hope (other than positing it in a purely fideistic fashion, which is all Protestants can do) that the Church was competent to preserve a reliable text of Scripture? Jones surely won't appeal to the science of textual criticism, since that science is not infallible, nor is it successful in filling in all the gaps. The earliest manuscripts we have are still copies of copies of copies. And if the science of textual criticism is admissible into the epistemological equation, why not the science of patrology, which established the Catholic understanding of the Christian faith as enjoying as much antiquity and consensus in the early Church as our text of Scripture? Jones, like all Protestants, hasn't yet grasped the lesson of the last five hundred years of history: that the reliability of the Church cannot be undermined without ultimately and inevitably undermining the reliability of Scripture.

What's more, Jones shows by his stout rejection of apostolic succession as "a contradiction in terms" that he has not taken adequate trouble to even understand the doctrine he claims to reject. The Catholic church has never taught that the successors to the apostles were apostles themselves. A successor to a founder is not a founder too, so the foundational uniqueness of the apostles remains intact.

Jones's befuddlement on this elementary point is all the more puzzling given my pains in my first essay (footnote 25) to explain the difference between the apostles and their successors. Jones counters the distinction by arguing that, since I deny the inspiration of the apostle's successors, I cannot "practice II Thessalonians 2:15 in the manner Paul teaches" any more than he can. This is a *non-sequitur*. The inspiration of the successors is no more necessary to my having reliable access to the original apostolic teaching than is the equally-absent inspiration of the manuscript copies we presently possess necessary to my having reliable access to the original Biblical autographs. In both cases, though the originals were inspired, the subsequent stages in transmission are not.

9. On my ninth point Jones charges me with failing to offer scriptural support for my "key point" (good choice of words, Mr. Jones) that "succession to office was conceived of as dynastic succession and filial inheritance." He needs to go back and re-read my essay, where ample evidence is cited. What else does Paul mean by referring to Timothy and Titus, the two bishops he personally appointed as successors, as his "true sons in the faith"? And what of the fact, in the particular case of Peter, that the office of chief steward of the royal house was one of dynastic succession (cf. e.g. Is. 22:24)? The fact is, that is how everybody (except the Gnostics) understood apostolic succession in the early church; nobody spiritualized it away in the (not un-Gnostic) way the sixteenth-century Protestant "Reformers" did. In any case, the burden is not on me in this debate to provide a full-blown defense of apostolic succession or any other aspect of Catholic ecclesiology (including magisterial infallibility or institutional unity). Rather, the debate is on whether Scripture teaches *Sola*

Scriptura, and the burden of proof is on Jones to provide at least one proof-text that Scripture is, after passing of the apostles, the only God-intended infallible source of apostolic doctrine — something Jones has yet to do.

What of Jones's summation, then, that my Biblical case fails on four counts? First, it's not the case that "[my] argument only succeeds if [I] assume the legitimacy of apostolic succession." My argument is not that apostolic succession is taught, but that *Sola Scriptura* isn't. Second, it is just not true that I "repeatedly assume the false view that *Sola Scriptura* precludes oral revelation." Third, my nine steps were never intended to entail my conclusion individually, though the last three, taken together and in line with the preceding ones, do. And fourth, Jones has yet to show that any of the steps "fail on their own account due to fallacious inferences."

Jones claims that in the next section of my essay after raising several charges of question-begging and equivocation against him I actually "refute myself" by somehow demonstrating that the charges don't apply to him after all. He offers no proof this in fact happens. Here you see the desperate ploy of a desperate man. Jones can't extricate himself from my charges, so he argues I've done it for him! He further diverts attention from his predicament by dredging up, for the umpteenth time, the counter-charge that "Mr. Matatics is committed to the false understanding of *Sola Scriptura* which precludes any oral revelation as normative." I leave the reader to draw his own conclusion.

Jones's second footnote is filled with the following further confusions:

1. For me to insist that "scriptura" means "writing" bespeaks "false notion of *Sola Scriptura*." No, that's the accepted meaning of the term.

2. To conclude that since "Scripture" and "the Word of God" are often interchangeable, and "the Word of God" is often oral, therefore "Scripture" can mean "oral Word of God" is embarrassingly bad logic.

3. I have no problem allowing Protestants to define their own doctrines. My point is that neither the Reformers nor the WCF define "Scripture" as an oral entity. If all that Jones means is that much in Scripture has oral antecedents, then there is no distinctively Protestant doctrine, and thus not what we are arguing about.

4. Jones has still not produced any proof-text that oral revelation is by God's design utterly superseded by written revelation.

5. Jones muddies the waters with the unhelpful example of "transmitting Paul's letter to the Ephesians by phone to a friend in Africa." What is your point, Mr. Jones — that Protestants thus do not find oral transmission of God's Word objectionable? Given this not what you and I know the Catholic Church claims to do by magisterially passing down Sacred Tradition, why waste time attacking this silly straw man?

6. If *Sola Scriptura* does not contend that Scripture alone brings us the teaching of prophets and apostles in normative form, what does it teach? I'm not sure even Jones knows what he wants to attack and what he wants to defend.

When Jones says "the Old Testament does not contain anything close to a body of authoritative tradition or an infallible institution on par with Scripture," he still sidesteps the inspired, infallible institution of the office of prophet, and the fact that oracles not written down but passed down functioned as authoritative Tradition. He erroneously assumes when Jesus rejected uninspired "traditions of men" which conflicted with God's Word (oral or written) as Jones would say) he was rejecting all Old Covenant Tradition (Mt. 15:1-9). If so, why didn't Jesus reject the tradition, nowhere taught in the Old

Testament, of "Moses' seat," an institution he said possessed morally binding authority (Mt. 23:2)? Why didn't Paul reject the extrabiblical tradition of the rolling rock in the wilderness, rather than derive a major Christological type and covenantal continuity from it (I Cor. 10:4), or the extrabiblical tradition of Jannes and Jambres opposing Moses, instead of using them as types of the false teachers plaguing his ministry (II Tim. 3:8)? Why didn't Jude reject the extrabiblical traditions of the archangel's dispute with Satan over Moses' body and the patriarch Enoch's prophecy of coming judgment, rather than derive doctrines from and support moral principles with them (Jude 9, 14f)? These examples prove that neither our Lord nor the apostles practiced *Sola Scriptura*, contrary to what a more superficial reading of the New Testament might conclude.

There's little space left to deal with Jones's remaining points, and little need: they've already been answered, again and again.⁶ His second offering, in sum, has two major flaws, and both of them bring us round full circle to his opening concerns about big, hairy animals. First, he repeatedly charges me with misunderstanding *Sola Scriptura* both before and after my conversion to Catholicism, a misunderstanding mediated by my supposedly-skewing experience. Well, any stick is good enough to beat a dog with, and any stigma is good enough to beat a dogma with. The dogma in this case is the Catholic contention that Scripture is neither sole nor sufficient but supplemented by Tradition and Magisterium; the stigma is the supposition that evangelicals who surrender *Sola Scriptura* and become Catholics do so from some experiential or psychological defect. This is the constant canard of commentators on conversions to Catholicism. The idea that such conversions are not theologically-driven and the converts in question reject something they really don't understand, is an understandably attractive one, but not an accurate one in my case or the case of any evangelical convert I know. The stigma doesn't stick, and the dogma doggedly stands.

If Jones's first flaw is a faulty psychoanalysis, his second is a faulty scriptural analysis. To switch the canine simile, Jones, in search of scriptural supports for *Sola Scriptura*, ambles through the two testaments like an amiable retriever who has buried a bone and can't quite remember where. However, much he ambles, he comes up empty. His bark, though noticeably louder than in his opening essay, is still much worse than his bite. Given his failure in his first and second efforts to produce proof-texts for the cessation of oral Tradition, he'll have to have a lot more teeth in his next and final attempt if he's to vindicate *Sola Scriptura* as a notion Bible-believing Christians ought to support.

I want to reemphasize my recognition of Mr. Jones and all evangelicals as fellow Christians; I wish him, and them, well. And I pray that we all may be willing to submit our most-cherished notions to the authoritative sentence of Scripture. For the clear teaching of Scripture, and the constant teaching of Christian Tradition and the Church's Magisterium, is that Scripture must ever be interpreted in harmony with that Tradition and Magisterium, and not in isolation from them. This is the conclusion to which I came, and the conclusion I crave for all my brothers and sisters who seek after scriptural truth.

⁶Except his accusation that in my final section I "lose [my] cool and let [my] rhetoric fly" (with occasional pit-stops for "pandering"), but he's all wet if he concludes from a few aquatic analogies ("Calvinistic cataract"), maritime metaphors ("Captain Jones"), alliterative phrases ("tour-giving tugboat") or pointed puns ("Maid of the Missed") that I lost my composure, though I appreciate his pastoral solicitude.

Jones' Closing Statement

If we step back from the details of the debate for a moment, we can see that one prevailing issue on both sides is now very clear: *there is no place in all of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, in which we find an actual non-revelatory, non-inspired, yet infallibly binding, body or source of doctrinal explications.* Please do not confuse this statement with previous disputes about oral revelation. There is a marked distinction between *inspired oral revelation* and *uninspired, though infallible, oral explications* (Mr. Matatics has himself provided this distinction). We both agree that Scripture speaks of inspired oral revelation. We both (now at least) claim to agree that *Sola Scriptura* does not preclude inspired oral revelation. The basic dispute, then, is not the irrelevant claim of whether Scripture speaks of inspired oral revelation alongside itself as a norm, but whether Scripture endorses *uninspired, though infallible, oral explications* as a supreme norm equal to its authority.

This latter question is now easily answered: No. This answer is drawn from Mr. Matatics' own case, in that, much if not all of his Biblical arguments against *Sola Scriptura* are made up of claims to the effect that Scripture speaks of *inspired oral revelation*. He has repeatedly attempted to rebut the Biblical case for *Sola Scriptura* by appealing in diverse ways to the oral revelation of the pre-Mosaic patriarchs, Moses, subsequent OT prophets, Christ, and the apostles. Since *Sola Scriptura* includes such inspired oral revelation, and Mr. Matatics now claims to agree, then none of these instances count against *Sola Scriptura* — Progress!

With that set of claims out of the way, we can then see that Mr. Matatics nowhere even attempts to find in Scripture a body or norm of *uninspired, though infallible, oral explications* parallel to Rome's Sacred Tradition. Such a normative tradition (note, *not* inspired oral revelation) is completely foreign to the pages of Scripture, and, therefore, has no Biblical precedent, parallel, or place (except, of course, Pharisaical traditions).

His most basic response to my ongoing request for a Scriptural basis for *uninspired, though infallible, oral explications* is found in his latest reply where he argues: "Jones says 'the OT does not contain anything close to a body of authoritative tradition or an infallible institution on par with Scripture,' he [Jones] still sidesteps the inspired, infallible institution of the office of prophet...." Precisely wrong. Inspired prophets and apostles, as Mr. Matatics himself has told us, are not parallel to non-revelatory, uninspired Roman Catholic explications. The two are in different categories, and, hence, as noted above, all of Mr. Matatics appeals to inspired oral revelation are completely irrelevant as evidence against *Sola Scriptura*. In my last essay, I appealed to Mr. Matatics: "Where is this body of priestly tradition? Give examples of authoritative appeals to it.... Point to...appeals to it which set it on par with Scripture." In return, we received silence.¹

As I've argued since my opening essay, the dispute between Protestants and Roman Catholics regarding *Sola Scriptura* is not a dispute

between evidence for *oral* vs. *written* revelation but rather a dispute between the supremacy of *oral/written revelation* (the inspired Word of God) vs. *non-revelatory, infallible explications*. Given this latter distinction, we can easily see why Mr. Matatics' perennial accusations of Protestant question-begging fail.² He's simply in the wrong debate.³ In order for Mr. Matatics to make his case against *Sola Scriptura* he needs to demonstrate that *Scripture speaks of God's Word, not as oral and/or written, but as uninspired, non-revelatory, and yet infallible*. Furthermore, the Biblical case for *Sola Scriptura* is easily sealed by providing Scriptures which demonstrate God's Word (temporary oral or written) is a Christian's sole and supreme norm, to the exclusion of texts endorsing uninspired, yet infallible explications. This has been an easy task, buttressed both by the evidence of redemptive history and a waterfall of proof texts (at least three dozen for Mr. Matatics' request for one).⁴

Given the absence of non-revelatory, yet infallible explications on par with Scripture, Roman Catholicism rests its claims on a very late and novel, let alone Scripturally unprecedented, foundation. We are supposed to believe that in all of redemptive history, from creation to the apostles, God's Word alone is supreme, but that as soon as the apostles pass away, then uninspired, non-revelatory, yet infallible explications immediately stand on par with Scripture. Yet, as we've seen, Scripture itself clearly forbids such a novel change in doctrine.⁵

² In the previous essay Mr. Matatics strangely denies that he refutes several of his own charges against me, and so I direct the reader to page 52 to read his own statements where he twice claims that I can avoid a certain charge, and then he goes on to cite my own case in rebuttal.

³ I gladly receive Mr. Matatics latest claim that he doesn't believe that *Sola Scriptura* precludes oral revelation, since it removes many of his previous objections, but he is quite wrong to suggest his arguments never assumed that view. In both essays he makes such blatant claims as, "If *Scriptura* includes oral as well as written teaching, then there is nothing left to argue about: Catholics now affirm *Sola Scriptura* too!" (p. 52). Similarly, his claim that "there was no scripture during the patriarchal period...therefore...[these] hardly serve as examples of *Sola Scriptura*." (p. 52). Thus, my charges weren't "trumped up," as he says; instead, he has apparently back-pedaled on the issue.

⁴ Several other points are worth noting: (1) Mr. Matatics still has yet to make his case against *Sola Scriptura* actually contradict my case, though now we are told that points 1-6 were not intended to contradict it but only to demonstrate that the "trajectories" conflict with *Sola Scriptura*. Well, at least we finally have a contradiction. (2) Mr. Matatics claims that his appeal to John 5:19 is irrelevant to his basic claim and then goes on to defend this irrelevance in four more paragraphs. His basic rebuttal of my point rests upon mistaken logical formulation of the claim. I direct the reader to John 5:19 to compare. (3) In all honesty, his critique of my previous essay's second footnote, his points 1-6, doesn't even come close to restating my arguments accurately. (4) Given my discussion in this response, my citations of II Tim. 3:16; II Pet. 1:2, etc. are not question-begging. (5) Mr. Matatics regularly cites James 1:4 in order to refute the Protestant appeal to II Tim. 3:16, but this is a category mistake in which he conflates the ethical and the epistemological.

⁵ Nevertheless, Mr. Matatics may grant the novelty of Roman doctrine but argue that the

In conclusion, then, the Roman Catholic Biblical case against *Sola Scriptura* has pointed out many of the texts speaking of inspired oral revelation but those, we now agree, are irrelevant. Mr. Matatics also agrees that inspired oral revelation ceased with the passing of the apostolic era, hence, there is no need to prove that oral revelation has ceased. What the Scriptural evidence does show, and Mr. Matatics has never disputed, is my original point that the sole and supreme norm invoked by persons in both Old and New Testaments is God's Word (oral and/or written), in opposition to non-revelatory, uninspired, yet infallible explications. As we've seen, the evidence for this claim is abundant, like a waterfall, and, hence, once we clear away all the debris, we see that Scripture very clearly teaches the very ancient truth of *Sola Scriptura*. We are now able to draw the inference from my very first statement: since *Sola Scriptura* is Scriptural, and it precludes Roman Catholicism as a system of theology, we ought to wholeheartedly reject Roman Catholicism.⁶ Δ

post-apostolic church was given this new standard beside God's Word. Yet his earliest footnotes in support of this point still do not uniquely support a Roman Catholic understanding of ordination, teaching authority, Peter's position, etc. Nor does Paul's references to Timothy and Titus in filial terms uniquely support Mr. Matatics' claim, given the wide use of such language for persons not holding church office. He has failed to supply even a foundation for Rome's novel view of revelation.

Moreover, Mr. Matatics attempts to salvage his case from II Thess. 2:15 by arguing that the central issue is infallible transmission not apostolic succession. First, by his own appeal to an infallible church, he explicitly continues his question-begging use of this passage. Second, his claim that our "only ground" for trusting Biblical manuscripts is the Roman Catholic church, belies his own concession that God promises to preserve His Word, which at least includes written revelation. Who needs fideism or textual criticism when God Himself makes a promise? Has Roman Catholicism now led Mr. Matatics to reject the sovereign providence of God as well? Third, my argument against apostolic succession doesn't in fact assume succeeding apostles but only their teaching authority. Hence, Mr. Matatics is still stuck with a non-foundational foundation.

⁶ Mr. Matatics spills plenty of ink in an attempt to take personally my comments about the complexities of human experience. Everyone can see that his opening appeal to his past is intended to gain a special hearing and buttress his case. A sentence can explain background, but his four paragraphs with rather heavy-handed condescensions are obviously supposed to make the reader support his case. My point was explicitly logical in aim, namely, that such appeals have no place in a serious debate and to point out that experience is messy in that its complexities give us no clear cut directions. If Mr. Matatics doesn't want people to challenge all parts of his case, then he shouldn't invoke his past experience. Nevertheless, given this, I can't help be amused when he opens his latest essay by claiming that he will not question my integrity or intelligence and then proceeds to describe me as speaking mumbo-jumbo, too dull to grasp issues, superficial, irresponsible, sloppy, too simple to check texts, silly, unable to grasp basic lessons, befuddled, desperate, and a slow-witted retriever. I would hate to see him insult me.

¹ Mr. Matatics also attempts to appeal to various allegedly extra-biblical traditions found incorporated into the New Testament but these don't fulfill the conditions of "uninspired, though infallible explications" because they are either (i) not even authoritative works as Mr. Matatics himself agrees, for instance in regard to Jude 9, 14f., or (ii) not necessarily received apart from divine inspiration, or (iii) simply stand as summary doctrinal locutions. Whatever the case, they do not fit the category in question.

Book Review

***And On This Rock* by Stanley Jaki reviewed by Andrew Peterson**

Trinity Communications 1987, Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged, 128 pages, \$14.95

"And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against the house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock" (Matthew 7:25)

Reformed Christians continue to have an historical bent. Whether studying the early church or reviewing events from the Reformation to the present, we treasure the historical data and the attempt to understand them in a Biblical manner. Although the author of *And On This Rock: The Witness of One Land and Two Covenants* sees us as "separated brethren" and, more consistently, as heretics and schismatics, it is well worthwhile for us to interact with his work.

The stakes are more than academic. Is God's Word sufficient without the added Roman Catholic tradition built on an extrapolation from Peter's confession of Christ's Lordship? As we Protestants have marched with brave Roman Catholics on anti-pornography picket lines, observed missions of mercy by Roman Catholics in crisis pregnancy centers, and attended conferences on traditional values, which were addressed by brilliant Roman Catholic scholars and activists, many Bible-believing Protestants have forgotten the reasons why we cannot have a deeper fellowship with Rome. At first glance, our political allies may appear to want to be Biblical and even desire to respect our confession, but as Jaki's work reminds us, the reality is otherwise.

Stanley Jaki is an eminent historian and philosopher of science quite apart from his credentials in theology. He has contributed important works to the philosophy of science which seek to drive the final nails into the coffin of logical positivism and begin to build a more subjectivist yet realistic alternative to our understanding of science. But what about his ecclesiology?

In writing *And On This Rock*, originally published in 1978 by Ave Maria Press, Jaki returns to theology to make the case for a familiar range of traditional Roman Catholic beliefs, in particular, the exclusive, universal, and infallible papal office. In the United States, there is some debate among Roman Catholic leaders and lay people about the issue of papal leadership, especially in regard to abortion, birth control, and the role of women. Jaki wants to boost traditional views on the papacy among the faithful after years of liberalization in liturgy and life-style. Additionally, he wants to challenge the many Jesuits and other liberal modernists who are skeptical about the Church, Scripture, and traditional teaching: "many Jesuits pride themselves in resisting the pope and instilling in others an attitude of defiance toward him" (p. 6).

The implied message for fundamentalist Protestants is to cease and desist from schism. On the contemporary scene, Jaki is a fellow anachronism reviving a sixteenth-century argument which we believe was settled by the Reformers. While he criticizes Hans Küng for not being more Biblical (p. 11), Jaki perpetuates the papal doctrines which make personal Bible study irrelevant. Why not just

study church dogma or wait until the pope gives an update on a particular issue?

The book begins with extensive coverage of the geography of Caesaria of Philippi and the specific location of Christ's discussion with the disciples in Matthew 16:13-20. Much detail is given about the related historical and archaeological research done over the years. There is a huge rock facade where Christ is thought to have acknowledged Peter's first confession of His deity. Jaki believes that this setting gives further confirmation of the nature of Peter's role in church history: the unmovable foundation of the church. Although this chapter is the longest in the book, it is difficult to see how the geography of the Bible land supplies evidence for the classic Petrine doctrine regarding Peter himself. What does it add to the exegetical argument which is the important issue for the biblicist? Certainly the symbolism of the rock tells us nothing about apostolic succession to his chair in Rome. Jaki's story is an iconic success, but hardly any more impressive to the exegete than a good historical novel.

The next longest treatment in the book is a study of the use of "rock" as a verbal image of God in the Old Testament. While there is little concern for actually making the connection to Peter, it is helpful to recount this description of the Lord as a Rock. Jaki seems to enjoy the Biblical material which communicates how God is a living foundation for the true believer. Yet in the same chapter, Jaki shows modernist tendencies in his comments on the Bible. At times, Scripture seems to be just one more source of data for the scholar, i.e. the Old Testament is a religious document rather than the Word of God to His people (cf. p. 61). Indeed, the consistent Roman Catholic emphasizes an inerrant Church as opposed to the Protestant's inerrant Bible.

The issue of the primacy of Peter as the authoritative beginning of the papacy is finally addressed directly in the short third chapter. Jaki's Roman Catholic presuppositions are evident throughout the interesting discussion of Peter's name. Having spent a long chapter on the Old Testament name for God as Rock (*sur*) and wanting to transfer that image to Peter, he must explain the use of the Aramaic word for rock (*kepha*, cf. pp. 75-77). His hypothesis is that the use of *sur* would stir charges of blasphemy among the contemporary critics. His Scriptural proof for the claim that Jesus wanted to avoid comparing Peter to God is simply, Christ's consistent reference to Peter as "the son of Jonas" rather than "Petros." Though I take this pattern as evidence against the view that Christ is ordaining a universal office, Jaki takes this data in stride: "Such was Christ's subtle way of making it clear that as long as he was visibly present he alone was the Spiritual Rock" (p. 78). Likewise, when Peter admonishes the adoring Cornelius, Peter "must have known in full that this endurance as a rock was a mirage unless maintained by Yahweh the Rock" (p. 85).

A writer reveals his bias in what he does not discuss as well as what he does. The

apostle Paul certainly exerted tremendous leadership throughout the apostolic period, yet Jaki says very little about him. Concerning Paul's rebuke of Peter in Galatians, Jaki defuses Paul's leadership by complimenting him on his deferential manners toward a brother. The Roman Catholic apologist needs to adequately address the leadership of Paul (and that of James and John). The book would be more credible if Jaki had spent additional time and his considerable skill on the hard counterevidence to the establishment of a papal office. A broader Biblical study is needed to establish Roman Catholic claims regarding Peter's role in the early church.

Jaki's concluding chapters contain interesting facts about the papacy and its implications. The philosopher rightly reminds the reader of the inescapability of the question of infallibility. For example, a scientist must operate with certain unquestionable givens in his paradigm. Indeed, conservative Protestants refer to the infallible Scripture which is known by its objective witness and internal testimony of the Holy Spirit (cf. John Murray in *The Infallible Word: A Symposium*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publ., 1946). God gives this infallible Scripture, not church tradition, to the church in order to accomplish its ministry of preaching, teaching, and counseling (cf. Weeks, N. "The Sufficiency of Scripture," *Banner of Truth*, 1988).

In contrast, the Roman Catholic approach, well-illustrated in *And On This Rock*, requires the church, especially in the person of the pope, to render infallible words about the Word: "[T]he plan of salvation must possess a built-in safeguard which, as Bible, Tradition, and history attest, can only be Peter living in his successors. Therefore, papal infallibility implies on the part of all those for whose safeguard it is given, an unswerving adherence to that rock foundation on which alone can rise that Church-edifice..." (p. 123).

Jaki wrote this book because of the crucial place of papal infallibility in Roman Catholic thought and practice. Though at base inconsistent with his faith in church tradition, he seeks to present a Biblically-based proof for the primacy of Peter as the first and paradigmatic pope. Even then, the matter of apostolic succession must be clarified. He does not do this. The final essay of the book assumes the divine origin of the papacy and the providential guarantee of a line of infallible "rocks." Apostolic succession is assumed rather than demonstrated.

Most Protestant readers of *And On This Rock* will be surprised to see the commitment to traditional Roman Catholicism and papal infallibility described by Jaki. The American trend toward presenting and perceiving Roman Catholicism as an orthodox, Biblical-type of Christianity is not consistent with the Pope's view of things or the Canon Law of 1983. The present book alerts us that the old arguments of the sixteenth-century are still with us. "Therefore every one who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock" (Matthew 7:24). Δ

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