

WHAT SEPARATES US?

By: Jim Seghers

“Holy Father, keep them in thy name... that they may be one, even as we are one” (Jn 17:11).

Reflecting on a great wound in Christianity, the Second Vatican Council declared: “Christ the Lord founded one Church and one Church only. However, many Christian communions present themselves to men as the true inheritors of Jesus Christ; all indeed profess to be followers of the Lord but they differ in mind and go their different ways, as if Christ himself were divided.¹ Certainly, such division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages that most holy cause, the preaching of the Good New of salvation to every creature.”²

The distressing reality is that this rupture in Christianity continues today. Nevertheless, Catholic and Protestant Christians share important common beliefs.. Hopefully, they will provide a starting point to draw us together.

- The Blessed Trinity – God is one in nature, but there are three distinct Persons Father, Son and Holy Spirit who equally share in that one nature.
- Jesus is the divine Son of the Father made man.
- Jesus is the Redeemer of all men and all grace comes through him.
- The necessity of grace and faith, without which no one enters heaven.
- Jesus rose from the dead.
- Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead.
- The existence of a place of eternal happiness called heaven, and the existence of a place of eternal punishment called hell.
- The Bible is the inspired word of God.

The Reformation that severed Western Christianity did not happen in a vacuum. The sins of churchmen were, perhaps, the chief culprit. By the time Martin Luther came on the scene the Catholic Church was in dire need of reform. The Great Western Schism (1378-1417) lowered the prestige of the Papacy when two men, and then three, each claimed to be the legitimate Pope. Tragically the Popes that followed from Sixtus IV (1471-1484) to Leo X (1513-1521) delivered hammer blows to the moral authority of the Church. They were only distinguished by their worldliness, ambition and avarice. This calamity led to a general moral collapse among many of the clergy and religious, and brought about strong anti-papal feelings in Germany.

This scandalous behavior of clergymen at the highest-level prompted Pope Adrian VI to publically acknowledge its significant contribution to the fracturing of Christianity.

¹ Referencing 1 Cor 1:13.

² *Unitatis Redintegratio*, The Decree on Ecumenism, # 1

“We freely acknowledge that God has allowed this chastisement to come upon His Church because of the sins of men and especially because of the sins of priests and prelates... We know well that for many years much that must be regarded with horror has come to pass in this Holy See: abuses in spiritual matters, transgressions against the Commandments; indeed, that every thing has been gravely perverted.”³

The person who lit the match to this tinderbox was Martin Luther in 1517, followed by Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin. However, instead of reforming the evil practices of men in the Church, they attacked the very nature of the Church. In the process they created new religions claiming to be the one true Church founded by Jesus Christ.

I. AUTHORITY

From the outset the burning issue between the Reformers and the Catholic Church was authority. How does a Christian know with certainty what he is to believe and how he is to act? What is his ultimate authority? From apostolic times Christians relied on three sources: Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture, and the Magisterium - the teaching authority of the Church centered in the Pope and the bishops in union with him. They formed a three-legged foundation upon which Christians withstood the onslaught of persecution and error.

- *Sacred Tradition* - The living revelation Jesus taught the apostles, which was orally transmitted to the Church by the apostles and their successors.
- *Sacred Scripture* – The Scriptures of the apostolic Church was the Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint.⁴ Eventually, the New Testament would be included to form the Bible.
- *The Magisterium or Teaching Authority of the Church* – Jesus entrusted his authority to Peter, the apostles, and their successors so they could faithfully instruct and govern his Church.

Sacred Tradition

It is historically irrefutable that the Christian faith was established and passed on well into the second century by means of oral tradition and not writings. Indeed, the sacred authors drew from this living tradition⁵ when they were inspired to pen the pages of the New Testament. The Catholic teaching regarding *Sacred Tradition* is well grounded in the New Testament.

³ Karl Adam, *Roots of the Reformation*, “Epilogue: The Roots of the Reformation Fifty Years Later,” by Kenneth J. Howell, p. 83. Pope Adrian VI followed Pope Leo X in 1522.

⁴ Of the 350 Old Testament quotations in the New Testament 300 are drawn from the Septuagint.

⁵ The inspired Greek word the New Testament uses for “tradition” is *paradosis*. The *New International Version* (NIV), which is the popular Evangelical translation of the Bible, takes liberties with the inspired text and shows its anti-Catholic bias. When *paradosis* (παράδοσις) is used in a negative sense as in Mt 15:1-9, Mk 7:1-15; Col 2:8 it is correctly rendered as “tradition.” However, when *paradosis* is used in the positive sense as a source of revelation as in 1 Cor 11:2, 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6 it is mistranslated as “teaching.” The Greek word of teaching is *didache* (διδάχη), not *paradosis*.

- “So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the *traditions* which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter” (1 Thess 2:15). Notice that in this passage St. Paul equates his oral teaching with his inspired letters.
- “Now we command you, beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the *tradition* that you received from us” (2 Thess 3:6).
- “I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the *traditions* just as I handed them on to you” (1 Cor 11:2).

The Catholic Church teaches that: “Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God.”⁶

The Gospels show that God’s authority was given by the Father to the Son and then by the Son to the apostles. “He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me” (Mt 10:40). It is clear that Jesus intended this assignment of authority to continue. In Acts 1:15-26 Peter announced the election of Judas’ successor because his “office” (Acts 1:20) was vacant. When the apostles founded local churches they delegated successors to govern in their place. St. Luke informs us that Paul and Barnabas “appointed elders for them in every church” (Acts 14:23). When St. Peter wrote to the leaders of the churches, he addressed them as men who shared his authority as “fellow elders” (1 Pet 5:1). He directed them to “tend the flock of God that is your *charge*” (1 Pet 5:2).

St. Paul sent Timothy to Ephesus to “*charge* certain persons not to teach any different doctrine” (1 Tim 1:3). Subsequently, he instructed Timothy to “rebuke” those who persist in sinning (1 Tim 5:20). When the apostles and elders met in Jerusalem to settle the issue of circumcision there was a great debate. However, once Peter made a decision “all the assembly kept silence” (Acts 15:12). The debate was over. As for those who demanded circumcision, the council made it clear, “we gave them no instructions” (Acts 15:24), in other words, they had no authority.

The New Testament demonstrates that the apostles delegated their authority to their successors. St. Paul declared that he preached, “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). Furthermore, he commanded his successors: “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you *guardians*” (Acts 20:28). He entreats Timothy, “O Timothy, *guard* what has been entrusted to you” (1 Tim 6:20). In his second letter he instructs Timothy: “Follow the pattern of the sound *words* which you have *heard* from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus; *guard* the *truth* that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us” (2 Tim 13-14).

This verbal transmission of faith and authority did not end with those men directly appointed by the apostles. St. Paul instructs Timothy to entrust the Christian faith to “faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2). The New Testament shows how Sacred Tradition passed from Jesus to the apostles, from the apostles to their

⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, # 97, citing *Dei Verbum*, # 10, henceforth cited as CCC.

successors and to later Christian communities. The apostles began a line of succession that forms a source of “sound doctrine” (Tit 2:1) that now extends into the 21st century.

Sacred Scripture

“*Sacred Scripture* is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit.”⁷ Therefore “God is the author of Sacred Scripture because he inspired its human authors; he acts in them and by means of them. He thus gives assurance that their writings teach without error his saving truth.”⁸

By the middle of the second century Christians began to regard certain of their treasured writings on a par with the Scriptures of the Old Testament. These books were eventually identified as the New Testament. By the end of the fourth century the Church settled on the 46 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament that belong in the Bible at the synod in Rome called by Pope Damasus in 382, at the Council of Hippo in 393, and again at the Council of Carthage in 397.

Canon of Scripture

The canon of Scripture refers to list of the books that belong in the Bible. The word “canon” comes from the Greek word *kanōn*. Originally it referred to a straight rod used as a measure. In relationship to the Bible the word canon means the rule or standard.

Different Bibles

Why do Protestant Bibles have less books than Catholic Bibles? Martin Luther used his religious sentiment as the standard to reject seven Old Testament books and parts of other books because they supported the Catholic teaching on Purgatory and the efficacy of praying for the dead, truths that he denied. These books are collectively known as the *apocrypha* or the *deutero-canonical* books. Although rejected by Luther these books were included in Protestant Bibles until discarded in 1827 by the British and Foreign Bible Society.

However, historical evidence illustrates that the apostolic Church had a very different viewpoint. The distinguished Protestant scholar J. N. D. Kelly writes: “It should be observed that the Old Testament thus admitted as authoritative in the Church was somewhat bulkier and more comprehensive than the [Protestant Old Testament] . . . It always included, though with varying degrees of recognition, the so-called Apocrypha or deutero-canonical books. The reason for this is that the Old Testament, which passed in the first instance into the hands of Christians, was . . . the Greek translation known as the Septuagint.”⁹

Books of the Bible Rejected by Martin Luther

Tobias (Tobit)

Judith

Wisdom

⁷ CCC, # 81, quoting *Dei Verbum*, # 9.

⁸ CCC, # 136, referencing *Dei Verbum*, # 101

⁹ *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 53.

Ecclesiastics

Baruch

1 and 2 Maccabees

The supplement to Esther from 10:4 to the end; the Canticle of the three Youths in Daniel 3; and the Stories of Susanna and the Elders, and Bel and the Dragon in Daniel 13 & 14

Because Protestants wrenched the Bible from the secure foundation of the Catholic Church, they unintentionally undermine the Bible itself. Thus the respected Protestant scholar R. C. Sproul wrote: “the Bible is a *fallible* collection of infallible books.”¹⁰ In rejecting the infallible authority of the Catholic Church, Protestants bring into question the inspiration of each of its books. According to Dr. Sproul, “the Protestant view is that the church’s decision regarding what books make up the Canon was a *fallible* decision. Being *fallible* means that it is possible that the church erred in its compilation of the books found in the present Canon of Scripture.”¹¹

From this viewpoint there is no divine guarantee that any books in the Bible are inspired and should be included. Luther also discredited four books of the New Testament: James, Hebrews, Jude and Revelation. Therefore from the Protestant perspective, can any book of the Bible be trusted? The Protestant scholar Keith A. Mathison reports that a Christian of his acquaintance believes “that it is the responsibility and duty of each individual Christian to determine the canonicity of each book of the Bible for himself.”¹²

The harmful consequences of this radical shift led Hartmann Grisar, Luther’s biographer, to conclude: “It was tragic that no Christian writer ever inflicted so much damage upon the Book of Books as the man who boasted of having favored it in so high a degree and represented it as the great, nay, the sole source of faith.”¹³

The Magisterium or the Teaching Authority of the Church

The Catholic Church’s understanding of its teaching authority is succinctly presented in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

- “It is this Magisterium's task to preserve God's people from deviations and defections and to guarantee them the objective possibility of professing the true faith without error. Thus, the pastoral duty of the Magisterium is aimed at seeing to it that the People of God abides in the truth that liberates. To fulfill this service, Christ endowed the Church's shepherds with the charism of infallibility in matters of faith and morals.”¹⁴

¹⁰ R.C. Sproul, “The Establishment of Scripture,” from *Sola Scriptura: The Protestant Position on the Bible*, p. 66, emphasis mine.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² *Shape of Sola Scriptura*, p. 314.

¹³ *Martin Luther: His Life and Work*, pp. 426-427.

¹⁴ CCC, # 890.

- “The infallibility of the Magisterium of the Pastors extends to all the elements of doctrine, including moral doctrine, without which the saving truths of the faith cannot be preserved, expounded, or observed.”¹⁵
- “The task of interpreting the Word of God authentically has been entrusted solely to the Magisterium of the Church, that is, to the Pope and to the bishops in communion with him.”¹⁶
- “Yet this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devotedly, guards it with dedication and expounds it faithfully. All that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed is drawn from this single deposit of faith.”¹⁷
- “It is clear therefore that, in the supremely wise arrangement of God, sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the Magisterium of the Church are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the others. Working together, each in its own way, under the action of the one Holy Spirit, they all contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.”¹⁸

The Biblical basis for this teaching is embedded in Matthew 16:18-19:

“And I tell you, you are Peter (*petros*), and on this rock (*petra*) I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Name changes are significant when God makes them.¹⁹ In this passage Jesus renames Simon “Rock.” He declares that he will build his Church upon this “Rock.” Jesus stakes his claim on Peter as the Prime Minister in his kingdom, but Jesus, not Peter, gives the guarantee that his Church will stand firm against the forces that will attack it. Peter and his successors will be the human foundation, but Jesus is the divine foundation and builder.

Jesus’ conferment of “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” on Peter is significant. It highlights the dynastic nature of the Church. Its meaning is clarified in Isaiah 22:19-22. In this passage an unworthy prime minister, Shebna, is being removed in favor of Eliakim. Eliakim, the new prime minister, is invested with the complete authority of the king, “the *key* of the house of David” (Is 22:21). The plenitude of authority given to Peter is clear in the stunning affirmation: “whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Mt 16:19).

¹⁵ CCC, # 2051.

¹⁶ CCC, # 100.

¹⁷ CCC, # 86.

¹⁸ CCC, # 95.

¹⁹ See: Gen 17:5; Gen 17:15; Gen 32:28, 34:10; Is 43:1, 48:1

It was the common understanding among first century Jews that the keys represented the spiritual authority to teach and judge according to God's word.²⁰ God's guarantee against teaching error is contained in Jesus' promise to Peter and his successors because God cannot support what is false. Thus the grace of infallibility protects the Pope from teaching error in the exercise of his office.

Objection: *Petra* verses *Petros*

The text from Matthew 16:16-17 unmistakably affirms Peter's primacy.²¹ Therefore some have sought to dilute its obvious meaning. A popular approach has been based on the masculine form of the Greek word for rock, *petros*, which is contrasted to the feminine variation, *petra*.

Petros, some have claimed, means "small stone" or "pebble" indicating Peter's human limitations. *Petra*, on the other hand, refers to a "massive rock" or "bolder," representing Peter's profession of faith or the faith upon which Jesus builds his Church.

This is a distinction without any linguistic merit. The Greek word for small stone is *lithos*, not *petra* or *petros*. Furthermore in the Greek language endings determine if a word is masculine or feminine. *Petra* is a generic word for "rock," large or small, but it is a feminine noun. In renaming Simon "Rock," the Greek language requires that this feminine word be given a masculine ending - thus, *petros*.

The word *petros* is used 154 times in the New Testament. In all but one case it is used as the second name for Simon. In the other case it is used to clarify the meaning of "Cephas" (Jn 1:42). The use of Cephas in John's Gospel and also in Paul's epistles²² as the name of Peter is very enlightening. Cephas is the Greek transliteration of the Aramaic word *kepha*, which means rock without any gender. Thus Jesus said, "you are *Kepha* and upon this *Kepha* I will build my church." This further underscores the weakness of the *petros* verses *petra* argument.

In addition the New Testament uses the word *petra* in passages that clearly refer to a small stone. For example, in Lk 8:6,13 it is used for the rocky soil upon which seed fell. In Rom 9:33 and 1 Pet 2:8 it is used for a stumbling stone. Had Matthew intended to make a clear distinction between Peter the small rock as opposed to the big rock of his profession of faith, he would have used *lithos* as he did in other passages.²³

II. SOLA SCRIPTURA

²⁰ J. Michael Miller, *The Shepherd and the Rock: Origins, Development, and Mission of the Papacy* p. 19.

²¹ Peter's primacy is now affirmed by numerous Protestant scholars, see: *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, III, pp. 384-386; D. A. Carson *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* on Matthew; Craig L. Blomberg, *New American Commentary*; R. T. Franc, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, W.F. Albright and C. S. Man, Howard Clark Kee, *Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible*; and H. N. Ribberbos, *Bible Student's Commentary*; also Oscar Cullmann in his famous book *Peter, Disciple, Apostle, Martyr* convincingly demonstrates that Christ meant Peter himself and not Peter's faith or profession.

²² 1 Cor 1:12; 3:22; 9:5; 15:5; Gal 1:18; Gal 2:9, 11, 14.

²³ Mt 3:9; 4:3, 6; 7:9.

Protestants cherish the Bible as holy, certain, and true. They prize it as God’s Word, a sure anchor of their faith, a place where they meet the Word who is God, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. These beliefs are also wonderfully Catholic. Unfortunately, some Protestants believe that the Catholic Church keeps the Bible away from the laity so that it won’t expose the Catholic doctrines that they think are unscriptural. They are taught that the Catholic Church invents doctrines that are quite independent from the Bible and are contrary to its teachings. At the core of this misunderstanding is the doctrine of *sola scriptura*, which cuts faithful Protestants off from the rich living experience of Christians from the time of the apostles.

In contrast to the Catholic Church, Protestants look to the Bible alone as its *only* infallible authoritative source in matters of faith and practice. This belief is captured by the Latin words *sola scriptura*, which means “by the Bible alone.” *Sola scriptura*, then, stands as the single pillar upon which Protestantism is built. Sacred Tradition, therefore, is rejected as an authoritative source of revelation and the authority of any church is discarded as the authentic and ultimate interpreter of divine revelation. Because this principle is the foundation of Protestantism, its meaning needs to be explored in some detail.

Essential Elements of *Sola Scriptura*

Clarity - The Bible is perspicuous, that is, all the essential truths that mankind needs for salvation are so clearly taught that even the uneducated can understand them when they read the Scriptures.

Self-interpretative – The Bible interprets itself, therefore, no church, council, creed, or confession of faith is authoritative nor needed to interpret the Bible.

Private interpretation - The individual believer comes to the knowledge of the essential truths of the Christian faith by personally studying the Bible, and he must base his faith on those truths alone.

Only Final Authority - The Bible is the only ultimate and infallible source that enables a Christian to know what God wants us to believe and how he wants us to behave.

Defects in *Sola Scriptura*

Sola scriptura bristles with the following difficulties. It is not historical; it is a principle of disunity; and it is not biblical. Let’s examine each of these points.

1. *Sola Scriptura* is Not Historical

If *sola scriptura* is the ultimate norm of faith and practice as it is claimed, then evidence of its widespread use should be found throughout Christian history. The opposite is discovered. Historically, it is evident that *sola scriptura* was an invention of the 16th century Reformers. There is no evidence that it was heard of, believed or practiced by Christians until the Reformation.

Obviously, if the Bible is the only infallible authority it must be readily accessible. Therefore it presupposes a widespread availability of Bibles. However, a wide distribution of Bibles was not even a possibility until the middle of the 14th century with the invention of the printing press. Previously Bibles were both costly and relatively scarce.

The historical evidence is overwhelming that the first generations of Christians did not have the New Testament. Jesus' message was orally passed on by the apostles and their successors, who taught how the New Covenant fulfilled and surpassed the covenants of the Old Testament. When the New Testament was completed it gave Christians a precious written summary of the truths that were passed down orally in Sacred Tradition. The Bible was never intended to communicate the entirety of Jesus' teaching with a stand-alone clarity. Indeed, the meaning of many biblical passages are only correctly interpreted within the framework of Sacred Tradition. Understanding the Mass as a sacrifice and belief in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist are examples.

Sacrifice of the Mass

The fulfillment of Malachi's prophesy is discovered in the sacrifice of the Mass.

“For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts” (Mal 1:11).

The Reformers denied that authentic Christian worship is a sacrifice. Yet this was the universal understanding of the apostolic Church. Kelly reports: “The eucharist was also, of course, the great act of worship of Christians, *their sacrifice*. The writers and liturgies of the period are *unanimous* in recognizing it as such.”²⁴ Referring to the fourth and fifth centuries he affirms: “During this period, as we might expect, the eucharist was regarded without question as the Christian *sacrifice*.”²⁵

Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist

Jesus said: “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (Jn 6:53). That teaching certainly sounds essential, but the Reformers disagreed over the meaning of Jesus words. Luther taught the Real Presence, a belief shared by many Anglicans, but Zwingli taught that the Eucharist was merely a symbol. Calvin also leaned toward a symbolic interpretation. By 1577 the book, *200 Interpretations of the Words, “This is My Body,”* was published. It illustrates the chaos *sola scriptura* fosters.

Nevertheless, the historical evidence is overwhelming that the early Church believed that the Eucharist was truly the body and blood of Jesus as the Protestant scholar J.N.D. Kelly affirmed.²⁶ James O'Connor writes in his excellent study, *The Hidden Manna: A Theology of the Eucharist*, “reading the Fathers can be compared to listening to a sustained hymn of praise for the Eucharist gifts.”²⁷ The non-Catholic scholar Darwell Stone also confirmed: “Throughout the writings of the Fathers there is unbroken

²⁴ *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 214, emphasis mine.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 449, emphasis mine.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 221, 440.

²⁷ p. 4.

agreement that the consecrated bread and wine are the body and blood of Christ, and that the Eucharist is a sacrifice.”²⁸

St. Ignatius, the third bishop of Antioch in Syria, is an important witness to the belief of the apostolic Church in the Real Presence. Arrested during the reign of the emperor Trajan (98-117), Ignatius was sent to the arena in Rome for execution. On the journey to his death St. Ignatius wrote to the Smyrneans:

“Now note well those who hold *heretical opinions* about the grace of Jesus Christ which came to us; note how contrary they are to the mind of God. They have no concern for love, none for the widow, none for the orphan, none for the oppressed, none for the prisoner or the one released, none for the hungry or thirsty. They abstain from the Eucharist and prayer, because they refuse to acknowledge that *the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ.*”²⁹

St. Ignatius wrote to the Philadelphians:

“Take care, therefore, to participate in one *Eucharist* for there is *one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ*, and one cup which leads to unity through his *blood*; there is one altar, just as there is one bishop, together with the presbytery and the deacons, my fellow servants, in order that whatever you do, you do in accordance with God.”³⁰

Heresies

Sacred Tradition, not *sola scriptura*, was the weapon the Church used to defend the truth against heresy. Kelly writes of the third and fourth centuries: “The supreme doctrinal authority remained, of course, the original revelation given by Christ and communicated to the Church by His apostles. This was the *divine* or *apostolic ‘tradition’* in the strict sense of the word.”³¹ Combating heresy in the early centuries amply demonstrates that God’s revelation was preserved by relying on Sacred Tradition and the infallible guidance of the Church’s magisterium.

The Fathers of the Church

There is an obvious inconsistency with the claim that *sola scriptura* is a fundamental principle of Christianity, but no one ever heard of it for almost fifteen hundred years. Therefore some attempts have been made to cite passages from early Christian writings that are alleged to show a belief in *sola scriptura*. An example is the following passage drawn from St. Cyril of Jerusalem’s *Catechetical Lectures*.

“In regard to the divine and holy mysteries of the faith, not the least part may be handed on without the Holy Scriptures. Do not be led astray by winning words and clever arguments. Even to me, who tell you these things, do not give ready belief, unless you receive from the Holy Scripture the proof of the things which I

²⁸ *The Holy Communion*, p. 37. Stone supports the same conclusion in his monumental two-volume study of this subject in the writings of the Church Fathers: *A History of the Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*.

²⁹ “Letter to the Smyrneans, Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, p. 112, emphasis mine.

³⁰ “Letter to the Philadelphians,” Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, p. 107, emphasis mine.

³¹ *Early Christian Doctrines*, pp. 41-42, emphasis mine.

announce. The salvation in which we believe is not proved from clever reasoning, but from the Holy Scriptures.”³²

Even if this statement were the only thing St. Cyril wrote on the subject, it would not support *sola scriptura*. Where does this passage reject the authority of Sacred Tradition and the Church? Where does it claim that the Bible is the *only* infallible source of doctrine and practice? Where does Cyril state that the Bible is self-interpretative and perspicuous? Indeed, if the Bible was self-interpretative and perspicuous, there would be no need for Cyril of Jerusalem to compose his *Catechetical Lectures*, the Scriptures alone would be sufficient.

Furthermore, upon examining the whole of Cyril’s *Catechetical Lectures*, it becomes evident he does not support *sola scriptura*. Consider the following statements, which are also drawn from St. Cyril’s writings.

The Infallible Authority of the Catholic Church

“[The Church] is called Catholic, then, because it extends over the whole world, from end to end of the earth; and because it teaches *universally* and *infallibly* each and every doctrine which must come to the knowledge of men, concerning things visible and invisible, heavenly and earthly.”³³

The Church Determines the Canon of the Bible

“Learn also diligently, and from the Church, what are the books of the Old Testament, and what those of the New.”³⁴

Sacred Tradition

“But what is also the point, let us note that the *very tradition*, teaching, and faith of the Catholic Church from the beginning, which the Lord gave, was *preached by the Apostles*, and was *preserved by the Fathers*. *On this was the Church founded*: and if anyone departs from this, he neither is nor any longer ought to be called a Christian.”³⁵

³² James White, *Sola Scriptura: The Protestant Position on the Bible*, p. 27; *Catechetical Lectures* 4:17.

³³ Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, # 838, p. 359, *Lectures* 18:23 (emphasis mine).

³⁴ Philip Schaff editor, *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Church*, Series 2, Vol. 26, 4:33.

³⁵ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, “Letters to Serapion,” 1:28, # 782, p. 336.

In his *Catechetical Lectures*, St. Cyril also teaches: the *Necessity of Baptism*,³⁶ the *Reality of Purgatory and Efficacy of Praying for the Dead*,³⁷ *The Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist*,³⁸ and the *Mass is a Sacrifice*.³⁹ Many Protestants deny these truths.

Similarly, attempts have been made that St. Augustine supported *sola scriptura*. Passages from his writings like the following are cited.

“Neither dare one agree with catholic bishops if by chance they err in anything, with the result that their opinion is against the canonical scriptures.”⁴⁰

“If anyone preaches either concerning Christ or concerning His church or concerning any other matter which pertains to our faith and life; I will not say, if we, but what Paul adds, if an angel from heaven should preach to you anything besides what you have received in the Scriptures of the Law and of the gospels, let he be anathema.”⁴¹

However, Augustine’s affirmation of the authority of the Church and Tradition clearly undermines any notion that he believed in *sola scriptura*.

Authority of the Church

“If you should find someone who does not yet believe in the Gospel, what would you answer him when he says: ‘I do not believe’? Indeed, *I would not believe in the Gospel myself if the authority of the Catholic Church did not influence me to do so.*”⁴²

“If the very order of episcopal succession is to be considered, how much more surely, truly, and safely do we number them from *Peter himself*, to whom, as to one representing the whole Church, the Lord said: ‘Upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not conquer it’.”⁴³

“[On the matter of the Pelagians] two Councils have already been sent to the *Apostolic See*; and from there rescripts too have come. The matter is at an end; would that the error too might sometime be at an end.”⁴⁴

Authority of the Church and Tradition

“What the universal Church holds, not as instituted by councils but as something always held, *is most correctly believed to have been handed down by apostolic authority.*”⁴⁵

³⁶ Ibid., # 811, p. 349, *Lectures* 3:10.

³⁷ Ibid. # 853, p. 363, *Lectures* 23:10.

³⁸ Ibid. # 840, p. 359, *Lectures* 19:1; Similar explicit statements are also found in: #'s 842, 843, 844, 845, 845a, 846, 847, 848, 853i, 853i.

³⁹ Ibid. # 851, p. 363, *Lectures* 23:8.

⁴⁰ *Sola Scriptura: The Protestant Position on the bible*, .p. 40-41.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., “Against the Letter of Mani Called ‘The Foundation’” (A.D. 397), # 1581, p. 52, emphasis mine.

⁴³ William A. Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. III, # 1418, p. 2, emphasis mine.

⁴⁴ Jurgens, *Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. III, # 1507, p. 28, emphasis mine.

⁴⁵ Ibid., “Baptism,” # 1631, p. 67.

Sacred Tradition

“What they found in the Church they held, what they learned they taught; what they received from the fathers they handed down to the sons.”⁴⁶

“What the universal Church holds, not as instituted by councils but s something always held, is most correctly believed to have been handed down by apostolic authority.”⁴⁷

There is no evidence that the early Church even heard of *sola scriptura* much less practiced it. St. Irenaeus, who became the bishop of Lions in the year A.D. 190, showed how the Church used the Bible. “Scripture must be interpreted in the light of its fundamental ground-plan, viz. the original revelation itself. For that reason correct exegesis was the prerogative of the Church, where the *apostolic tradition* or *doctrine* which was the key to Scripture had been kept intact.”⁴⁸ When Sacred Scripture is subjected to the whim of individual interpretation chaos is the result.

2. *Sola Scriptura* is Not Workable

The Protestant scholar Robert McAfee Brown highlights the unworkability of *sola scriptura* with the following observation:

“Protestants often sing,
We are not divided,
All one body we,
One in hope, in doctrine,
One in charity.

A more honest version would go,
We are all divided,
Not one body we,
One lacks faith, another hope,
And all lack charity.”⁴⁹

The history of Protestantism amply demonstrates that *sola scriptura* leads to doctrinal anarchy. The *World Christian Encyclopedia* reported in 2001 that there were 33,820 Christian denominations!⁵⁰ This multiplication of denominations exemplifies the evil fruit of individual interpretation that is at the core of *sola scriptura*. It has produced a chain reaction of endless disunity. Jesus came “to testify to the truth” and he taught that “everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice” (Jn 18:37). It is not possible that the truth is proclaimed in 33,820 denominations disagreeing with each other on almost every doctrinal issue.

⁴⁶ John R. Willis, *The Teachings of the Church Fathers*, “Against Julian,” p. 94.

⁴⁷ Jurgens, *Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. III, # 1631, p. 67.

⁴⁸ Kelly, *Early Christian doctrine*, p. 38, emphasis mine.

⁴⁹ p. 24.

⁵⁰ *World Christian Encyclopedia* reported this growth in denominations by the year 2000.

How could it be any different? Every sincere Protestant holding a different doctrinal position appeals to a scriptural passage that is “clear” to him, but not to those who hold an opposing view. They both can’t be correct because truth is one. Who decides? Both have appealed to their ultimate infallible authority, the Bible. Yet, the answer that each ardently grasps is different, even contradictory. This inevitably leads to doctrinal and moral chaos, and the watering down if not the outright denial of truth. Therefore Brown candidly acknowledges: “The sole authority of Scripture cannot be defended any longer without careful reformulation. No satisfactory reformulation has yet been achieved.”⁵¹ This is why Professor Brown correctly identifies authority “the Achilles’ heel for Protestantism.”⁵²

The practice of the Reformers further highlights the deficiency of *sola scriptura*. Luther’s early position proclaimed that everyone, “even by the humble miller’s maid, nay, a child of nine,” could interpret the Bible. However, as Christianity began to fracture, he radically altered his position. He called the Bible the “heresy book.” In 1525 he wrote: “There are as many sects and beliefs as there are heads. This fellow will have nothing to do with baptism; another denies the sacraments; a third believes that there is another world between this and the Last Day. Some teach that Christ is not God; some say this, some say that. There is no rustic so rude but that, if he dreams or fancies anything, it must be the whisper of the Holy Spirit and he himself is a prophet.”⁵³

Historical evidence shows that the Reformers used the principle of private judgment as their lever to abandon the Catholic Church. Both Luther and Calvin recognized that *sola scriptura* led to anarchy in belief and practice. Rather than abandon this indefensible principle, they employed another strategy. They quickly moved to positions that forbade their followers from exercising that same privilege.

The noted historian Will Durant reports: “It is instructive to observe how **Luther** moved from tolerance to dogma as his power and certainty grew... In an Open Letter to the Christian Nobility (1520) Luther ordained ‘every man a priest,’ with the right to interpret the Bible according to his private judgment and individual light; and added, ‘We should vanquish heretics with books, not with burning.’ . . . Already in 1522 he was outpaling the popes. ‘I do not admit,’ he wrote, ‘that my doctrine can be judged by anyone, even the angels. He who does not receive my doctrine cannot be saved’”⁵⁴ Where does the Bible give Martin Luther the authority to make such a claim?

Walter Köhler, a leading Protestant historian of the Reformation, records the punishments that resulted from Luther’s visitations: “Capital punishment for heresy was legitimized by the Lutheran authorities... Freedom of conscience and of religion was out of the question with Luther.”⁵⁵ The Protestant scholar P. Wappler also cites specific instances where Luther decided in favor of execution. He reports that “the principles of evangelical

⁵¹ Robert McAfee Brown, *The Spirit of Protestantism*, p. 171. Brown, a Protestant, is the Professor of Theology and Ethics at the Pacific School of Religion at Berkeley.

⁵² *Ibid.*, Chapter 14, pp. 171-185.

⁵³ Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, Vol. 6, p. 419.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 420-422.

⁵⁵ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol VI, p. 206.

freedom of belief and liberty of conscience” that Luther championed in 1525 “were most shamefully repudiated by this lay inquisition” of 1527.⁵⁶ Eventually, Luther proclaimed that anyone who deviated from his teaching was deserving of death. Because of his intolerance, Luther was dubbed “the Pope of Wittenberg (Papa Albiacus).”⁵⁷

John Calvin also assumed the role of a dictator. “The new clergy . . . became under Calvin more powerful than any priesthood since ancient Israel. The real law of a Christian state, said Calvin, must be the Bible; the clergy are the proper interpreters of that law; civil governments are subject to that law, and must enforce it as so interpreted... No one was to be excused from Protestant services on the plea of having a different belief; this greatest legislator of Protestantism completely repudiated the principle of private judgment with which the new religion had begun. He had seen the fragmentation of the Reformation into a hundred sects, and foresaw more; in Geneva he would have none of them. . . Heresy again became an insult to God and treason to the state and was to be punished with death... Between 1542 and 1564, 58 persons were put to death [in Geneva], and 76 were banished, for violating the new code.”⁵⁸

Both Luther and Calvin seized the principle of *sola scriptura* for themselves, but they rejected its use by others when it led to beliefs and practices contrary to their views. As long as Protestant leaders could prohibit individuals from the free exercise of *sola scriptura*, while still proclaiming it from the pulpit, they maintained a certain uniformity in belief and practice. However, once the freedom of private judgment was enshrined in the American Constitution, the floodgates were opened. Nothing could stop the avalanche of new denominations.

Protestant apologists have never explained *how* Scripture can be its own infallible interpreter. They have never shown *where* the Bible teaches this novel idea, nor can they give any examples *when* Scripture ever functioned as its own infallible interpreter.

3. *Sola Scriptura* is not Biblical

Protestants allege that the Bible alone is the only ultimate infallible authority in all matters of faith and practice, yet this idea is nowhere taught in the Bible. In his conversion story, Scott Hahn recalls the question that shattered his world and eventually led him into the Catholic Church: “Professor, where does the Bible teach that ‘Scripture alone’ is our sole authority?”⁵⁹ In his desperate attempt to find a biblical support for *sola scriptura*, Scott searched diligently, and sought the help of Protestant scholars. One professor candidly admitted “it is a theological presupposition, our starting point rather than a proven conclusion.”⁶⁰

Sacred Scripture teaches that “the *church* is the pillar and foundation of truth,” (1 Tim 3:15), not the Bible. All Christians should love, cherish and study the Bible. However,

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 333.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 332-333, 500, 502.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 472-473.

⁵⁹ Scott and Kimberly Hahn, *Rome Sweet Home*, p. 51.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 53.

the Bible explicitly rejects the idea that the individual's interpretation is authoritative. In his second letter Peter wrote: "First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation" (2 Pet 1:20).⁶¹ It is claimed, of course, that *sola scriptura* is taught in the Bible, but this is quickly dispelled once a passage is examined in light of the definition of *sola scriptura*. A text frequently cited is 2 Timothy 3:14-17.

"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

A study of this quotation quickly reveals it does not support *sola scriptura*. It reads "all scripture," not *only* scripture. Indeed, St. Paul wrote that his oral teaching was the word of God: "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the *word of God* which you *heard* from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as *what it really is, the word of God*, which is at work in you believers" (1 Thess 2:13). Furthermore, the "sacred writings" that Timothy learned from his childhood (2 Tim 3:15) refers to the Old Testament not the Bible. Certainly, the Old Testament alone is not the ultimate infallible source in all matters of faith and practice.

Another favorite text cited in support of *sola scriptura* is from Acts 17:11:

"Now these Jews [the Bereans] were more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so."

When this passage is examined it becomes clear that it doesn't support *sola scriptura*. It refutes it! The "sacred writings" in the passage also refer to the Old Testament. No Old Testament passage can support *sola scriptura* because it would negate the necessity of the New Testament. The Protestant principle is the Bible alone, not the Old Testament alone.

Furthermore, St. Paul judged the Jews in Thessalonica unfavorably because they trumped his inspired message with their interpretation of the Old Testament. Therefore they rejected the crucified Jesus as the Messiah. Subsequently, they fermented a riot against Paul in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-9) and later in Berea (Acts 17:13-15). The Bereans also examined the prophetic passages of the Old Testament, but their faith was based on the revelation of Jesus Christ, not on their interpretation of Scripture.

⁶¹ This passage so clearly rejects the idea of individual interpretation imbedded in *sola scriptura* that Protestant translators intentionally mistranslate the passage. The *New International Version* has "by the prophet's own interpretation, but *tou prophetou* is not in the sacred text. Equally incorrect is the translation of the *New American Standard Bible*, which gives the rendering "by the act of human will."

An observation

In discussing Catholic beliefs with Protestant relatives and friends, the conversation may start with a question like the following: “Why do Catholics call their priests father when the Bible teaches “call no man father” in Matthew 23:9? When the Catholic gives a solid biblical response showing that Jesus is not prohibiting the use of the word “father,” but the pride in assuming titles and authority, the question shifts to a different topic without the sense that a common understanding was achieved. The reason is simple, the vital issue between Catholics and Protestants is their different understanding of the authority, not the interpretation of Matthew 23:9. Therefore, it is a good idea to begin the discussion with the authority of Scripture, *sola scriptura*, which focuses the discussion on the fundamental issue.

II. JUSTIFICATION

Justification is the process of transforming the sinner from a state separation from God to the state of holiness and sonship of God. The key issues between Catholics and Protestants centers on how we get justification and what does it do to us.

Fundamental differences over the understanding of justification was the second major reason the Reformers broke away from the Catholic Church in the 16th century. These differences separate us today. Therefore any meaningful dialogue between Catholics and Protestants must include a substantive discussion of justification. This is true for several reasons:

- Many Protestants have a keen sense that salvation is by grace, a belief which Catholics share. Their convictions are reinforced through sermons, publications, crusades, Bible studies, and broadcasts.
- Many Protestants are erroneously convinced that Catholics believe that salvation is by works alone, that is, they can “earn” or “merit” their Salvation by their “good works” apart from the grace of Jesus Christ. Therefore they reason that Catholics are not Christians. This conclusion does not come from uncharitableness, but from their misunderstanding of Catholic teaching.
- What adds fuel to this fire of misunderstanding is the fact that many Catholics have a very poor understanding of justification and its Biblical basis.

Starting Point

The place to begin this discussion is the important beliefs that Catholics and Protestants share regarding justification.

- Our justification is by *grace*. This means our redemption is God’s free unmerited gift. The *Catechism* states it succinctly: “Our justification comes from the *grace* of God.”⁶²
- *Faith* in Jesus Christ is necessary for salvation. “Since without faith it is impossible to please God and to attain to the fellowship of his sons, therefore without faith no

⁶² CCC, # 1996; also 1998.

one has every attained justification, nor will anyone obtain eternal life ‘but he who endures to the end.’⁶³

Although Luther and the other Reformers affirmed the necessity of both grace and faith, they developed a flawed understanding of justification that rejected two vital elements of the doctrine of justification that was given to the Church by the apostles..

1. Specifically, they rejected the necessity of any good works in cooperation with the grace of justification. Thus Luther coined the expression “by faith alone” - *sola fide*, that is, one is saved by faith *alone*.
2. Secondly, the reformers taught that the grace of justification did not effect an internal transformation, but it was merely a legal declaration by God that we are called just.

The Reformers were motivated by the conviction that the Catholic Church itself was corrupt, not just some men in the Church. Therefore they used their doctrine of justification built on *sola scriptura* to abolish the authority of the bishops, especially the bishop of Rome, and the Church’s sacramental system. Because Protestants and Catholics share a great love for the Bible, it will prove helpful to examine these critical issues from the teaching of Sacred Scripture.

***SOLA FIDE* – BY FAITH ALONE**

Luther confused St. Paul’s use of the expressions “works of law” and the human “works” unaided by grace with the “good works” that are necessary for our salvation. *Works of law* was an idiomatic term for circumcision and the ceremonial laws and sacrifices of the Old Testament. It was in this context that St. Paul wrote:

“For no human being will be justified in his sight by *works of the law*, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. . . Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On the principle of works? No, but on the principle of faith. For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law” (Rom 3:20, 27-28).

In regard to working one’s way into heaven without grace, St. Paul also declared:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God -- not because of works, lest any man should boast.” (Eph 2:8-9).

However, St. Paul never taught that *good works* were unnecessary. Thus he wrote in the next verse of Ephesians:

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for *good works*, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10).

Similarly, he wrote to Titus:

⁶³ CCC, # 161, also: #’s 183, 846; Mk 16:16.

“he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration [Baptism] and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life. The saying is sure. I desire you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to apply themselves to *good deeds*; these are excellent and profitable to men. . . . And let our people learn to apply themselves to *good deeds*, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not to be unfruitful.” (Tit 3:5-8, 14).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that “God’s free initiative demands *man’s free response*.⁶⁴ It also makes its own the words of St. Augustine: “Indeed we also work, but we are only collaborating with God who works, for his mercy has gone before us.”⁶⁵ This instruction is firmly rooted in Sacred Scripture.

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, *work out your own salvation* with fear and trembling; *for God is at work in you, both to will and to work* for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:12-13).

“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I *worked harder* than any of them, though it was not I, but *the grace of God* which is with me” (1 Cor 15:10).

From the Catholic perspective every aspect of man’s cooperation with grace is itself a gift of God’s grace. Without God’s grace nothing man does is spiritually effective because the “good works” that are pleasing to God would be impossible. This understanding of the teaching of the Catholic Church narrows the distance from the Protestant view. It is not a question of grace or no-grace, but an issue of grace and grace. *Good works*, then from the Catholic perspective, are *graced* works.

What then is the difference? The Catholic Church teaches that we are not merely the passive recipients of God’s grace, but his grace enables us to freely cooperate with him. God is our Father, not our puppet master. In the traditional Protestant view of grace, man is the passive recipient of grace. Therefore even with grace he is not able to do anything that is pleasing to God. From this narrow perspective it is claimed that our good works are filthy rags, that is, supernaturally useless.

Summary

The *Catholic Church* views the impact of justification as *God’s family plan*. The interior transformation of justification creates a dynamic personal relationship between the Heavenly Father and his children by uniting us to His Only-Begotten Son through the Holy Spirit.

Traditional Protestantism views justification as a legal process in a courtroom, in which the Heavenly Judge ignores the interior sinfulness of the defendants because they are

⁶⁴ CCC, # 2002.

⁶⁵ CCC, # 2001.

covered by the merits of Jesus Christ. In this view mankind is passive. It is the *divine welfare plan!*

What is saving faith?

Catholics and Protestants use the same word *faith* in relationship to justification, but the meaning may be quite different. Catholics define faith as the firm belief in God's revealed truths and promises. However, faith for Luther and Calvin meant the infallible conviction that God will no longer impute our sins.

Luther taught that the only thing necessary for salvation was faith alone – *sola fide*. In contrast the Catholic Church teaches that saving faith is faith infused with love. The *Catechism* expresses it this way: “Living faith works through charity,”⁶⁶ because “when it is deprived of hope and love, faith does not fully unite the believer to Christ and does not make him a living member of his Body.”⁶⁷ What does the Bible teach on this subject?

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, *but faith working through love*” (Gal 5:6).

St. Paul's letter to the Romans is his great treatment of justification. It is important that he framed the entire letter with the expression “*the obedience of faith*” (Rom 1:5; 16:26), because in Sacred Scripture obedience and love are synonyms.

St. Paul used the word *faith* and its cognates over 200 times in the New Testament, but never with the qualifiers *alone* or *only*. It is also striking that Paul used the word *alone* more frequently than did any other New Testament writer. Are we to believe that Paul taught as the central part of the doctrine on justification that one is justified by faith alone, but never used the one modifier, *alone*, that would have made that meaning clear?

There is only one passage in the New Testament where one finds the words *faith alone*. James' epistle explicitly rejects this idea that Luther made a cornerstone of his doctrine on justification.

“You see that a man is justified by works and *not by faith alone*” (Jas 2:24).

James' teaching is right to the point. He also wrote: “Do you want to be shown, you foolish fellow, that faith apart from works is barren?” (Jas 2:20). Subsequently he concluded: “For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead” (Jas 2:26).

A DECLARATION OR INTERIOR TRANSFORMATION?

⁶⁶ CCC, # 1814.

⁶⁷ CCC, # 1815.

Many Protestants are taught that justification is merely a *legal, forensic act*. It consists in God's judicial declaration that we are called righteous because of the atoning death of Jesus Christ. However, justification does not work an internal change in those justified. This means the justified person is just as sinful after justification as he was before. Therefore the grace of justification does not eradicate sin by an internal transformation in man's soul. It only covers his sinfulness with the merits of Jesus Christ.

Luther used the analogy of a pile of manure to represent mankind's sinful nature. He compared the grace of justification to a snowfall that covers the manure. It looks pure and white, but the underlining reality remains unchanged. Luther taught that the remission of sin is not a real forgiveness. Sin is merely cloaked by the imputed merits of Christ. The only thing that mattered to Luther was the conviction that one is saved.

In a letter to his close collaborator Melancthon in 1521, Luther declared: "Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ more strongly, who triumphed over sin, death, and the world; as long as we live here, we must sin." Subsequently he stated: "If adultery could be committed in faith, it would not be a sin."⁶⁸

The Catholic Church teaches, instead, that the grace of justification cleanses us from sin by communicating God's righteousness.⁶⁹ "Justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the *interior* man."⁷⁰ Therefore we are resurrected to a "new life" as members of Christ's Body,⁷¹ making us "inwardly just."⁷² In the words of Scripture:

"Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a *new creation*; the old has passed away, behold, the *new* has come" (2 Cor 5:17).

There are also many passages in the Bible that use language that indicates an interior transformation by the removal of sin, for example: "blot out" and "wash me thoroughly" (Is 43:25; Ps 51:1-2), "remove our transgressions" (Ps 103:2), and "take away" (Jn 1:29). Both St. Paul and St. John speak about a regeneration into supernatural life (Jn 3:5; Titus 3:5). St. Paul also speaks about our being "washed" and "sanctified" (1 Cor 6:11). In his letter to the Ephesians he commands "be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the *new nature*" (Eph 4:23). In addition Scripture makes a sharp contrast between grace and sin that is as great as the difference between light and darkness (2 Corinthians 6:14; Ephesians 5:8), life and death (Romans 5:21; Colossians 2:13; 1 John 3:14), and between Christ and idols (2 Cor 6:15-18).

⁶⁸ *Catholic Encyclopedia*, "Justification" by Joseph Pohle, c. 1910 by Robert Appleton Company, online edition c. 2003 by K. Knight.

⁶⁹ CCC, # 1987.

⁷⁰ CCC, # 1989.

⁷¹ CCC, # 1988.

⁷² CCC, # 1992.

Furthermore, the New Testament is explicit in its frequent declarations that all humans will be judged by God on what they have *done*, not on faith alone. The following passages are representative:

- “For we must *all* appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that *each one* may receive good or evil, according to what he has *done* in the body” (2 Cor 5:10).
- “For he will render to *every man* according to his *works*” (Rom 2:6).
- “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay *every one* for what he has *done*” (Rev 22:12).
- “For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay *every man* for what he has *done*” (Mt 16:27)

The Fallout of *Sola Fide*

The Reformers teaching on justification led to the rejection of other beliefs that Christians held for 15 centuries. Therefore these beliefs are now areas of contention between Catholics and Protestants. These are listed below followed by the biblical citations that support Catholic teaching.

- The absurd idea that a Christian can’t lose his salvation (Mt 10:22; 1 Cor 9:24-10:13; Phil 3:8-14; 1 Jn 5:16-17; Rom 2:6; 8:12-13; Heb 10:26-27).⁷³
- The denial that the grace of justification comes through baptism (Jn 3:3, 5; Mk 16:16; Mt 28:20; Acts 2:38, 41; 20:16; 1 Cor 6:11).
- The denial of mortal sin (1 Jn 5:16-17).
- The denial of Purgatory (Rev 21:27; Heb 12:14; 1 Cor 5:13; 2 Macc 12:42, 46; Sir 7:33).
- The rejection of praying for the dead (2 Macc 12:42, 46; Sir 7:33).
- The denial of Indulgencies (1 Jn 2:1-2; Mt 16:18-19; Col 1:24).
- The rejection of the sacrament of Confession (Jn 20:21-23; 2 Cor 5:18; Mt 16:19; Mt 18:18; Jas 5:16).

III. THE NEXT STEP

Bishop Sheen once wrote: “There are not over a hundred people in the United States who hate the Roman Catholic Church; there are millions, however, who hate what they wrongly believe to be the Catholic Church.”

It is the intention of this essay to help Catholics better understand their faith and the key issues that divide us from other Christians. It is also the hope that this treatise will help Catholics become “familiar with the outlook of our separated brethren.”⁷⁴ Catholics need to explain and defend their beliefs biblically without engaging in heated arguments.

⁷³ There are more than 80 biblical passages in the New Testament that refute the idea “once saved, always saved.”

⁷⁴ “The Decree on Ecumenism,” *Unitatis Redintegratio*, # 9.

At its deepest level the Catholic Church defines itself Christ Mystical Body. This stupendous mystery underscores God's marvelous family plan. The loving Father sent the Son to recreate us through the rebirth of Baptism which transforms us to "share in the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4). The Holy Spirit's indwelling presence is the life force of the Church, its soul. *Sacred Tradition* is the living memory of all that Jesus taught kept alive and true by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus established a visible Church as his earthly family. He appointed Peter and the apostles, together with the bishops and priests who succeeded them, to share in the Father's paternity. The *Magisterium* is the appointed guardian and servant of the Word of God entrusted to the Church. The *sacraments* are the visible instruments Jesus established to communicate his love and life.

In *Baptism* Christians are "born again" into God's family. *Confirmation* matures God's children in the Holy Spirit so they can be faithful witnesses. *Penance* heals souls from the malady of sin, while the *Sacrament of the Sick* brings to God's family healing of body and soul. Christ's members are fed supernaturally in the *Eucharist*. *Holy Orders* extends Christ's priesthood thereby fulfilling the command, "Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:25). *Matrimony* raises the covenant of marriage to a supernatural level imaging Christ's love for the Church. In their loving fidelity to one another, husbands and wives raise godly children and, thus, people heaven.

The participation of God's Fatherhood in the sacrament of marriage underscores the Church's teaching regarding human sexuality. *Abortion* destroys the *fruit* of fatherhood. *Homosexuality* destroys the *act* of fatherhood. *Contraception* destroys the *possibility* of fatherhood and makes a *lie* out of marital self-giving. *Fornication* destroys the *commitment* of fatherhood. *Adultery, divorce and remarriage* destroys the *faithfulness* of fatherhood.

Catholics honor *Mary* in a special way because God has done "great things" for her.⁷⁵ She is the mother of God (Lk 1:43). We love her because she is also our spiritual mother (Rev 12:17). We ask the *saints* to pray for us because they are our heroes who reside with Jesus in paradise. We pray for the souls in purgatory because that are not yet in heaven and are in need. Finally, the Catholic Church cherishes the *Bible* as its priceless family history and the revealed Word of God.

Finally, we Catholics need to embrace a life of holiness that was so wonderfully exemplified by Pope John Paul II. He never wavered from proclaiming the truth by word and example. Clearly the words of St. Paul aptly applied to him: "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). The magnetism that drew the world to him was the love for Jesus that overflowed from him to all men and women without consideration of their religious affiliations or condition.

His powerful example prompted D. Stephen Long to write: "There are also two positive reasons Protestants need the papacy: for the sake of unity of the church, and for the sake

⁷⁵ Lk 1:49.

of truth grounded in love.”⁷⁶ Expanding on the theme of unity he continued: “The papacy offers an impressive visible manifestation of the church’s unity. Christians must seek the unity of Christ’s body in a visible way through the church. Both scripture and tradition so clearly bear witness to this claim that I need not argue for it here. When it comes to visible unity, it is time for us Protestants to admit that we have failed. We are disunified beyond repair and cannot solve our divisions through our traditional Protestant resources.”⁷⁷

Professor Long ended his essay with the following remarkable affirmation. “At one point in history, to be a Protestant was explicitly or tacitly to will an end to the papacy. I think many Protestants can now confess that was a mistaken view. Both the church and the world would sorely lack a necessary witness if there were no papacy. If being a Protestant means willing the end to the papacy, then I find myself no longer capable of willing such an act.”⁷⁸ The Second Vatican Council directs all Catholics to renew themselves. “The faithful should remember that they promote union among Christians better...when they try to live holier lives according to the Gospel. For the closer their union with the Father, the Word, and the Spirit, the more deeply and easily will they be able to grow in mutual brotherly love.”⁷⁹

⁷⁶ “In Need of a Pope?” *Christian Century*, May 17, 2005; professor Long teaches at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois..

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., # 7.