

Bible Conversations

Catholic-Protestant Dialogues on the Bible, Tradition, and Salvation

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(<http://ic.net/~erasmus/RAZHOME.HTM>)

. . . I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

(1 Corinthians 9:22-23)

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Dedication

To Three Fathers and Three Mothers:

To my wife Judy's parents: Ray and Joan Kozora: thank you for your love and for raising that lovely woman with whom I am privileged and honored to share my life and all my heart and soul.

To our Father in Heaven: It is for Your sake that I engage in apologetics and evangelism, so that more people may know of You and the grace and truth of Your gospel message. All praise and glory and honor and adoration to You!

To the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II: you are my hero and one of the greatest popes of all time. The Church will forever benefit from your remarkable teachings and profound example of Christian discipleship.

To Holy Mother Church: My goal as a writer is to glorify God and also to help make better known the depth of the riches and fullness of the Christian faith, uniquely preserved in you by the Holy Spirit, for all time, and for one and all.

To the Blessed Virgin Mary: the Immaculate one, the Queen of Heaven, and our Spiritual Mother. To you was given the unfathomable honor of bearing and raising the incarnate God: our Lord Jesus. Please help me, by your intercession, to become a better follower of your Son.

Introduction

The word *dialogue* appears in the Bible. The Greek *dialeptomai* occurs 13 times in the New Testament, and refers to reason, rational argument, discussion, discourse, debate, dispute and so forth. Particularly, we often see it applied to the Apostle Paul as he reasoned and argued with Jews in the synagogues (Acts 17:2,17, 18:4,19, 19:8) and Greeks and other Gentiles in the marketplaces and academies of the time, where the exchange of ideas took place (Acts 17:17, 18:4, 19:9-10).

St. Paul's evangelistic preaching wasn't simply thrilling oratory and edifying, "homiletic" exposition; it involved in-depth reasoning; even – at times, such as on Mars Hill (Acts 17:22-34) --, literally philosophical discourse.

Our Lord Jesus, too, often engaged in vigorous, rational, scriptural argument, especially with the Pharisees, much in the spirit of the ancient rabbis. One example of this among many occurs in Mark 12:18-27, where He is said to be "disputing" (Greek, *suzeteo*) with the Sadducees (cf. Acts 9:29, where the same word is used).

Rational argument, thinking, or open-minded discourse and dialogue is altogether permissible; indeed, required of all Christians who wish to have a robust, confident, reasonable faith amidst the competing ideas and faiths of the world and academia. Our Lord instructs us to love God with our *minds* as well as with all our hearts, souls, and strength (Luke 10:27).

The word *apologetics*; that is, the *defense* of Christianity (or Catholicism in particular, in the present instance) is derived etymologically from the Greek *apologia*, which term was used by Plato as a title of one of his many classic dialogues, in description of the philosopher Socrates' lengthy and elaborate defense or justification of himself against trumped-up, politically-motivated charges in Athens, in 399 B.C.

Apologia is also a biblical word, and appears much in the same sense as with Socrates, with regard to St. Paul's defense of himself during his lengthy trial (Acts 22:1, 25:16). It is also used with reference to Paul's defense and confirmation of the gospel

(Philippians 1:7,16 -- rendered *defense* in the RSV in all four instances).

The use of *apologia* in the imperative verse 1 Peter 3:15, with regard to the explanation of the hope of the gospel which resides in the heart of every Christian believer, makes apologetics a duty of *every* Christian, to some extent. But of course, people have different God-granted gifts and abilities, and the Christian or Catholic apologist is specifically called to that task as a matter of vocation and life's work.

The dialogue or debate (as a teaching tool) seems to have been sort of a lost art for some time now, in wider Christian circles (though apologists such as C.S. Lewis and G.K. Chesterton had always loved and utilized it). Thankfully, it is making a comeback, notably in Thomist philosopher and Catholic Christian apologist Peter Kreeft's books of fictional dialogues, some containing contributions from "Socrates" himself.

During the Middle Ages, there were many public disputations and debates, accompanied by much pomp and fanfare. Rhetoric was taught in the schools, as a key element of a broad, liberal arts education, based on the ancient arts, perfected by Pericles and others.

St. Thomas Aquinas, regarded by many as both the greatest Catholic theologian and philosopher, in his famous masterpiece *Summa Theologica*, used syllogistic reasoning and logic to great effect, anticipating many possible counter-responses of his opponents, in a sort of back-and-forth method, or self-dialogue.

He was, of course, incorporating the philosophical wisdom of Aristotle into Christian thought. Aristotle was a student of Plato, who in turn was taught by Socrates, in the Golden Era of Greek philosophy.

When the Protestant movement came about in the 16th century, many dialogues or disputations also took place, between Martin Luther, John Calvin and various Catholics such as Erasmus and Eck and Cardinal Sadoletto, as well as inter-Protestant squabbles. So this method is a time-honored one within Christianity as a whole; one which we should not be afraid

of as a means to ascertain truth and to test competing theological or exegetical ideas.

Socratic method, or a certain method of discussion, has been ably described by the prominent philosopher and authority on Plato and Socrates, Alfred E. Taylor, in his 1933 book *Socrates: The Man and His Thought*:

Truth has to be reached by dint of dialogue or debate, which may be carried on between two inquirers, or also within the heart of a single inquirer, as his "soul" questions itself and answers its own questions. The truth, which is not to be discovered by any direct inspection of "facts," may be beaten out in the critical confrontation of rival interpretations of them. It comes, when it comes, as the conclusion to a debate

Socrates starts from some proposition which, on any grounds, commends itself to him as presumably true. This he calls his initial *hypothesis*, and he proceeds to ask himself "what must follow if this is admitted," that is, to deduce its consequences . . . whatever follows from it is also set down as true, and whatever conflicts with it as false. Thus the assumption of the method is simply that truth is a coherent system, and that nothing which conflicts with a true principle can be true.

Frederick Copleston, the great Jesuit historian of philosophy, in his *History of Philosophy* (volume 1: *Greece and Rome*, 1946), elaborates:

This dialectic might, of course, prove somewhat irritating or even disconcerting or humiliating to those whose ignorance was exposed and whose cocksureness was broken down . . . but the aim of Socrates was not to humiliate or to disconcert. His aim was to discover the truth, not as a matter of pure speculation, but with a view to the good life: in order to act well, one must know what the good life is. His "irony," then, his profession of ignorance, was sincere; he did not know, but he wanted to

find out, and he wanted to induce others to reflect for themselves and to give real thought to the supremely important work of caring for their souls . . . Socrates called his method “midwifery,” . . . to express his intention of getting others to produce true ideas in their minds, with a view to right action.

This general outlook, informs the following series of dialogues. I have sought to adopt this Socratic method to some extent in my own apologetics. The most obvious mark of this influence has been my participation in many, many dialogues, throughout my now-20 years of apologetics and innumerable “serious discussions” with people of almost every imaginable worldview.

I have changed my mind on many things as a result of such dialogues: notably with regard to my conversion to Catholicism, which came about very much as a result of ecumenical dialogue carried out in my own living room. I continue to love and enjoy dialogue, and have posted dozens of these discussions on my website (and now, in books), in order to foster critical thinking among readers and seekers after truth, as I myself try to be at all times.

The following fifteen dialogues are loosely-based on real encounters with Protestants, over the course of nearly five years of Internet discussions on lists, bulletin boards, and private correspondence. My words are essentially the same as they were at the time, with some editing of extraneous or unnecessary material for the purpose of this book.

I have paraphrased and re-written the essential arguments of my Protestant opponents, in order to make this my own work, in my own words, but I have taken great pains to retain the *essence* of their arguments, so as not to distort or misrepresent their own particular Protestant strain of thought or ways of thinking about Scripture, Tradition, and salvation.

The Catholic apologist often hears the objection that a particular belief critiqued or scrutinized is only held by *some* Protestants (perhaps a minority) and not all, but that goes with the territory. In any treatment of a religious and intellectual

movement as splintered as Protestantism, it is simply impossible to present a unified portrayal. That being the case, I have tried to faithfully and accurately present the thought of each person, so as not to be guilty of creating any “straw men” (which I have absolutely no desire to do).

My opponents were most sharp and worthy ones, with a far above-average theological education and ability to express their beliefs eloquently and intelligently. Among the eleven people with whom I engaged in these dialogues, three had advanced theological degrees, some had attended Bible colleges, and others were very well-educated informally in such matters.

All of them would call themselves *evangelicals*; some generically so; others under the denominational categories of Presbyterian/Reformed, Baptist, Reformed Baptist, and Lutheran. Essentially, then, this is a series of discussions based on real dialogues, yet re-written and “tightened up” for public consumption, between a Catholic and former evangelical Protestant (myself) and able representatives of mainstream evangelical Protestantism in several of its major branches.

It is my devout wish that the reader will enjoy these exchanges as much as I did participating in them, and that they will be challenged to exercise their critical faculties, in order to make up their own minds on the issues, with knowledge and an accurate acquaintance with the thought of both parties.

Chapter One

The Premises of *Sola Scriptura*

Protestant (P): The Bible doesn't attempt to prove that God exists. His existence is regarded as self-evident, and those who deny this are termed *fools*. "The fool sayeth in his heart that there is no God."

Catholic (C): There are seven major philosophical / historical / ethical / experiential arguments for God, and Paul alludes to a type of teleological (design) argument in Romans 1. All Christians believe that God's existence is evident from natural law and natural theology, and the witness of the moral law in all men's hearts (what C.S. Lewis in *The Abolition of Man* called the *Tao*). Paul plays upon this in his sermon on Mars Hill to the philosophically-minded Greeks in Athens (Acts 17:16-34). Nevertheless, God does attempt to "prove" His existence by appearing to Moses, miracles, fulfilled prophecy, predicted military victories, Jesus' Resurrection, etc. It was anything but a secret, esoteric, "gnostic" knowledge. So although it is assumed in the Bible that there are no real atheists, this is not divorced from demonstrable evidence of some sort. The Bible is a propositional revelation, and as such, it offers "proofs" of itself indirectly, via evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus, fulfilled prophecy, the other demonstrations of God listed above, etc. It must do that because there are competing "Scriptures" (the Koran, Book of Mormon, Bhagavad-Gita, etc.). Then, of course, it goes on to teach authoritatively, in the name of God, as a result of being by nature *God-breathed*. But to say that *sola Scriptura* is assumed and not stated in its pages is stretching it, when all other doctrines that I can think of (save for the Assumption, which can be directly deduced from other biblically-grounded doctrines, such as the Immaculate Conception, and analogous incidents) are mentioned in Scripture, and there are also strong indications therein of the authority of both Tradition and Church. It is quite implausible, indeed even incomprehensible, in my opinion, to have a state of affairs (granting *sola Scriptura* for the sake of

argument) where the Bible would never teach its own exclusive position as the *rule of faith* for all Christians, over against Holy Church and Sacred Tradition. I think that the Protestant principle of authority offers little proactive argument of substance to establish its alleged biblical superiority. Protestantism as a system is never weaker than at its very foundation: *sola Scriptura*.

P: I grant that it is not always true that the Bible explicitly presents every important thing.

C: Then Protestants should cease chiding us for the Marian doctrines, prayers for the dead, etc., which are in the Bible to some extent, however little, whereas *sola Scriptura* is absent (at least explicitly so). But we are often taken to task for 1001 supposed "extrabiblical" excesses.

P: If we accept the Bible as God's revelation: a communication from the Almighty Creator of the Universe, then it is quite reasonable for some sort of *sola Scriptura* must be presupposed in order to do serious theology. We ought to be silent when God speaks.

C: For us the Bible is absolutely central, too. It simply isn't the exclusive (or final) authority, nor could it be, by its very nature, for true, binding authority requires human beings to exercise it.

P: Nothing else even remotely approaches the uniqueness of Holy Scripture. Therefore, the only way to disprove *sola Scriptura* is to produce another source of authority which deserves anything like the same honor and deference that Scripture deserves.

C: Scripture is unique, but it itself refers to an authoritative apostolic Tradition, which is not identical to itself (e.g., Jn 21:25, 1 Cor 11:2, 2 Thess 2:15, 3:6, 2 Tim 1:13-14, 2:2, 2 Pet 2:21). Apostolic Tradition and Scripture are harmonious, but they are not identical, and that being the case, *sola Scriptura* is demonstrated to be untrue. It's as simple as that, but there are

many other deficiencies in it as well. The Church is the Guardian and Custodian of the Apostolic Deposit (Jude 3), which includes the Bible. And of course, the Church determined the canon of the New Testament. Church, Tradition, and Scripture are not at odds with each other. They are all of a piece. Scripture and Tradition are two sides of the same coin, and the Church is necessary to infallibly proclaim the truths of Christianity, and to exercise doctrinal and disciplinary authority.

P: I don't believe that there is *no* biblical basis *for sola Scriptura*.

C: I would be delighted to see what you believe that basis is -- something besides biblical praises of God's Word, etc., which all Christians readily believe in the first place. That's *not sola Scriptura*: not even indirectly.

P: Don't you argue that the Bible clearly presents all important doctrines?

C: They are not always necessarily "clear" to one and all, though I believe many doctrines indeed *are*, for a fair, honest, and open-minded inquirer. I believe that all true Christian doctrines are either explicitly stated in the Bible, or able to be deduced from solid biblical evidences (i.e., I accept the *material sufficiency* of Scripture). In my opinion, *Sola Scriptura* falls under neither category.

P: In any event, some doctrines; for example: the Trinity and God's existence, are not explicitly laid out in Scripture.

C: But they are very easily deduced. The Trinity is established in this fashion by a ton of biblical arguments. No one who reads the Bible seriously can question the Triune Godhead for a second. It's the simplest demonstrable logic:

- 1) The Bible presents the Son as a Divine Person.
- 2) The Bible presents the Holy Spirit as a Divine Person.
- 3) The Bible presents the Father as a Divine Person.

4) Yet the Bible clearly teaches that there is one God, and no "gods."

Ergo: There are three Persons in the one Godhead.

I believe that *sola Scriptura* is merely a convenient assumption made by Protestants for lack of any superior principle of authority, and in order to overcome the weight of Christian Tradition, apostolic succession, and an authoritative Church. It cannot be found in Scripture, nor deduced from it, whereas our views are readily observed in Scripture, and also in the early and late Fathers, who claimed to have preserved the apostolic deposit. Yet Protestants have made *Bible Alone* their foundational principle: making a document a final authority, even though that document makes no such claim, and in fact contradicts it.

P: Even if I grant for the sake of argument that *sola Scriptura* is not clearly presented in Scripture, it really proves nothing.

C: My argument is that it seems likely that the foundation of a "scriptural system" would be clearly spelled out in Scripture. But I'm not even asking for that demonstration (which all Protestants seem to concede is absent, when pressed). I'm asking to see *anything* solidly in favor of *sola Scriptura*.

P: The only way that one could prove *sola Scriptura* to be false, would be to demonstrate that there are additional sources of authority in the same league as Scripture.

C: Okay:

1) The Church (Mt 16:18, 1 Tim 3:15).

2) Tradition (1 Cor 11:2, 2 Thess 2:15, 3:6, 2 Pet 2:21, cf. Acts 8:14, 1 Thess 2:9, 2:13, 1 Cor 15:1, Gal 1:9).

3) Oral Tradition (2 Tim 1:13-14, 2:2).

4) The many warnings and prohibitions against division and sectarianism, which are made inevitable by *sola Scriptura* (e.g., Jn 17:20-23, Rom 16:17, 1 Cor 1:10-13, Gal 5:19-21).

5) Church Conciliar Authority: Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-29).

6) Apostolic Authority and "Deposit" (Eph 2:20, Jude 3).

7) Apostolic Succession (Acts 1:20-26).

8) Church's (Bishops' and Priests') Authority to "bind and loose" (Mt 18:18).

9) Petrine/Papal Authority (Mt 16:18-19, Lk 22:31-32, Jn 21:15-17, Acts 2:14-41).

10) Authority of Bishops (Acts 14:22, 1 Tim 5:22, 2 Tim 1:6, Titus 1:5).

11) Church's/Bishops' Power of Excommunication and "Anathema" (Acts 8:14-24, 1 Cor 16:22, 1 Tim 5:20, 2 Tim 4:2, Titus 1:10-11).

12) And of course the Church determined the canon of Scripture. A stream cannot rise higher than its source. Strictly speaking, the Bible wasn't produced by the Church (as it was inspired and "God-breathed"), but the canon was, and since the two cannot be separated, in a large sense the Church "gave" us the Bible. Therefore, to set the Bible over against, or higher than the Church is absurd and ludicrous -- historically, biblically, and logically.

P: *Sola Scriptura* can be falsified; it will collapse if some comparable authority can be produced.

C: I believe I demonstrated that above, with eleven different biblical arguments, and one purely historical one, intimately related to the Bible (the canon).

P: It is biblically impermissible to come up with a nonfalsifiable doctrine out of thin air, without solid biblical support.

C: We don't necessarily have to demonstrate all our doctrines from Scripture (in our system), because we reject *sola Scriptura*. It isn't required. Church authority alone would be sufficient, just as the Jerusalem Council was "sufficient" before (and apart from) its inclusion in Scripture. And Jesus' teachings (and Paul's letters) were sufficient before they were recorded in Scripture as well. Would you deny that? If you do, you have severe biblical problems. If you don't, you have already conceded much of the issue under consideration.

P: God exercises plenty of authority indeed.

C: Of course, but does He not use men and His Church? God set up His Church so that doctrinal certainty, spiritual fullness, moral certitude, and binding discipline would be possible to be applied and clearly understood by all.

P: God's own word must be the final authority.

C: No one is denying the authority of Scripture, only that it exists *in isolation*, apart from Church and Tradition. My above proofs (save one) are "God's own word." So you must interpret all those passages in a fashion that salvages your Bible Alone view, which cannot be grounded in Scripture.

P: We cannot add to God's Word!

C: Indeed. I agree.

P: "Perspicuity" [the notion that Scripture is clearly understood by the average reader, in the main] is possible for one who is open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

C: That's a huge "if." And that is the catch to the whole thing. Who determines who is yielded to the Holy Spirit and who isn't? So Calvin and Luther, Wesley and C.S. Lewis weren't "yielded to the Holy Spirit" because they couldn't see the "clear" biblical teaching of adult baptism (and three of them even believed in regenerative baptism)? Why should anyone believe you over against those competing Protestant authorities? Or the others over against your position? What happens when there are disagreements? More sin: schism and division? This is hardly impressive, let alone epistemologically, biblically or ethically solid.

P: The Greek word *ekklesia* (*church*) is used in two ways in Scripture: 1) the "universal church" which includes all Christians of all time, with Christ as the Head; 2) the local church (e.g., the church in Galatia).

C: We agree, except that you define the universal Church as invisible and congregational in government, neither of which is biblical, as I demonstrate in my proofs cited above. Both of these notions are mere traditions of men; outrageously late traditions of men, I might add (precisely what we are perpetually accused of).

P: The notion of a "church" that is not a local church but also not the whole body, is unbiblical. So I find dubious any idea of a group having authority equal to Scripture.

C: I've provided plenty of biblical evidences for all the attributes of the Catholic Church, including (notably) the papacy, whereas you are making statements, but providing little biblical documentation for them.

P: John the Baptist criticized the religious leaders of his day for adding human traditions to the Word of God. He was excoriated

and eventually killed for defying authority. Do you see a parallel with Martin Luther?

C: No, because:

1) Martin Luther added the human tradition, not the Catholic Church.

2) John the Baptist criticized the Jewish leaders, but didn't leave the Jewish people, whereas Luther chose to leave the Catholic Church (by not renouncing clear, previously unknown heresy).

3) The Catholic Church has a long history of its saints criticizing authority, in the form of popes (e.g., St. Bernard, St. Francis, St. Catherine). This was nothing new. Leaving the Church and simultaneously claiming to be a "reformer" of it *was* new, though.

4) Luther, of course, wasn't killed, and was, in fact, protected by a Catholic prince (Frederick the Wise), in the time period which most historians consider his most dangerous hour. Later, perhaps the greatest threat to his life came the German peasants, whom he had forsaken in their Revolt of 1525, after having stirred them up. In fact, they referred to him as "Dr. Lugner" ("liar"), and Luther stated that he feared travel for this very reason.

P: How can a "church" improve upon the canon of God's Word?

C: It cannot, nor does the Catholic Church intend to. But authoritative interpretation remains the dilemma for the Bible Alone view.

P: If such a "church" denies that the Bible is God's Word, would that make the Bible less true?

C: No, but it never did, so this is a moot point.

P: All the "church" did was recognize truth, and there is nothing wrong with that.

C: Exactly. But the "church" did it, and that is the whole point. You miss the forest for the trees. What is this *small c* "church" which you have to put in quotes, as if it wasn't even real? It was *very* real: it decreed the canon, and also many other doctrines, such as the Trinity and Two Natures of Christ, which all evangelical Protestants accept.

P: The "church's" so-called "determination" of the canon was merely a recognition of what the apostles and early Christians had already accepted in practice.

C: It was a recognition of a broad consensus; nevertheless the consensus was sufficiently uncertain to have required an authoritative pronouncement. Books, e.g., such as James and Revelation weren't accepted by many until the mid-4th century.

P: But if the church as you describe it is an unbiblical notion, then its tradition definitely becomes suspect.

C: I've provided the biblical proofs for that; now it is your task to shoot them down and provide a "better way."

P: It is highly important that we find some common ground, for the purpose of constructive discussion, and then work through the issues from that premise.

C: That common ground is the centrality and inspiration of Holy Scripture and reverence for the Nicene Creed. The debate is over whether it is the *sole rule of faith* and *exclusive* authority.

P: If we are to discuss authority, then the one who claims an authority other than the one we both agree upon -- the inspiration and authority of Holy Scripture -- has the burden of proof.

C: Very well, then. You show me why the Bible is your sole authority (preferably from Scripture, as that seems to be the necessity of that view), and then I will show you why we include in the equation Church and Tradition. Fair enough? But you cannot escape so easily from your own assertions. That's what good debate and constructive criticism are all about. Show me why Scripture Alone is your authority, and why someone should believe that.

P: We agree on the authority of Scripture, so our rational common ground entails making rational arguments from Scripture.

C: Precisely! And this is why I have asked you to defend *sola Scriptura* from Scripture.

P: I believe that the Bible is God's Word, and that (because of its nature) it is the ultimate and final authority for mankind. God Himself is the ultimate authority in the universe, and this is His Word. There are many other lesser authorities as well, and Christians should submit to many of them, if they are legitimate. None of these are in any way comparable with the Bible, though.

C: But -- can't you see? -- this already *is sola Scriptura*. The Bible is the Rule of Faith for Protestants. Church and Tradition are strictly non-binding and optional.

P: I have never recognized Rome as having spiritual or theological or ecclesiological authority, because I have seen nothing in the Bible which indicates that this is so.

C: But you already implicitly accept Rome's authority because you accept the canon (save seven books) that it gave you, as well as many other orthodox doctrinal formulations (e.g., Two Natures of Christ, Virgin Birth, etc.).

P: The idea that other forms of authority must be in line with the Bible is a very old one.

C: That's right -- it's apostolic. And it has always been this way.

P: Luther did re-state it in a rather blunt, confrontational fashion.

C: Also in a self-defeating, impracticable fashion.

P: But is the concept really unique with him?

C: No, it was anticipated in groups such as the Marcionites, Arians, Monophysites, and Nestorians, as well as mavericks like John Wycliffe. But none of these are in the mainstream of orthodox Christianity, of course.

Chapter Two

Is the Bible the Ultimate Rule of Faith?

P: The Bible presents to mankind the entirety of God's special revelation, and sufficiently provides everything we need to know for salvation and obedience to God.

C: I believe in the material sufficiency of Scripture myself, and this is an acceptable Catholic position. I deny that Scripture is formally sufficient as an authority over against apostolic succession, biblically-consistent and biblically-based Tradition, and the Church (however the latter is defined). I deny that Scripture itself teaches either formal sufficiency or *sola Scriptura*. This will constitute your burden of proof.

P: The most important text in support of *sola Scriptura* is 2 Timothy 3:15-17. In v.15 we are informed that the sacred writings are "able to instruct you for salvation." In v.17 Paul tells us that the teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness that comes from the Bible makes us complete and equipped for every good work. I contend that Paul refers to Scripture in a categorical sense, without precise personal knowledge of the later-determined canon.

C: However, by *equipping for every good work* it does not follow that Tradition and Church are thereby excluded. Catholics (who understand their faith) abide by this passage as much as Protestants do. The Bible is wonderful, etc., and we believe it is materially sufficient, as you do. All we are saying is that this passage in no way proves Scripture Alone. If the Apostle Paul is teaching *sola Scriptura* here (which I deny), then he certainly contradicts himself in many other places in his biblical writings. I assume that Church and Tradition are present implicitly in 2 Timothy 3:15-16, based on topically cross-referencing to other Pauline passages on authority, apostolic Tradition, and the Church. Even if you deny that, you still cannot establish (logically) that 2 Timothy 3:15-16 compellingly teaches *sola*

Scriptura. It does no such thing. This is eisegesis, pure and simple, and an anachronistic hermeneutic of special pleading (i.e., reading a notion which originated in the 16th century back into the biblical text). That this is considered the very best argument for *sola Scriptura* is a startling indication of the utter biblical bankruptcy of the doctrine -- itself one of the pillars of Protestantism. Protestants say it is a *pillar*; I say it is the *Achilles' Heel* of your system.

P: To say that Scripture is sufficient is *not* to say that the church is unimportant!

C: What, then, is the church? When does it have authority? How does it exercise authority in the *sola Scriptura* worldview? Why is it important? How is that "importance" demonstrated? Which denomination (or combination of elements of denominations) constitutes the Protestant "church?" Was it a "good work" to canonize Scripture? Where is that list of books in Scripture itself? I readily agree with you, however, that Scripture can "equip for every good work," as I believe in the material sufficiency of the Bible. Your mistake is in equating that sufficiency with *formal* sufficiency as a norm of faith, to the exclusion of Church and Tradition. This does not follow logically, nor exegetically from the passage. It is a radically circular argument. At best, it might conceivably be regarded as *harmonious* with a view of *sola Scriptura*, assuming it was established on *other* biblical grounds. But in no way, shape, or form does it establish the principle of *sola Scriptura* of its own accord.

P: In James 1:18 and 1 Peter 1:23 Scripture is used by God to cause the salvation of men.

C: *Word of truth* in James 1:18 by no means refers to the written word alone (let alone the Bible), as a check of any Concordance under *word* will quickly establish. Even Jesus Himself is called *Word* (*logos* -- the Greek word used here), yet He is not identical with Scripture. St. Paul, in fact, contrasts the *logos* with the written word in, e.g., 2 Thessalonians 2:15. In effect, he then

equates the *logos* with *oral tradition* or *proclamation*. *Word* in Scripture is used far more as referring to preaching, rather than a Bible (i.e., collection of inspired writings), which our present Bible has no knowledge of. Protestants see *word* and they immediately equate it with *Scripture*. This is a very serious exegetical error. The same exact reasoning applies to 1 Peter 1:23. In fact, St. Peter defines "word" in context (1:25) as "the good news that was announced to you." In other words, he is referring to the gospel itself, which was preached, and which is not synonymous with "the Bible," as it preceded the New Testament entirely.

P: I agree that *word* often includes preaching, but the theology of that preaching is itself in Scripture.

C: Not always (see, e.g., Mk 4:33; 6:34; Jn 20:30; 21:25; Acts 1:2-3). In any event, in the references you made, to which I responded, you equated *word* with Scripture. I showed, contrariwise, from context, that this was clearly illegitimate interpretation.

P: Evangelical Protestants recognize the different meanings of *word* in the Bible. But we maintain that all of the original *kerygma* [gospel proclamation] that God wanted to communicate is contained in Scripture. That is an epistemological belief grounded in the Providence of God.

C: I recognize the first matter as true, which is why I was so surprised at your overly-simplistic arguments on that score. The second is an assumption which remains to be proven. These are the unsubstantiated premises upon which *sola Scriptura* is built. You claim to believe that Scripture is the sole norm and final authority. Very well, then, isn't it your duty to establish this whole teaching about Scriptural authority from Scripture itself? Does that not follow? Protestants come up with several alleged proof texts, but they all utterly collapse upon close examination. They last only as long as their first critique.

P: Catholic Tradition, the Koran, the Book of Mormon, etc., lack the marks of inspiration that Scripture possesses.

C: This neglects to see that each Protestant possesses (arbitrary and very fallible) tradition of his own, be it Lutheran tradition, or Reformed tradition, or Methodist tradition, or Seventh-Day Adventist tradition, Church of God tradition, or what not. No one can escape tradition. Simply invoking *sola Scriptura* does not eliminate the necessity and inevitability of interpretation and exegesis, and application of scriptural teaching in a systematic fashion to creeds, confessions, and denominational statements of belief. The truly relevant issue for theology and authority, therefore, is: *which* tradition is the *true* one.

P: It is true that Protestants have traditions also. But no Protestant claims that theirs is infallible.

C: I want to know how truth is ascertained in a system which eschews the very notion of infallibility from the outset. If you claim to be so certain about your eternal destiny, then I would imagine that you would at least hope for attainable certainty in the matter of doctrine. Doesn't that make sense to you?

P: You commit a logical fallacy in making a false dichotomy, whereby one has either doctrinal certainty (to your satisfaction) or complete relativism. But the biblical teachings are absolutely reliable for ascertaining doctrine. It is a human endeavor (hopefully guided by the Holy Spirit) to better comprehend that teaching. But we can have as much certainty about doctrine as we do about the law of gravity. We don't require a "science pope" to know that, so why should we need one in our search for spiritual truth? I believe that any other source of divine revelation besides Scripture doesn't measure up. I didn't deny that other traditions exist.

C: Then I eagerly look forward to you informing me of what these "absolutely reliable" biblical truths are, and why those who take a different view are wrong. This is your task. Sooner or later

you have to get down to brass tacks. Let's get real practical: Some guy is at your door asking where Christian truth is to be found. He wants it. He is ready to commit himself fully to Christ as a true disciple. What do you tell him? To go read *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis? Then -- beyond that -- the poor guy is left to fend for himself? Frankly, that is wholly inadequate, and is *not* the apostolic and biblical view, by any stretch of the imagination. The early Christians didn't preach "mere" Christianity, but full-bodied, incarnational, institutional Christianity.

P: The question is not, "Which tradition is correct?" Many traditions might be acceptable to God (as long as they are consistent with Scripture). I didn't say tradition was *bad*, only that it is not *authoritative* for the Protestant.

C: Many Protestants I have debated flatly assert that Catholic tradition is the moral and logical equivalent of Pharisaical tradition, and that (in effect) "tradition is a dirty word." You take a more nuanced view, which is good, and one reason I'm engaging you in discussion. Nevertheless, in the quest to arrive at truth in theology, you have to come up with some sort of means to do that. This is self-evident. Your task is to find a means to determine "which tradition is correct." One constant problem in debate with evangelicals is their tendency to become a rhetorical "slippery fish." An assertion is made, and often the reply is, "but that's not *my* belief." Yet the "outsider" obviously cannot refute hundreds of views all at once. We are forced to generalize to some extent. One cannot do otherwise. I am told that there are multiple millions of evangelicals who (as I am always told) agree on the "central issues" (as they define them). In such an endeavor, there are inevitably instances where my opponent at the time can say "that's not me." Catholicism, on the other hand, is a very easy target, because we are huge and old and everyone knows what we believe, and about sins in the past committed by Catholics. We have a history. Evangelicals can always (so they think) escape from history, and appeal to the Bible Alone (as if the Bible itself can be divorced from history and Church -- this is the fallacy). In that sense, debates such as

these are always difficult to undertake. That's one reason why I wanted you to defend your views (after you offered to do so).

P: Sufficiency of Scripture as a concept and principle of authority is obviously a post-revelational doctrine. References to oral teachings that were authoritative before the Bible was finally canonized do not disprove the truth of the doctrine today.

C: Okay; you acknowledge that oral forms were "authoritative" before Scripture was compiled. Please tell me, then, where in Scripture we are informed that oral Tradition is to altogether cease after the canon is established? I agree that these oral transmissions do not detract from Scripture itself, but then I believe that legitimate (not corrupt or Pharisaical) Tradition, whether oral or written, is consistent with Scripture – that they are two sides of a coin.

P: Oral truth was, undoubtedly, riddled with substantial error, though. If a source is not completely inerrant, how can you determine when it is in error?

C: By apostolic succession, papal and conciliar infallibility, and the consensus of the Fathers, the Church, and the faithful (Newman's *sensus fidelium*).

P: The Bible is God-breathed and inerrant.

C: No disagreement there.

P: Paul no doubt said many things that didn't end up in the Bible.

C: As did Jesus.

P: 2 Thessalonians 2:15 -- Paul says to follow his instruction whether by *letter* or *word of mouth*. This is taken to mean an endorsement of the authority of oral tradition. But Paul is merely giving a pastoral injunction to the Thessalonians; he is not laying

down a binding principle about the unquestionable authority of Oral Tradition.

C: Very well then. I could just as well say that 2 Timothy 3:15-16 falls in the same category, and was not intended as an eternal decree about the authority of *sola Scriptura*, over against Church and Tradition. The oral Tradition was just as binding in Paul's opinion as his written letters. In fact, I doubt that Paul would have regarded his own letters at that point as Holy Scripture, on a par with the Old Testament. He simply taught with authority, granted to Him by God, as an apostle, and confirmed by the Church. So I say that 2 Thessalonians 2:15 is strong evidence against *sola Scriptura*.

P: Let's focus on the question of Paul's intent. Neither you nor I have heard Paul's preaching in person. I maintain that Paul does not assume that every word he ever spoke (or even all of his *kerygma*) is the Word of God.

C: Yes; I think he thinks in that fashion only regarding that which he authoritatively teaches, as received from the apostles (1 Cor 11:2; 15:1-2; 1 Thess 2:13; 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6; 2 Tim 2:2; cf. Lk 1:1-2; Jude 3). It's real simple: if Paul's written letters are absolutely authoritative, and in fact became a large part of New Testament Scripture, and Paul says that his oral words are to be obeyed in the same fashion as his written, then - ergo -- there is an *authoritative* oral proclamation -- ergo -- *sola Scriptura* cannot be appealed to as the sole final authority in matters Christian. "If it was good enough for Paul, it's good enough for me . . ." You can try to apply the statements which trouble you only to the immediate context, but the problem with that, is that there are a host of teachings which would be able to be interpreted in the same arbitrary way, and applied only to the people who originally heard them. If that is to be the case across the board, why are Paul's letters Scripture in the first place? Obviously they have a general application to all believers in some sense. Do you say that all of the material in first and second Timothy applies only to Timothy? Of course not. Those letters

were written to him, but obviously have general application: e.g., Christian workers (2 Timothy 2:14-26), avoidance of verbal controversy (2 Tim 2:16-18, 23-25), the last days (2 Tim 3:1-9), qualifications of bishops and deacons (1 Tim 3:1-13), one mediator (1Tim 2:5).

P: God requires nothing of us which is not taught directly or indirectly in Scripture.

C: This is material sufficiency, with which I agree. But there still remains the question of Church authority and the nature of theological and spiritual certainty. I accept both Church and Tradition largely because Holy Scripture itself clearly indicates both. As long as Protestant denominations continue to disagree with, and contradict one another, this will be a live issue, as there is by logical necessity much error being propagated.

P: As I understand your position, the difference between material and formal sufficiency has to do with church authority.

C: Correct. It relates to who has the final say in determining the truth of Christian doctrine and theology: the individual (who must necessarily interpret and become ultimate judge of Scripture in the *sola Scriptura* outlook), or the authoritative Church, Tradition, and apostolic succession, to which the individual must submit as a divinely-established authority, higher than himself.

P: Scripture isn't the *sole norm*. We believe that Scripture is *sufficient*. Civil laws are norms in their own domain. Parental instructions are normative for children too.

C: Material sufficiency is fine. But we object to the exclusion of an authoritative Church, Tradition, and apostolic succession, as themselves unbiblical positions.

P: Some things in Scripture are difficult to understand unaided, but the *essential* teachings of Scripture are clear to all who read

seeking God's guidance, and those who are willing to live by what they learn in the Bible.

C: What *are* the "essential" teachings? Who determines that? Who gave them (whomever you cite) the authority to determine it? Where in the Bible is a list of such teachings? I agree that the Bible is largely accessible and understandable to those with an open heart and mind (I think, however, that a basic understanding of hermeneutics is very helpful to that end), but the history of the human race and the Bible indicate to me that the human heart is "deceitful above all things." This is the area where the glaring deficiencies of Protestant epistemology are obvious, in my opinion. What this boils down to is that when my "brother" disagrees with me on a doctrine, I simply deny that he is depending on the Holy Spirit, and sinfully assert that he is unwilling to go where God leads him. This is absurdly simplistic. Who, then, was following the Holy Spirit on the question of the Lord's Supper? Luther or Calvin? Who was right about the nature of baptism (e.g., does it regenerate?), Luther or Calvin? I challenge you to name even a single major doctrine that all Protestants agree on, which is not already a tenet where Protestants already agree with Catholics and Orthodox. If all you can agree on are doctrines we have taught for centuries, then what becomes of the distinctiveness and utility of the Protestant principle of authority and epistemology?

P: The clarity of Scripture is taught in the Bible itself. In Deuteronomy 6, Moses instructed the Israelites to talk about and pass on the Law to children. This implies that the teaching of the Law could be readily understood by all.

C: It did have to be "taught," however. It seems to me that this supports my view at least as much as it does yours. As for the Jews and the Old Testament in general; the Jews did not just have a "me and the Bible, and the Holy Ghost" mindset. Protestants have, of course, teachers, commentators, and interpreters of the Bible (and excellent ones at that -- often surpassing us Catholics in many respects). They are, however, strictly optional and non-

binding when it comes down to the individual and his choice of what he chooses to believe. This is the Protestant notion of private judgment and the nearly-absolute primacy of individual conscience (Luther's "plowboy").

P: Psalms 19:7 and 119:130 inform us that the Word of God can be grasped by the simple.

C: There is a significant sense in which this is indeed true. But then, if it is true in a formal sense, why such doctrinal confusion in Protestantism? One of your insuperable problems is that in the endeavor to show that Scripture is perspicuous, you merely heighten and magnify the folly and wrongfulness of denominationalism and competing truth claims. It's like robbing Peter to pay Paul.

P: Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for obscuring God's Word but never attributed to the message itself the cause for the misunderstanding.

C: Again, so, too, have many Protestants obscured God's Word by adopting so many contradictory interpretations of it. Paul is not an individualist at all. He often addresses churches as a whole. For Paul, Christian doctrine is entirely a corporate enterprise, not an individual one.

P: The *message* of Scripture is, indeed, *clear*.

C: So clear that even with a simple-enough ritual like baptism, which most Protestants regard as a sacrament, or at the least a binding and extremely important Christian rite, there are five major Protestant camps, irreconcilable and contradictory? So clear that differences are allowed on something as supremely important as the Lord's Supper, or Eucharist, which Jesus explicitly ties in directly to eternal life (Jn 6:50-51,54-58)? In fact, He even puts it in stronger terms: that those who do *not* partake of His Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist "have no life" in them (6:53). This is extremely serious business. Yet

Protestants allow anything from a symbolic Eucharist to communion only four times a year, etc., as if it is no big deal at all. But you say that Scripture is *clear* (i.e., apart from the necessity of a Church authority or binding Tradition, passed down through apostolic succession). These disputes are intra-Protestant squabbles. Luther himself basically came down on the "Catholic" side on both issues (especially with regard to baptism). I am trying to demonstrate the inherent weakness and unworkability of your belief in perspicuity.

P: There are different theories about baptism, but so what? That's just theory. *Getting* baptized is the central thing.

C: But *when* do we do it, and what does it *signify*? Does it *regenerate* or not? These are super-serious questions. Yet seemingly you wish to dismiss them as unimportant.

P: Like you, I decry this kind of unresolved speculation, but I don't think the solution is to arbitrarily select some authoritarian power which will arbitrate the differences. The solution is to determine where God has *shouted* and where He has *whispered*.

C: So God has "whispered" on baptism, over against the unanimous consensus for 1500 years, even continuing in the views of Luther, Wesley, and the Anglicans, and some other Protestant groups? Your viewpoint seems to be: "if there is *in fact* difference of opinion on any given doctrine, then that proves that God 'whispered' and that we must despair of any solution, and of finding the truth pertaining to that question."

P: There are many things in Christianity that are not primary central to the gospel message.

C: What is His *central* message? Where is it found in Scripture? How is it to be propagated? Who decides what is *not* "central?" Where is *that* differentiation in Scripture? Where are we informed that "non-central" doctrines are therefore less important, and not to be followed by the Christian -- that they are

released from the responsibility of allegiance to those "lesser" teachings? The Bible speaks of Christian truth, period, not this multi-level (ultimately relativist) notion of central, secondary, and disposable "truths." It would be better to take a firm position that what one has is *the truth* (like, e.g., the Church of Christ) than to relativize and trivialize Christian doctrine and ethics, and reduce theological truth to whim and fancy and individual opinion (some even to the point of utter irrelevance and unimportance), oftentimes divorced from the guiding influence of any Christian corporate body, whether Protestant or Catholic. In effect, you relegate much of revelation to mystery and darkness -- forsaking hope of ever understanding and coming to agreement on certain matters. This is the counsel of despair, and most unbiblical.

P: In my opinion, diversity on secondary points do not undercut the central doctrines of evangelical Christianity, or of the Bible itself.

C: Somehow, error and falsehood supports truth? Where do you find this notion in Scripture?!

P: I would point out that there is much diversity within Catholicism as well.

C: This is always the reply, but it fails miserably, because we have the long-established means to determine which of these dissenting views is not Catholic teaching in the first place (the Councils, the "books," the papacy, catechisms, etc. -- the Magisterium). You have no such mechanism, and so reduce to doctrinal relativism and ecclesiological chaos (because you simply split and form more sects). We have dissenters on, for example, contraception, or divorce. But they are clearly outside the Catholic Tradition on those issues: even the typical non-Catholic on the streets often knows what Catholic teaching is on those matters. So do the dissenters (they're not stupid). They are deliberately trying to change the Church to fit into their image and fancies. So this -- if anything -- bolsters *my* point, because we

see clearly the difference in principle between Catholicism and Protestantism. How do you resolve and determine which is the "official" view in Protestantism? No Protestant can explain why their view is better than the others, except by saying that it is more "biblical." The trouble is, all the heretics through the centuries said the same thing. That is only the *beginning* of the problem of authority and proper biblical interpretation, not its solution, by any means.

P: We explore the biblical data by the same reasoning processes that we use in other fields of knowledge.

C: Where does the Holy Spirit come in? Or prayer? Or the righteousness which is equally incumbent upon us if we hope to find truth (see. e.g., Pr 2:7; Lk 6:45 -- cf. Mt 12:37; Jas 3:17, Titus 1:7-8 -- cf. 1 Tim 3:1-10)? Here your secularist-soaked epistemology again shows through. We need not undermine the usual scholarly means to interpret biblical texts, but you seem to almost equate secular wisdom with Christian wisdom. Colossians 2:2-4 makes it clear that all wisdom derives from Christ. Paul appears to contrast that wisdom with "plausible arguments" in 2:4. The superiority of God's wisdom over against man's is clearly asserted in Paul's words to the Greek Corinthians (1 Corinthians 1:18-31). *God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom . . .* (1:25). Not that I am against solid reasoning, or philosophy, or science -- not in the slightest. But I reject the notion that Bible study or theology is equivalent epistemologically to those endeavors, for the reasons I have carefully explained. I believe in the medieval view that theology was the "queen of the sciences."

P: I don't believe that any Christian teachers possess authority if they depart from the true biblical message.

C: Who defines this truth, and how? This illustrates perfectly what I was just saying. Such a system is unworkable in practice. Unity of doctrine is the guarantee of fidelity to Scripture. This is precisely what Protestantism lacks, yet it continues to assert (in a

logically circular fashion) that it (whichever version) is somehow faithful to the Bible, whereas Catholics and Orthodox and others who accept Tradition are not. What gives?

P: According to the dictionary, there are two basic meanings of *authority*: I. Power to enforce obedience and II. Power to influence action, opinion, belief. The first meaning might be characterized as *authoritarian*, while the second is *authoritative*. This is the distinction between the authority of the policeman and that of the scholar. I submit that God himself has both types of authority, but the church and revelation has type II authority.

C: Then you have severe scriptural problems, as Paul issued anathemas, and was extremely "authoritarian," as you put it, as were early Councils such as Nicaea and Chalcedon, which Protestants generally accept as "orthodox." The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) was *exceedingly* "authoritarian." It issued *commands*, not merely "scholarly" opinions from an ivory tower. The "priesthood of scholars," as I sometimes describe Protestant authority, is a recent novel innovation, not even in line with Protestant historical foundations. Of course, this system is altogether arbitrary, too. It reduces "authority" to a head count, and we all know how risky "truth by head count" is (dogma reduced to sociology . . .). The fact remains that each Protestant is ultimately (by logical reduction) not absolutely obliged to follow *any* authority, since this is the quintessential Protestant principle. Following Luther (who devised it at Worms), the individual can (at least in certain circumstances, such as the one he found himself in) judge Scripture, the pope, and ecumenical Councils (not to mention pastors), according to his own will and/or understanding. But we are not spiritual lone rangers, all left to fend for ourselves and figure out each doctrine. God did not leave us "orphans," as Jesus said.

P: I believe in an egalitarian model of church leadership, which I think is the New Testament position.

C: Apart from the fact that such an ecclesiology was unheard-of before the 16th-century (and even then only among the "radical Reformers" such as the Anabaptists), why should I accept your view over against one of the other Protestant variants? Everyone appeals to Scripture. But how does that fact alone resolve the differences and contradictions? For my part, I support myself (i.e., as a Catholic) the same way that the Church Fathers and early Councils did: by an appeal to an unbroken apostolic succession which goes back to Jesus and the apostles. This is how we can determine Christian truth: it is what we "received" from Jesus and the apostles. The only "innovators" were the heretics, such as the Arians, Monophysites, and Nestorians.

P: Insofar as the Reformation was a revolt, it was against a merely human institution.

C: Where was the institutional Church all that time, then? To what "institution" would a Christian point to and say "there is the Christian Church" (as St. Augustine stated)?

P: God will have the final say -- at the judgment.

C: So there is no "final say," humanly-speaking? We can attain no certainty in Christian doctrine till we are judged by God?

P: You contend that disagreement within the believing community is a disproof of epistemological and theological accuracy.

C: The Bible constantly warns about divisions. These make it very difficult for the man on the street to find truth within the Christian framework. Again, you have to tell me why a particular Protestant tradition is true and the others which contradict it false. It will do no good to say that truth can't be achieved, or if so, only with regard to the arbitrary "central doctrines," because this is blatantly contrary to Scripture, which makes no such distinction: John 8:32; 14:6, 17; 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-15; 17:17-19; Romans

1:18,25; 1 Timothy 2:4; 3:15; 2 Timothy 3:7; 1 John 4:6; 5:6; many more.

P: Here you clearly go overboard. Do you interpret these verses to say that Christians will know all truth -- *everything*? You will probably reply that we can know all *theological* truth.

C: Yes, I would (to answer your last statement).

P: Where in Scripture do you find this notion?

C: In John 8:32, (taking into consideration the context) *truth* clearly refers to discipleship and Christian truth, as indicated in 8:31. The very notion of being set free refers to bondage to sin. Jesus talks about being a "slave to sin" in 8:34. In 8:43, He says that the Jews "cannot bear to hear my word." Jesus talked about spirituality and theology and ethics, not science, etc. This is obvious. The same argument can be made about all the passages in John 14-16 concerning the *Spirit of truth*. For example, in John 16:8, reference is made to "he will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment." Then in 16:13, Jesus says "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth . . ." I say that in context, this is clearly referring to spiritual and theological truth, not exhaustive knowledge. Again, in John 14:26, Jesus says that "the Spirit will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." Since Jesus (as far as we know) stuck to "religious" subject matter, it is safe to guess that the Holy Spirit basically would, too. We know that this is how God has chosen to communicate to the human race, in His revelations, encapsulated in the Bible. But this theological knowledge could be known with certainty, according to the same proof texts. These passages concerning truth qualify themselves in terms of not applying to all knowledge, against your rhetorical assertion, but they do not at all suggest a hierarchy of spiritual truths, or the unattainability of such knowledge and certainty -- also contrary to your position. Likewise, in Romans 1:18-25, *truth* in context refers to God's attributes (1:19-20), what I would call a primitive version of the

teleological (Design) argument for God (1:20), not honoring and thanking God (1:21), and the folly and closed mind of the unbeliever (1:21-23). 1:25 refers to the truth about God. 1 Timothy 2:4-5 is in the same sense ("who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator . . ."). Paul says that he is a teacher of the Gentiles *in faith and truth* (1 Timothy 2:7). Likewise, in the context of 1 Timothy 3:15, where the church is described as "the pillar and bulwark of the truth," Paul refers to the mystery of our religion and gives a sort of "pocket catechism" (3:16). In 2 Timothy 3:7, the context is religious belief as well (see 3:4-5). In 3:8, Paul refers to counterfeit faith, in contradistinction to the truth. So we find that context is decisive in favor of the very interpretation I put forth, in virtually all these passages. You will have to refute all this for your point to stand. Lexicons also confirm this predominant meaning of *truth* in Scripture. Thayer's *Greek-English Lexicon* states that *aleuthia* (Strong's word #225) can have a meaning of "what is true in any matter under consideration." In the great majority of instances, however, the meaning is "what is true in things appertaining to God and the duties of man (moral and religious truth)." Under this heading are many (all?) verses I cited (such as Romans 1:18,25; Jn 8:32; 1 Tim 2:7, 3:15; 2 Tim 3:7-8; 1 Jn 4:6; 5:6; Jn 14:6,17; 15:26; 16:13). Vine and Kittel put forth essentially the same definition. I rest my case . . .

P: Jesus didn't I say, "I am the way, the theological truth, and the life." Obviously there are limits to knowledge. I contend that you can find no basis in Scripture to claim perfect knowledge in theology if you deny it in other areas of thought.

C: Well, I think the above data shows otherwise. The scriptural evidence is overwhelming. You are thinking in overly-rationalistic terms (in the bad sense of that word): in ways which are most unbiblical. It may be some sort of self-consistent philosophy which you espouse, but it is not a biblical or apostolic viewpoint, assuming the Bible is to be our guide in these matters, and not merely human philosophy (read, tradition).

P: You want me to tell you which Protestant tradition is true. My answer is: none of them. All Christian traditions contain a mixture of merely human speculation on top of the truth God makes clear in the Bible.

C: How do we determine which is the "speculation" and which is the supposedly "clear" truth of the Bible? Do you give up on those doctrines which you say are not clear? What are those, by the way? Baptism, Eucharist, free will, Church government, sex roles, female clergy, divorce, contraception, etc.? Can you at least give me a list and explain how you arrived at that?

P: God has chosen to reveal some things and kept other things hidden (Deuteronomy 29:29). We should accept this and the diversity that God allows within the biblical framework.

C: God allows "diversity," meaning *contradiction*, therefore (necessarily) error? I find that absolutely astounding. As for Deuteronomy 29:29, the context (the whole chapter) suggests strongly that the *secret things* is a reference to God's Providence and foreknowledge and sovereignty, ways in which He is far higher than us. But the verse then goes on to say that "the revealed things belong to us and to our children forever, to observe all the words of this law." In other words, revelation is immediately placed outside the realm of the "secret things." Thus you violate the logic of the text. You try to suggest a "diversity" (read "error") within the revelation, whereas the text separates the two: precisely the opposite. Deuteronomy 29:29 teaches us that we may do all the words of the law. Jesus affirms that the gospel and the New Covenant is a continuation and fulfillment of the Law (Mt 5:17-20). Paul concurs (Rom 3:31; 7:12,16,22,25; 8:4; 13:9-10; 1 Cor 9:21). Note that when our Lord Jesus commissions the disciples before His Ascension (Mt 28:20), He instructs them to "teach[ing] them to obey everything that I have commanded you . . ." Note that this is not the central doctrines only, not "mere Christianity," not a minimalistic set of beliefs, but *everything*. Truth is truth, and any way you look at it.

P: *Everything* doesn't mean absolutely every word, but rather, *every substantial concept*.

C: Fair enough. But this is still enough to make your vaunted "diversity" highly questionable from the biblical standpoint. You now have to justify Protestant *de facto* relativism in light of this command. When Jesus prayed His priestly prayer at the Last Supper, what was the subject? Unity; oneness. And why was that supremely important? Jesus explains that very clearly:

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me . . . that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

(John 17:20-23; NRSV)

P: Jesus is praying for *interpersonal unity*, not organizational conformity.

C: Prove it! I say *completely one* clearly includes doctrine. And being *one* as the three Divine Persons in the Trinity are one also must include uniformity of belief. It is as clear as the noon sun in a cloudless sky. Of course love is always central. No one is denying that. But you deny the importance of doctrinal unity (what other choice do you have, given the endless divisions in your camp?).

P: The essential unity of the Trinity is based on love, not doctrine.

C: You cannot escape the fact that there is no doctrinal diversity within the Triune God. Of course we will always fall short of that perfection as human beings, but at least we can maintain the concept to strive for. Evangelicals, however, simply chuck the concept and try to argue that doctrine is not at all in sight.

P: It is most unfortunate that your solution is to point us to a formal, sterile, enforced, arbitrary uniformity that will make the condition of the church worse.

C: So all doctrinal uniformity is "formal" and "sterile"? How did you arrive at these conclusions?

P: I dislike "doctrinal pluralism" just as much as you do. All I am suggesting is that we recognize that God has not told us everything. Speculation is separate from what has been divinely-revealed in Scripture.

C: You say there is no way to avoid the pluralism, and that Scripture isn't clear enough on many of the issues (so the result of that belief clearly is "diversity"), yet you don't desire that result. If God really does believe in *sola Scriptura*, then would it not be His will to have made Scripture plain enough for evangelicals to come to agreement on that basis? If that's how God designed things in His Providence, then the result must be good and desirable, no? I am saying that these very notions run contrary to Scripture itself, and that obviously something beyond Scripture (as an *authority*, not as additional *revelation*) is needed in order for Christianity to be unified and compelling to the unbeliever. I haven't given up on finding theological truth in its completeness. It seems that you have. So while you may pooh-pooh unity as irrelevant to "epistemological" accuracy; the Lord has far more important things in mind: the salvation of souls, a consistent and compelling Christian witness, a proof that He was sent to earth to be our Savior, etc. Catholics get blasted all the time for our supposed "extrabiblical" beliefs and "traditions of men." That works both ways, and an unbiblical construct is even more inconsistent within your *sola Scriptura* worldview. Jesus is

concerned with the very heart of the gospel, and what will make it more presentable and believable to the pagan world. Your system makes pluralism in doctrine inevitable; He wants us to be one as the Holy Trinity is one! There is no way out of this. Everyone knows that Protestantism has no such unity. I would say that it is literally impossible to achieve, given Protestant foundational premises, which bring about violations of God's express will for the unity of His Church. I want to make it clear that I am drawing a contrast between the Protestant methodology and principle of authority and what appears to me to be Jesus' approach. That in no way should be taken to mean that I believe Protestants are consciously working against Christ or are insincere in following Him. Most people are unaware of the logical implications of their own premises – indeed whole systems. I have been arguing that the Protestant *system* leads (*logically*) to an unbiblical way of thinking -- even if Protestants are unaware of that fact.

P: Substituting external doctrinal uniformity for true inner, spiritual unity will not make the gospel any more believable to unbelievers.

C: I didn't accept Catholic doctrine out of any "external" compulsion or coercion, but because I came to believe with all my heart that it was true, and that it more closely conformed to the "biblical shape of reality."

P: The gospel cannot be reduced to formally joining a church.

C: Here you seek again to pit the gospel against the Church (or in a strange rhetorical fashion, equate them, as if that is our view). That is an unthinkable position to take, biblically. You may dispute which communion represents the "Church," but to make this false dichotomy is absolutely unacceptable in a Christian worldview.

P: You seem to suggest that Catholic organizational and dogmatic unity provides a proof that Catholicism is true.

C: No, but it is a great start! Dogmatic *disunity* certainly is no compelling argument for the superiority of Protestantism. Luther and Calvin despised this as much as I do. It is ironic and strange that evangelicals today dismiss this huge problem with the wave of a hand. How disrespectful towards their own Founders and forerunners; spiritual ancestors . . .

P: Truth is true whether "The Church" agrees or not.

C: But who decides?

P: Why do you insist that theological inquiry must be undertaken in an authoritarian fashion which is foreign to almost every other field of study in which humans search for truth?

C: As for "authoritarian fashion," I guess you would have to further define that for me. The Christian Church has authority, certainly. Christianity is indeed different. One can arrive at truth in Christianity by various means (including experience) which are not present in the "secular" disciplines of learning. This is a grave error that you commit: equating Christianity and Christian Revelation with mere philosophy or science or the arts: a thoroughly secular epistemology, especially when you imply (correct me if I'm wrong) that no more certainty can be achieved in Christianity, than, say, in biology or astronomy or algebra. That is preposterous. Not only have I given you (above) many biblical proofs that truth is attainable; but furthermore, God (speaking through Paul) condemns those who are "always being instructed and can never arrive at a knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7).

P: It would be fabulous, I agree, if God *had* decided to do things your way. But the evidence demonstrates that he hasn't. We have acquired an unrealistic expectation from the Scholastics, whereby we think we are owed an answer to every question we ask.

C: This opinion isn't from the Scholastics, it's from the Bible, as I think I've demonstrated.

P: You can believe in infallibility fideistically (purely by faith, with no reason), but there is no actual *evidence* to support the claim.

C: You keep switching over to my view and refusing to explicate yours. It would be simple enough for you to admit that you can't attain certainty on thus-and-so doctrines (or Christianity in general) within your system. Then this debate would be over, as I would consider that a profound demonstration of the inadequacy of your system. You, to the contrary, seem to equate that outcome with its glory.

P: Those things which God has made clear in Scripture are able to be known with absolute certainty.

C: Which things are those? And who decides that, and how?

P: Incomplete knowledge is not the equivalent of relativism.

C: I didn't say it was. When I make the charge of relativism, it is always in reference to competing, contradictory truth claims within the Protestant fold (even if one restricts that "fold" to evangelicalism).

P: At least you are honest enough to admit that your epistemology entails two different, distinct infallible sources. I think you would be even more honest if you acknowledged that you see the authority of Scripture itself being derived from the church.

C: I can't say that and be consistent, for my Church doesn't believe that. We teach that Scripture (being God-breathed) is inherently authoritative and revelatory, apart from its being declared so by the Church. However, once one honestly faces the enormous problem of authoritative interpretation, the Church is

necessary in order to avoid error and rampant contradictory viewpoints. This is a subtle distinction, but a real and valid one.

P: You seem to want earthly arbiters, when it comes to theology.

C: You want to have your cake and eat it too. On the one hand, you say revelation is different from other knowledge humans attain (which is true). But when it comes to that revelation's "clarity" and "interpretation" and an espousal of the whole Christian truth which the New Testament authors casually assume to be ascertainable, you fall back on merely human epistemology, and make analogies to human sciences and fields of knowledge. There is no hope for a solution within Protestant principles, so the denominational, individual Christian (apart from the historic stream of apostolic Tradition) is forced to rely on secular standards of truth and philosophy in order to rationalize their own inability to definitively determine true Christian doctrine. All I'm saying, on the other hand, is that I believe God has guaranteed the accurate transmission of *all* His truth, largely through human means, through His Church, which He established. God can and does easily use otherwise sinful and fallible men for this end, just as He used sinners like David and Paul and Peter to write His infallible Scripture.

P: 1 Timothy 3:15 -- Paul refers to the church as "the pillar and foundation of truth." This is taken to be a proof that church tradition, not the Bible alone, establishes truth.

C: Not quite; rather it is Scripture and Tradition woven together, of a piece. The Church authoritatively interprets Scripture, but in so doing does not introduce anything that was not inherent in Scripture (explicitly or implicitly) in the first place. At least we have a system, and a self-consistent and up-front one, whatever one thinks of it. Far from "proving" your system from Holy Scripture, you have scarcely even adequately explained to me what it *is*, or (most importantly) specifically, what its doctrinal products (the so-called *central doctrines* of Christianity) are.

Chapter Three

Does the Bible Clearly Teach That it is Clear?

P: I believe that sufficient truth needed for salvation is contained in Scripture, that no single church is divinely authorized, that all churches are mixtures of truth and error, but that Scripture is inerrant. A church is a "true church" insofar as it is conformed to biblical teaching.

C: Duly noted.

P: Your conclusion about Protestantism seems to be that if the doctrines are true, they certainly aren't working out very well in concrete reality.

C: One would hope for better fruit if perspicuity [the clearness of the Bible in the main] is true, I think. Things aren't true because they work, but they ought to work when they are true. That's what I call the "reverse pragmatic argument."

P: I don't think you have answered the biblical arguments for the perspicuity of Scripture, which are either direct or clearly implied.

C: Please tell me what these verses are. I've yet to see "direct" biblical proofs or clear inferences for either *sola Scriptura* or perspicuity.

P: The Bible is clear and comprehensible in its major themes, with proper study.

C: I agree with that. But I don't think it rules out the necessity for a binding teaching authority (itself quite a biblical construct and not optional, according to the New Testament).

P: I think that most divergences of interpretation can be accounted for by: (1) different levels in individual knowledge of

the Bible. Those who study the Bible in greater depth will tend to agree on its central teaching.

C: That's simply not true. Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons know their Bibles quite well (of course they have horrendous hermeneutical principles) and they can't even arrive at trinitarianism. Calvin and Luther both knew the Bible inside out, yet they disagreed on a host of things (baptismal regeneration, Eucharist, etc.). The argument doesn't fly. We have to deal with history and the ugly reality of unbiblical sectarianism. I don't think the disagreements are primarily due to a mere lack of knowledge, but rather, due to a lack of a biblical authority structure (Church, Bible, Tradition: the "three-legged stool"), and flawed premises (*sola Scriptura*, private judgment, supremacy of the individual conscience, competing ecclesiologies, etc.).

P: (2) Many differences can be explained by historical accident (the founding of various denominations).

C: Agreed; but this, too, shows how inadequate the Protestant position ultimately is. Doctrine determined by "historical accident"? St. Paul would turn over in his grave to see the "tradition" he "received" and "delivered" handled so cavalierly and nonchalantly.

P: (3) The tendency to approach the Bible through the "lens" of preconceived notions.

C: Don't forget "private judgment," which is what you are doing. No one escapes presuppositions. You are no different. Yet many Protestants pretend to be "objective" (over against a guy like, say, Aquinas) and not weighed down by any prior traditions whatever. It's a pipe dream, I think. *Sola Scriptura* itself is an unbiblical and self-defeating proposition; quite a man-made tradition in its own right. It is indeed quite true that false premises will lead to false hermeneutics. But in the end I don't think the problem is deduction and prior notions per se, but rather, the wrong premises

vs. the right ones. There is no such thing as a *tabula rasa* ["clean slate"].

P: (4) Ignorance of proper biblical hermeneutics. Most false doctrine is the result of misinterpretations of the Bible.

C: I agree again. Yet of course you still have competing Protestant Christianities with equally scholarly exegetes on all sides, so this is not the final answer to your dilemma. An authoritative Tradition and Church is clearly needed, and these things are biblical in the first place, so it is no new idea.

P: We mustn't ignore passages which inconveniently contradict preconceived notions, but conform our views to them.

C: Amen! I couldn't agree more. And this is what I have observed in Protestantism so often. It was only when I converted to Catholicism that so many biblical passages which Protestants routinely ignore came alive and made sense for the first time. I have often marvelled at the glorious harmony of Scripture, as interpreted under the framework of Catholic dogmatic beliefs and premises.

P: (5) Insufficient understanding of the cultural background of biblical passages and books.

C: I agree.

P: Given all those reasons, it looks like you'll have to admit that Protestant has indeed given you another reason for denominationalism besides the "sin problem."

C: It still basically reduces to that, because your arguments break down as soon as you have equally brilliant, able, spiritually-minded, godly theologians on two sides of a question. Since there is no "final court of appeal" in Protestantism, there can only be insinuations that the other guy is a closet liberal, or ignorant, or stubborn, etc., because "he doesn't agree with *me* (i.e., the true

opinion...)." I believe I have gotten to the very root of the (insurmountable) epistemological problem. The Protestant view sounds wonderful, biblical, plausible, impenetrable, almost self-evident when simply "preached" and presented without counter-arguments (mostly from Holy Scripture) to weigh it down and sink it. You contend that once two people go head to head on any given biblical matter, that the Bible is clear enough to resolve it. This clearly isn't the case. Faced with that, the Protestant must blame the other person's inability to see the clear truth of Scripture. "Why does he not see it?" "Because he is ignorant." "Why is he ignorant?" "Because he is lazy or stubborn, or has preconceived notions he refuses to yield," etc. I exaggerate greatly to make my point, but I really think this is what it boils down to. I can make that point without denying the need to understand proper exegesis and hermeneutics; that's a given for any student of the Bible.

P: The Bible is the sole source of infallible spiritual truth inspired by God Himself.

C: Inspiration is not at issue. Protestant liberals have been responsible for tearing that down for over two centuries now, whereas it has always been a binding dogma of the Catholic Church. But even an inspired document needs to be authoritatively interpreted and its teachings proclaimed and codified and systematized in their particulars and parameters in creeds and confessions (just as in Protestantism, pertaining to the latter aspects).

P: Jesus spoke forcefully about the dangers of traditions of men; Peter condemned the twisting of Scripture.

C: Indeed, and in so doing they condemn much of Protestantism (or at least insofar as it departs from received doctrines). You yourself said that if people disagree, either one is wrong, or both are. They can't both be right. Therefore, it is *certain* that Protestantism contains much undeniable error, and error is not from God; therefore those errors are (most literally) man-made.

So you necessarily condemn many of your brethren when you assert this. We can defend all our beliefs from both Scripture and Tradition. But Protestants can't defend a symbolic and regenerative baptism at the same time (i.e., both as biblical and historical). You can't prove both the Lutheran and Zwinglian notions of the Eucharist from Scripture and history. Etc., etc. Someone is, therefore, telling untruths and creating man-made tradition. Someone is twisting Scripture . . . But we have one doctrine . . .

P: It is by believing the Scripture (James 1:21, "the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls"; 1 Peter 1:23, "being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever," a reference to Isaiah 40:8, "but the word of our God shall stand forever," that we have everlasting life.

C: You fail to grasp that we freely accept all this, as you do. Scripture is true; Scripture is unique and authoritative. That does *not*, however, rule out the need for the Church, or else Paul would never talk about it (or *tradition / paradosis*) at all; there would have been no need for a Jerusalem Council, etc. The entire argument presupposes dichotomies which are both logically unnecessary and blatantly contrary to Scripture. And you assume that Catholics deny things that we do not deny at all. We believe in the material sufficiency of Scripture, but not its formal sufficiency as a self-sufficient authority.

P: All that is necessary for salvation is in the Bible alone.

C: Yes; if you are on a desert isle with no one around, and a Bible, I believe you could be saved. I also believe you could be saved without a Bible or ever hearing a word of it, if you seek truth; since God said His existence is evident from that which is made (Romans 1). This does not disprove the need for a Church and an authoritative Tradition in normal circumstances. It's like saying "I could survive on a deserted, barren island with bread and water, no modern conveniences, and no medicine." Sure you

could, but is this the best way to go through life? Do we not take advantage of those blessings which God has provided for us -- among which is the Church, and the wise spiritual guides in it who help us better follow the path of discipleship?

P: There is little doubt regarding which books belong in the Bible.

C: There certainly is; the seven books of the so-called Apocrypha were thrown out only in the 16th century. The apostles and Church Fathers accepted them.

P: No church council determined the canon of the Old Testament books; rather, the Jews of Palestine at the time of Christ accepted the same thirty-nine Old Testament books that Protestants accept .

C: So now you wish to consult the Jewish community after Christ to determine which books are in the Bible, rather than to Christians in Council, during the same time they were working out other doctrines such as the fine points of the Trinity and the Divinity of Christ (doctrines which you accept)? You wish to condemn the Pharisees as absolutely corrupt (which Jesus did not do), while accepting what New Testament period Jews declared about the Bible, and conveniently neglecting what other Jews had asserted previously, during the period the Septuagint was produced.

P: Whenever there is a doctrinal disagreement, the following possibilities occur: (1) I am right, and you are wrong; (2) you are right and I am wrong; (3) we both are wrong.

C: Exactly, and that is why the division in Protestantism is so indefensible, because the prevalence of error is calmly accepted, as if it is a small thing of little importance.

P: Whenever such disagreement appears, Scripture itself provides an answer as to which claim (if either) is correct.

C: Here is the circular nature of your argument. The two both state that their view is the biblical view. Now what do you do? The Catholic's way out of this is to appeal to what has always been believed by the Church (just as the Fathers did, against the heretics). We believe that God will protect His Church from error (indefectibility from truth). But since you have thrown out Tradition and apostolic succession as the final court of appeal, you in effect sanction relativism and division as soon as a situation of equally brilliant competing exegetes differing, occurs. I would be absolutely terrified to depend upon myself as the final court of appeal in matters spiritual and theological.

P: The final court of appeal in Protestant biblical Christianity is the Holy Scripture, properly interpreted according to the rules of hermeneutics.

C: This is a great statement, but it is, unfortunately, impossible to live by in the real world, under Protestant premises. It collapses as soon as the disagreements arise. If the "other guy" disagrees with you, it is because you have studied Scripture and its interpretation more than he has (a variation of the "ignorance" argument). You always have to accuse the other of something of that sort, given your premise that Scripture is always clear. You must always tacitly assume the other is deficient when there is disagreement. Catholics, on the other hand, simply say a person is mistaken and incorrect if they disagree with the history of Christian doctrine, passed down in an unbroken chain from the apostles. Certain teachings were received from Jesus, and they are true. Period. What the biblical arguments supporting them may be is another issue. But they are true because Jesus passed them down, and Christians believed them (and were quite justified in doing so) even before biblical arguments could be produced.

P: You make illegitimate claims based on secondary sources.

C: You make claims based on (themselves unbiblical) historiographical and Enlightenment philosophical principles concerning the relationship of the individual and the (faith-based) community, rather than on the basis of faith, revelation, and Christian Tradition. That's ultimately why we disagree, I think.

P: Upon what authority do you base your truth claims?

C: Jesus, the apostles, apostolic succession, apostolic Tradition, and the Bible (and historical and supernatural proofs for same). They all agree with each other.

P: Your position has the serious deficiency of being based upon secondary (rather than primary) source material. The primary source for Christian theology is the Bible.

C: The Apostolic Deposit is not "secondary" material. It was received from Jesus, passed on to the apostles and in turn passed down by them. It expands upon what we know from Scripture, and is just as valid (in terms of truth, though not inspiration). True, one must determine precisely what constitutes the Tradition. That's ultimately the job of the Church. Truth doesn't have to always be in the Bible itself to be authoritative. It has to be apostolic and to have always been held implicitly or explicitly by the Church universal. What is apostolic always *is* in fact harmonious with biblical teachings.

P: The Bible clearly asserts total precedence over all other sources on any matters pertaining to divine revelation and doctrine.

C: Where does it claim this and rule out any pride of place for Tradition and Church? Your conclusion is based on a premise not itself established from the Bible. This is a house of cards, of the most vulnerable sort. The slightest wind demolishes it. Your premise remains radically unproven. It is basically an unexamined axiom and treasured Protestant tradition, originally made out of desperation in reaction to the Catholic Church

(Luther at the Diet of Worms in 1521). Martin Luther didn't appeal to Scripture as a proof of *sola Scriptura*; he simply claimed "Scripture and plain reason" for himself and stated that "popes and Councils do err." He merely assumed his (false) premise, just as you are doing. This is philosophically and theologically very unimpressive. When Paul was preaching to the Corinthians, Galatians, Thessalonians et al, he was quite authoritative, as an apostle. Not everything he said was later included in the Bible; therefore it was not all inspired (he was no walking Bible-machine any more than Jesus was). But he was an authority, and acted upon this authority quite consciously. So this is yet another Protestant false dichotomy (inspiration vs. non-inspired authority, as if all authority must be possessed of inspiration). Even in one night of preaching and teaching, Paul would have surpassed in numbers of words all his epistles. But you would have us believe that he possessed no authority till the Christian could read an epistle of his and figure out that it was part of the New Testament without the necessary aid of an authoritative Church which could declare what was Scripture and make the canon binding on all Christians.

Chapter Four

The Perspicuity (Clarity) of the Bible: Plowboys, Preachers, and Popes

P: Do you believe that you have an argument that can thoroughly disprove the Protestant doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture: namely, hundreds of competing denominations which all claim to possess the correct interpretation of Scripture?

C: Yes. I do contend that there ought to be some criteria for falsifiability with regard to this crucial element of *sola Scriptura*. Lacking that, I believe that few things could be conceived as more fatal to the position than hundreds of competing, feuding denominations, where -- sadly -- much error must be present, according to the laws of contradiction. It seems simple enough, to an "outside" observer, I think. If this state of affairs does not cast serious doubt on the principle, what conceivable critique *does*? Or is it claimed that there is no possible disproof, in which case we are dealing with a pure fideism not amenable to rational examination in the first place?

P: Although some places in Scripture -- due to ancient grammatical conventions and terminology -- are obscure to present-day readers, the general outlines of Scripture can, nevertheless, be ascertained and understood. Doctrines like Christ's deity, the Trinity, salvation by grace, etc. are not unclear. The unclear passages are more than made up for by clear passages elsewhere. Also, there is a crucial distinction to be made between "Bible-only fundamentalists" and the "classic Protestant" or Reformational position.

C: I would contend, however, that the beliefs of the masses of "Bible-only fundamentalists" flow from the principles inherent and fundamental to "classic Protestantism" (basically Calvinism, or Lutheranism before Luther died). You, of course, would claim that some of their beliefs are inconsistent with true "Reformational" Protestantism. But I don't see how this can be

maintained (as far as their notion of authority and individualism goes), in light of the espousal of private judgment and absolute primacy of conscience as the formal principles in Protestantism. This is precisely why sects started proliferating wildly -- to Luther's great chagrin --, as soon as he set the wheels in motion: some even denigrating him as a traitor, compromiser, "half-papist" (Calvin), etc. He himself despised this tendency, yet (like you) apparently failed to comprehend the organic causal relationship between his *sola Scriptura* and perspicuity and private judgment and the fruit which they very quickly produced. Even popes, of course, are altogether subject to received precedent and conciliar consensus.

P: You are right in asserting [in the book, *A Biblical Defense of Catholicism*] that there is no "absolute necessity for theological teaching, scholarly interpretation, and the authority of the Church (however defined)"; however, classical Protestantism differs with fundamentalism, with regard to their *modus operandi* of ignoring or minimizing the Christian history of doctrine and a certain anti-institutionalism pertaining to the Church's legitimate role as a teacher and guide for theology.

C: I agree. But in practical terms this is largely a distinction without a difference, since in the final analysis the Protestant individual (no matter how educated, nuanced, sophisticated) is left on his own to determine doctrinal, ecclesiological, liturgical, even moral orthodoxy. He is the final arbiter -- by definition. He may be familiar with Church history and proper hermeneutics, and may have read the complete sermons and commentaries of Calvin, Edwards, and Spurgeon, but he still is not ultimately subject to any authority higher than himself. He will (no doubt) say, "the *Bible* is *my* authority!" But it must immediately be understood that this, in turn, reduces to his own particular *interpretation* of the Bible. He can disagree with any expositor if he so chooses. He is truly the master of his own destiny. This is Renaissance nominalism and atomistic humanism come to fruition, and Western Civilization has been increasingly reaping the tragic consequences ever since.

P: The Westminster Confession of Faith asserts that "not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding . . ." (1:7).

C: No doubt the fundamentalists from whom you distance yourself think that Holy Scripture alone is more than enough "ordinary means." Who needs theologians and Church history (so they would opine)? It is highly important that people realize that indeed the "unlearned" are also able to attain "sufficient understanding" in this mythological scenario (Luther's famed "plowboy"). This is the root, in my humble opinion, of the radical individualism, a-historicism and anti-intellectualism which you and I both disdain, wherever it appears. We are one in detesting these tendencies. Where we differ is in the *causes* for this state of affairs. You say it is sin (I assume). I say it is sin, yes, but also, the fatal flaws in the principles of Protestantism itself. As (I believe) Francis Schaeffer said (or taught, at any rate): "ideas have consequences." These are some of the consequences of Protestantism. Your task is to demonstrate that such glaring deficiencies neither flow from the system itself, nor prove fatal to it, as a sort of *reductio ad absurdum*.

P: The *Westminster Larger Catechism* expands on this by saying "The visible church hath the privilege of being under God's special care and government; of being protected and preserved in all ages, notwithstanding the opposition of all enemies . . ." "

C: This merely opens up another huge can of worms for you. What is the "visible church"? Note that an "invisible church" is not referred to, but a "visible" one. So where is this "church?" Where does it reside? How can it trace itself back to the apostles, in unbroken succession? Who are its bishops? Obviously, it is preserved from error and cannot defect, so please identify this "church" for me, if you would. Is it Presbyterianism? Which branch, and how does one determine which one? Is it the Reformed Church? Which branch, and how does one determine

which one? What is its form of government? What is its view of baptism (I wonder, particularly)? On and on I could go.

P: “. . . and of enjoying the communion of saints, the ordinary means of salvation, and offers of grace by Christ to all the members of it in the ministry of the gospel, testifying, that whosoever believes in him shall be saved, and excluding none that will come unto him." (Q 63). The WCF also states that there is no "ordinary possibility of salvation" outside the Church (25:2). Of course, the thing to determine is the definition of "the Church."

C: Yes, you hit the nail on the head, and (to understate it) I don't think you will be able to escape this dilemma if you wish to pursue it further.

P: The classical Protestant position recognizes that God has ordained certain *normal* means for the teaching of Christianity, which may not necessarily apply in every individual instance. In other words, God (being omnipotent) *could* communicate saving grace and truth to someone who had nothing but a Bible. You yourself don't even deny this premise, right?

C: That's right. But such hypotheticals don't solve the internal difficulties of Protestantism or determine the outcome of this debate. This is the material sufficiency of Scripture, which many Catholics accept. I do myself, following Cardinal Newman in particular. Therefore, it is not at issue between us.

P: No classic Protestant in his right mind would give a Bible to a new convert without guiding him towards a proper teaching (ecclesiastical) authority. The failure to do this in many circles of evangelicalism or fundamentalism doesn't prove that such a faulty approach is the logical end-result of true, Reformational Protestant doctrine.

C: Then what *does* cause such “faulty approaches”; you tell me? It can't be, e.g., merely American rugged individualism or

pragmatism, since the Anabaptists adopted radical individualism and "civil disobedience" in 16th-century Europe. The inner contradiction of Protestantism was there from the beginning. The heart of it is the disjunction between Luther's "Here I stand (with Bible, conscience and 'plain reason')" and the State Church he set up in reaction to the anarchy of the Peasants' Revolt in 1525, which he himself played a key role in stirring up. Calvin also set up an autocratic State Church. But State Churches do not square with the primacy of the conscience and the individual. So some Protestants retained the State Church model in some fashion (e.g., Anglicans, European Lutherans, early American Puritans, to a large extent); others rejected it and adopted separationism (Anabaptists, Mennonites, Quakers, Baptists, congregationalists, Methodists and many lesser denominations). You can't dismiss all these historical factors as if they are of no import. Things do not just happen for no reason. You can yell "sin, sin" (or "ignorance, ignorance") as the answer-all, but that doesn't easily explain differential histories of diverse groups. One must take into consideration ideas also. My argument is essentially one of degree, and of plausibility, and of analogy. I was arguing, in effect, that if perspicuity is true, then wouldn't there be any appreciable level of success in creating doctrinal unity? If this is a preferable principle compared to the dogmatic, papal, conciliar authority of the Catholic Church, shouldn't we expect of it some improvement and success in result? Obviously, Martin Luther himself expected as much, because he was very distraught at the scandalous sectarianism near the end of his life (along with the even more and ever-despairing Philip Melancthon, his successor). He clearly thought that since he had "brought in the new Evangel," all would be hunky-dory. People -- liberated from the "Roman yoke" -- would be free to discover all this "new" biblical truth, just as Dr. Luther had. Fat chance . . . Thus Luther showed himself incredibly, extraordinarily naive as to human nature, among many other shortcomings. Yes, sin is clearly a factor in any human affairs, yet to say it is the main reason for hundreds of denominations (rather than a flaw in principle in whole or in part) is a bit much to take. Conversely, I contended that if hundreds of denominations didn't cause one to be

suspicious of this system, then what scenario *would* do so? That gets back to the issue of falsifiability, briefly alluded to above. It isn't so much that the Bible is unclear per se, or that if largely clear, all differences would vanish. That is too simplistic in the other direction. Rather, my point was that what I called the "sin argument" was absurdly simplistic as an explanation for hundreds of denominations and disagreements on several arguably "central" doctrines. And the multiplicity of denominations do indeed render the view highly implausible (if the argument is understood as I intended it, and as I elaborate upon it presently).

P: Mentioning large numbers of denominations is superficial and contributes little to meaningful discussion or a resolution of the issues.

C: In a sense the exact number is unimportant. What is key is to realize that something has gone radically awry in a system which can countenance and rationalize away such astonishing *de facto* relativism and ecclesiological confusion and pretend that when all is said and done it is still "one" invisible system ("church") of "mere Christianity," consistent with biblical notions of a hierarchical, indivisible, visible, apostolic Church.

P: Do you really believe that "Protestants" have anywhere close to "hundreds" of different views on baptism? You yourself detailed five views in your book [*A Biblical Defense of Catholicism*].

C: Of course not. But we did see that there were 200 versions of the phrase "this is my body" by 1577, within 60 years of Luther's *95 Theses* (1517). Imagine even trying to sit under a tree and dreaming up 50 versions, let alone 200! Five major camps, which differ concerning the central rite of initiation into the Christian faith, is quite sufficiently troubling enough. So you will probably simply deny that baptism is "central." But Luther certainly wouldn't have done that. He thought baptism *regenerated* the person receiving it. And so forth. Lutherans (with Luther and Melancthon's approval) *drowned* Anabaptists for denying this,

and for not baptizing infants. The system always breaks down under scrutiny.

P: Are there hundreds of differing beliefs on the Lord's Supper? The Gospel? Church government? Eschatology? The differences among Protestants are simply not as many or as great as the "hundreds of denominations" mantra implies.

C: But the *exact number* doesn't matter; rather, the crucial thing is to recognize that the *principles* underlying the Protestant system clearly haven't worked, and cannot work. There was always supposed to be "one faith, one baptism . . ." Even having *two* contradictory beliefs on baptism (or the Lord's Supper, the gospel, Church government, etc.) is scandalous and unbiblical already. There was only *one* received doctrine, or "deposit of faith." Not 2, not 5, not 15, nor hundreds. The error starts beyond one. God doesn't like falsehood.

P: It is absolutely irrelevant to the truth of any Protestant principle how many divisions exist among Protestants.

C: What about the biblical principle of oneness and unity? Or is that not a Protestant principle from the outset (strange, if it is supposedly the "Bible faith" par excellence)?

P: We don't accept the naive and unbiblical view of Roman Catholics that "the Church" is a physical, organized hierarchical body united under a single visible head (the pope).

C: It is eminently biblical and historical. But that veers off into separate territory. Your task is to defend your view without recourse to mine. We are discussing perspicuity, not historic, apostolic, fully-biblical Christianity (i.e., Catholicism). So the *Westminster Larger Catechism* (which you cited prominently above) uses "visible church" as a synonym for the "invisible church"? Is not "visible" "physical"? And a "disorganized" body is preferable to an "organized" one? Does that not follow from your incoherent expression above?

P: True biblical unity involves much more than physical unity. Many groups of professing Christians who are, in fact, apostate (Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc.) also have an extraordinary degree of visible "unity" – even more than Rome. According to your reasoning, that would be a demonstration that they possess the truth.

C: This misses the point, which is that, according to the Apostle Paul, there is a visible, institutional, doctrinal unity, and one Church; one received doctrine. The Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons claim this, as well as Catholics. One must then consider their competing claims in turn and decide which has the most plausible case. These groups deny the Trinity, which has always been believed by all Christians throughout history, so their claims are false, no matter how "unified" they are. Be that as it may, my arguments presently are not so much a proof for Catholicism, as they are a disproof of certain errors in Protestantism, particularly in its various competing versions of ecclesiology (i.e., as superior and more "biblical" than Catholicism). Denominationalism is condemned repeatedly in the Bible. Must Protestants pessimistically conclude that the unity which was so important to Jesus and Paul is impossible, because their man-made denominational and doctrinal structures simply will not permit it, given the sinfulness of man and his propensity for clinging to dead, crusty, false traditions of men? This is part and parcel of my argument: if a system produces something which is clearly contrary to Holy Scripture, then at some point the system itself must be questioned. Man's sin and rebelliousness make an institutional Church with real, binding authority necessary, in order to maintain the doctrinal oneness and unity which is both commanded and assumed in Holy Scripture. It's very simple: one can often find things in the Bible by oneself, with adequate study aids, and (hopefully) some basic background as to hermeneutics and exegesis. I do this now, and have done it for years. This is, of course, the theme of my website and my first two books (*A Biblical Defense of Catholicism* and *More Biblical Evidence for Catholicism*). I've never been disappointed or

"stumped" when studying Holy Scripture. It is always a glorious shining light, and unambiguous. The difference lies in the ultimate authority, or formal principle of authority. The Catholic, when completing such a study, will want to know if his conclusions are in line with those of the Church, and with what Christians have believed for 2000 years. In this way, doctrinal unity and historical continuity with the apostles and the Church of the Ages can be maintained, and the relativism and sin-influenced individualism avoided. To reiterate briefly, then, my thesis: it is not so much that Scripture is so unclear and esoteric that it is an utter mystery and an undecipherable "code" which only Holy Mother Church can break, and which no individual can possibly understand. Rather, the Church is required to speak *authoritatively* as to what Holy Scripture *teaches*, just as it spoke authoritatively with regard to what books were to be *included* in Scripture. In both instances, Holy Scripture is inherently what it is: God's inspired, inerrant, infallible written revelation, but human error, sin, and inability to achieve unity of belief on the basis of individualism made the teaching Church absolutely necessary. It is the principle of private judgment to the exclusion of a necessary, binding, ecclesiastical teaching authority which is radically unbiblical, blatantly contrary to the practice of the Church in the patristic period -- all the way up to the Protestant Revolt, and obviously a failure in practice.

P: How can you be so sure that you possess the truth, over against Protestantism? Simply because your church tells you?

C: The Catholic "epistemology of authority" is the following: Jesus was the incarnate God. He performed miracles. He rose from the dead, and proved that by "many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3). There was one, recognized deposit of faith (Acts 2:42, Jude 3). Jesus established a Church, with Peter as the head (Matthew 16:13-20). This Church has certain characteristics, described in the Bible. Apostolic succession was the criterion of orthodoxy for the Fathers. The Catholic Church traces itself back via this unbroken line, centered in Rome and the papacy. One accepts all this in faith, but it is based on reasonable consideration of the

historical criteria, just as one would accept the historicity of the Resurrection or the authority of the Bible. Since the deposit of faith was one unified teaching, there necessarily had to be one Church which preserved it and promulgated it. We clearly see such a Church in the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15. These early Christians met together and authoritatively decided on doctrine, even having to do with matters of salvation (Acts 15:2). We also see the institutional, visible Church in the power -- granted by Christ -- to "bind and loose" and to forgive sins.

P: Doctrinal conflict is often a means to advance the understanding of the Church as a whole, as is shown both in the New Testament and in the history of the ecumenical councils. Paul writes to the Corinthians, for instance, that "there must be factions [heresies] among you so that the ones who have God's approval will be made manifest." (1 Corinthians 11:19). There is a big difference between legitimate doctrinal diversity which is part of the maturing process of the Church and the arrogant spirit of Rome, with its constant triumphalistic claim that "I am of Peter and you are not unless you agree with me." (cf. 1 Cor 1:12).

C: I disagree that the Bible espouses a notion of allowable doctrinal relativism [as detailed above]. Protestantism only adopts that because to not do so would be to self-destruct at the level of foundational premises. We are under no such compulsion; we can simply follow the Bible in its entirety, not having to ignore that which contradicts and rebukes our system (as in Protestantism). Again, Paul is very clear:

Galatians 1:9,12 . . . If any one is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed . . . For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

And this is assuredly not the truncated four-step evangelical "gospel" -- it is the entire deposit of apostolic faith. Jesus commanded His disciples to instruct new converts to "obey *everything* that I have commanded you" (Matt 28:20). Not the

central doctrines, or TULIP, or the Creeds alone; no, *everything*. God has to use division to teach us things, just as He uses any number of sins to teach a stubborn, prideful, rebellious human race. That doesn't mean He *countenances* it in His perfect will. That will is expressed in John 17 and many other passages decrying disunity. In fact, Paul, in the context of the verse you cite (1 Corinthians 11:19), states outright that because of abuses and divisions, he does not "commend" the Corinthians (11:17-18,22). He rebukes the same church in no uncertain terms for divisions: 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 3:3 ff., 12:25, and 2 Corinthians 12:20. You have no biblical case for any permissible doctrinal relativism, pure and simple. In John 16:13, Jesus is speaking to His disciples, at the Last Supper. He said that the Spirit would guide them (by extension, the Church) into "all the truth" -- hardly consistent with your position of sanctioned relativism for the purpose of "growth." In 1 John 4:6 the Apostle John is teaching that Christians can "know the spirit of truth." Falsehood is always harmful.

P: I do agree, however, that all falsehood is harmful.

C: Good. Yet you won't denounce the glaring shortcomings of the Protestant system, where falsehood necessarily exists, due to ever-present contradictions which are not able to be resolved, and even (as in your own argument above) deemed as necessary and even helpful!

P: Yet I can believe that and not have to follow you and your Church in its unloving activity of anathematizing fellow Christians who disagree with me on various doctrines.

C: In that we merely follow St. Paul: see Galatians 1:9,12 and also 1 Corinthians 5:3-5, 16:22, 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 1 Timothy 1:19-20, 2 Timothy 2:14-19, and 4:14-15, as well as our Lord's express injunction in Matthew 18:15-18. So if we are unloving and uncharitable, overly "harsh" or what-not, St. Paul and Jesus are equally so. Besides, no one is more uncharitable than the anti-Catholic brand of Protestant who consign my entire Church and

its members (with few exceptions) to hell. That's a far cry from simply maintaining doctrinal integrity and purity, as the Church has always done (and the words *anathema* and *excommunication* are *not* synonyms for "damnation," as many falsely assume).

P: I believe in infant baptism (but not in baptismal regeneration). I think my Baptist and Lutheran brothers are mistaken about major elements of their baptismal theology. But should I also believe that their *souls* are in danger because they don't agree with me?

C: Not according to your theology. But Luther would have thought so, and he basically created the framework in which you move (particularly in relation to our present topic). You would disagree with Luther on whether baptism was a central doctrine; thus non-negotiable. The logic always breaks down, whenever any particular topic is run through the Protestant matrix.

P: Does *every* theological issue have exactly the same importance, according to Rome?

C: Strictly speaking, no. Limbo or Molinism are not on a par with the Resurrection. Yet we are given no reason to believe that whole areas of doctrine can be "up for grabs" -- to be determined by the whim and fancy of every individual believer, with disregard (to one degree or another) for the history of doctrine and practice. Catholics don't say that various issues are unimportant simply because of existing differences which are not easily resolved. And we shouldn't say that this division has no bearing on perspicuity as understood in Protestantism.

P: It is true that Luther damned his Protestant opponents to hell when they disagreed with his doctrines, but it's ridiculous for you to use his example in your arguments against present-day Protestants. Besides, Luther was neither infallible nor sinless.

C: You miss the point of my argument. The point was that Luther originated this novel notion of perspicuity, and illustrated in his

own life and conflicts the ultimate absurdity and impossibility of it. And it is equally silly for you to pretend that present-day Protestantism has no organic connection to Martin Luther, its very Founder.

P: Luther had too much Roman Catholicism left in him, from his earlier days as a monk.

C: This is the usual (grossly inadequate) explanation: Luther's many faults are not due to the novelties he introduced, but rather, they stem from residual Catholicism.

P: If Protestants are indeed your "separated brethren" (as Vatican II states), why don't you treat them like brothers and stop trying to bully them into adopting *your* viewpoints?

C: If I am a bully, as a faithful Catholic, then so are Paul and all the Fathers who fought valiantly for the Faith "once received." But how am I a "bully" by simply engaging in discourse? I find that to be a very odd comment. I ask you: what possible criteria could falsify your beliefs about perspicuity? What possible critique could cause you to question your rock-solid faith in the axiomatic premises of Protestantism? If there are none, why are we dialoguing? If a position is not based at all in reason, reasonable discourse obviously can't dissuade someone from the position. You tell me that Scripture is perspicuous, yet it can't settle this issue, with vigorous discussion among "brothers?" And why is that? Because the "other guys" are blinded by sin and denominational bias, whereas *we* are not! But then this pretty much implodes your whole perspective, since it is allegedly applicable to central doctrines. If I understand correctly, you are saying that baptism and Eucharist are "primary" and "essential" doctrines -- precisely the sort of beliefs that a perspicuous Scripture is supposed to resolve. Yet they have not been resolved; ergo: this understanding of perspicuity is false. The sin argument is far too simplistic. It will not do. The issues are far more complex than that. You have multiple parties, all approaching Scripture with open-mindedness and willingness to follow it, and

they still disagree nonetheless. As a Catholic, I can freely affirm that Calvin and Luther were both utterly sincere and passionate in their commitment to Holy Scripture as authoritative. Yet they couldn't agree on many fundamental issues. You are the ones who are forced to cast aspersions on others' purity and motives in order to uphold the false belief of a perspicuous Scripture wholly distinct from an authoritative teaching Church. Of course cordial discussion is often possible among Protestants who disagree with each other. But the point is that there is no way to *resolve* such disputes within the Protestant system. The proverbial man on the street cannot achieve any certainty within these presuppositions.

P: I submit that there is much more charity and unity among Protestants than you seem to be willing to acknowledge.

C: I agree (having experienced it myself many times, during my Protestant years). I'm not talking primarily about charity and "good feelings," though. I'm talking about how foundational Protestant principles and ideas make doctrinal unity impossible to achieve.

P: Your whole argument against perspicuity is based on the false connection of the clarity of Scripture to actual, factual unity of belief among those who claim to believe in the perspicuity of Scripture. Thus, your catalogue of divisions amongst Protestants is irrelevant.

C: How convenient: unfalsifiability reigns again. It seems, then, that you believe that nothing can disprove your brand of Protestantism. Facts don't matter. The logical or causal relationship of behavior and doctrinal beliefs to presuppositional principles are irrelevant and of no import at all (if not nonexistent in the first place). Needless to say, I profoundly disagree with this sort of apologetic or epistemology, no matter *who* holds it: Protestant or Catholic.

Chapter Five

The Formal Sufficiency of Holy Scripture

P: The Catholic Church has taught that Scripture is not clear enough for a person to understand without ecclesiastical interpretation.

C: The Catholic Church -- I want to stress -- does not dictate how every Bible passage must be interpreted. Actually, there are very few individual passages which must be interpreted a certain way (and Catholics and Protestants would not disagree on the plain meaning of vast numbers of passages, such as, e.g., those having to do with the divinity of Christ, or God the Father's attributes). But the Catholic Church *does* require its members to interpret the Bible according to received, Catholic Tradition. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* of 1910 (now available online), in its article on "Biblical Exegesis," states (emphasis added):

(a) Defined Texts

The Catholic commentator is bound to adhere to the interpretation of texts which the Church has defined either expressly or implicitly. *The number of these texts is small, so that the commentator can easily avoid any transgression of this principle.* The Council of Trent teaches that Rom., v, 12, refers to original sin (Sess. V, cc. ii, iv), that John, iii, 5, teaches the absolute necessity of the baptism of water (Sess. V, c. iv; Sess. VII, De bapt., c. ii), that Matt., xxvi, 26 sq. is to be understood in the proper sense (Sess. XIII, cap. i); the Vatican Council gives a direct definition of the texts, Matt., xvi, 16 sqq. and John, xxi, 15 sqq. Many more Scripture texts are indirectly defined by the definition of certain doctrines and the condemnation of certain errors. The Council of Nicæa, e.g., showed how those passages ought to be interpreted on which the Arians relied in their contention

that the Word was a creature; the Fifth Ecumenical Council (II Constantinople) teaches the right meaning of many prophecies by condemning the interpretation of Theodore of Mopsuestia.

On the other hand, Protestant Calvinists today have a whole set of biblical passages (e.g., their favorite, Romans 9) related to their notions of double predestination, unlimited election, irresistible grace, and limited atonement (TULIP), concerning which they do not admit any difference of interpretation. If the whole truth be known, I suspect that Protestants are more guilty of the practices decried above than the Catholic Church ever was. It is Protestantism which is far more "hung up" on proof texts from the Bible which supposedly can only mean one thing. The Catholic Church is much more concerned about *true doctrine*, received from the apostles, than about particular *proof texts*. That's not to say that proof texts aren't offered (my website is devoted to that very thing); just that the emphasis is different.

P: The Catholic Church eventually adopted a perspective that since it was the sole divinely-guided guardian of Scripture, only its representatives could interpret the true meaning of the Bible. Laypeople were also denied easy access to the Scriptures, lest they apply improper hermeneutics and promulgate false doctrine. The Catholic Church denied the notion that all persons should be able to read the Bible in their own languages.

C: This is inaccurate in its overly-broad and "dichotomous" either/or presentation. Some might interpret the above as if the (Catholic) Church was some sort of Gestapo- or KGB-like thought police, monitoring every biblical reading by its members. This is historically untrue. Nor was the Church absolutely opposed to the popular availability of the Bible (i.e., after widespread literacy and the possibility of mass literature occurred, in the 15th century) or vernacular translations (of which there were plenty, all through the centuries). Even the preface of the King James Version notes the long tradition of vernacular translations, starting hundreds of years before the onset of

Protestantism. The medieval Church was concerned about private judgment and heresy, dislodged from apostolic Tradition, and bad translations, just (in the case of the latter) as any conscientious Protestant tradition is (or should be) today. Bad translations distort the word of God in Holy Scripture, no matter who does them or what doctrinal bias may be present.

P: A typical Catholic argument runs: "If Scripture is clear, why are there so many Protestant denominations? Why can't Protestants come to agreement about the meaning of the Bible?" We must admit, in all honesty and candor, that the scandal of division among Protestants over biblical theology damages the plausibility of the assertion that Scripture is perspicuous, or clear. We cannot lightly dismiss this charge.

C: I commend you for acknowledging the (at least perceived) difficulty, but I think it is a fatal objection, whereas you think it can be overcome by the analysis and "solution" you are offering presently. With all due respect for your thoughtful and conscientious effort, an untruth remains an untruth, no matter how brilliant or skilled its defenders may be. A good lawyer may get an acquittal for a guilty client, but the client remains just as guilty as he was before the verdict!

P: God, who inspired Holy Scripture and ultimately is the Author of it, created language. He knows the rules of language and does not "cheat" in His revelation to man. Therefore, His message in the Bible must be clear. Scripture couldn't have been any better (or more true) than it is, since the omniscient God produced it.

C: This assumes what it is trying to prove. It takes for granted from the outset that Scripture must be clear without an ecclesiastical Guide and Infallible Interpreter (of its teachings overall – not of every individual verse), which is precisely what is at issue in Catholic-Protestant discussions on the nature of authority, the roles of Scripture and Tradition, theological certainty, and the rule of faith. Scripture doesn't have to be clear for any reader to ascertain its meaning if it was always intended

(by God) to be understood within an overall context of Church and Tradition (as I would argue that it itself teaches). In other words, the Church would provide the foolproof method of proper interpretation of a Scripture otherwise often misinterpreted due to sheer ignorance or prior doctrinal biases and predispositions (see, e.g., 2 Peter 1:20-21, 3:15-17). So the above claim is a false dilemma and a circular argument.

P: A negative or misinformed response from a listener does not change the objective quality and truth of the message. Rather, it makes us recognize that various factors distort an otherwise clear message.

C: Then this is going to (inevitably) boil down to the fallacious "sin argument" that I have critiqued above. In practical terms, "clearness" can only be viewed in terms of actual, human exegesis and interpretation. In other words, I think that the truth or falsity of perspicuity as a principle of biblical interpretation and the nature of the Bible itself, is inextricably bound up with (and demonstrated by) its actual *application*. God (as an omnipotent, sovereign Being) is just as able to bring about the institutional and doctrinal unity He wants (within His established Church) as He is able to theoretically write the message in a clear fashion without need of authoritative interpreters. To say it is "clear" regardless of how it is variously interpreted is not only illogical, but also, in the final analysis, a reduction of Christianity to a mere abstract, theoretical philosophy, when in fact it was intended by God to be very practical, concrete, and lived out. The Church exists for a reason, and it is an extension of the Incarnation, the Body of Christ. It has real, tangible authority. It is not simply an invisible society of like-minded individuals, who possess authority each one for themselves (as if the Church was optional or a convenient historical accretion). Christianity, like Judaism before it, was always a fundamentally historical religion.

P: Spiritual clarity means that only those who are in Christ Jesus and partakers of His grace will be able to understand biblical, spiritual concepts.

C: We agree, except that we emphasize Christianity as a communal and historical entity, much more so than an individualistic enterprise. So then, there is such a thing as a "mind of the Church," informed by the Holy Spirit, which is more profound than the "spiritual mind" of one person, be he Luther or anyone else. Luther was not infallible (though he often seemed to think so), but we believe that the Church is to a large extent (and popes and Councils, under certain circumstances). We apply the passages in John 14-16 about the Spirit's leading of believers into all truth primarily to the Church as a whole. They can apply to individuals as well, but not as a norm for the faith: that must be historical and communal; ecclesiastical. And we maintain that this is the biblical (as well as the historic Christian) position.

P: The Bible is spiritually clear to true followers of Christ; it is essentially clear for the saints in heaven. In the perfection of heaven, all barriers to understanding God's revelation will be removed.

C: Well, in my mind, this epitomizes the incoherence and practical impossibility of this position. You come right out and admit that the only people who can understand Holy Scripture as it came from God (in its essential clarity), are the saints in heaven! If that is so, then (quite ironically) the Protestant position of perspicuity certainly makes the Bible more obscure than the Catholic position, which holds that its doctrines can be definitely known, with the guidance of a teaching Church, ordained by God and formally established by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As for the second category of "spiritually clear," that doesn't resolve the difficulty of competing interpretations. Are we to believe that those who differ from us are therefore not "believers in Christ" or of sound mind? This position cannot possibly succeed in real life. It is refreshing to see an admission (perhaps unintentional) that it only totally "works" in heaven. Catholics are much more optimistic than that about the understanding of Holy Scripture. That Scripture is clear to the God who "breathed" it is an uncontroversial truism. But that doesn't help us to understand it.

We don't have the mind of God. I find this entire argument quite insubstantial and circular. It is largely (at least thus far) presented axiomatically, as if anyone who simply heard it would automatically be compelled to accept it. But I don't find it in the least compelling myself.

P: According to 1 Corinthians 2, those who didn't understand were spurning the Holy Spirit. Paul addressed the Corinthians as "carnal" – their comprehension and acceptance of Christian truth was darkened by their divisiveness and worldliness.

C: This is the classic "sin argument." So when Protestants disagree, if we consistently apply this criterion and standard, then the "other guy" must not be open to the Holy Spirit, or he is carnal, or a spiritual babe. He and they must be possessed of "divisiveness" and "worldliness." Does anyone seriously believe that someone like, e.g., John Wesley, must have had one or more of these characteristics, when he disagreed with the Calvinists about the distinctives of Calvinism? I don't even believe that as a Catholic (who happens to greatly admire Wesley in many ways). This leads inexorably to both logical absurdity and an unseemly judgmentalism of our brothers and sisters in Christ. The Catholic, on the other hand, need not judge the heart and motives of individuals when they hold a different belief. We simply compare their beliefs with that of the apostolic doctrines of the Church, passed down historically (as seen especially in the Fathers), and fully preserved in the Catholic Church, and if they differ, then we say they are mistaken in that belief, apart from the inner state of their soul, which we leave up to God to determine.

P: The allegorical method of hermeneutics, which predominated in the Middle Ages, caused an unnecessary obscuring of Scripture, and minimized the straightforward literal interpretation of it.

C: But since virtually all Protestants have rejected this approach to hermeneutics, this analysis alone doesn't explain their differences, within the framework of their own grammatico-

historical method. It is not nearly as simple as "Catholic allegorical interpretation vs. Protestant literal interpretation." Otherwise, Protestants should largely agree (presumably at least far more than they in fact do), but of course they don't. So we're back to judging the hearts of those "in error," since they claim to be (and are) using the same hermeneutical methodology.

P: In the Protestant hermeneutical and exegetical methodology -- which presupposes perspicuity --, Scripture must be approached (even as a divinely-inspired document) as literature written in ordinary human language, subject to the usual rules of grammar and against the backdrop of the historical details of the text.

C: Catholics accept this also. It is not "either/or." Rather, the literal sense was always considered fundamental, and the other senses were built upon this premise. Nor do Protestants totally reject metaphor and allegory, and multiple meanings. The latter is seen particularly in the multiple fulfillment of many prophecies, where in one passage there can be several applications and fulfillments. For instance, in the prophecies about Christ, oftentimes one passage will switch back and forth between our Lord's first and second coming. It was very difficult to comprehend this without the benefit of hindsight. It was understandable that the Jews at the time of Christ (even the disciples before Pentecost) would expect a powerful, reigning Messiah because that is how many messianic prophecies read on their face (i.e., "literally"). In other words, there are many complexities in biblical interpretation, and it is not always evident that a literal approach is the only one.

P: The Reformers did not sanction interpretive lawlessness or relativism with this doctrine. Christians were to be subject to the Church and guided by its pastors and teachers.

C: *Which "Church"?* Curiously, Protestants continue to speak of the "Church" as an identifiable, concrete entity, possessing obligatory authority (as the Fathers and the apostles themselves habitually do). So Calvin sets up his "Church." So does Luther.

They even make it subservient to the state. The Anabaptists set up their variant of the "Church" -- far less institutional. Their version of the "Church" has prevailed amongst today's evangelicals. The word "Church" (when closely-scrutinized, as is often my assumption in my arguments) scarcely has any meaning in Protestantism. Yet it continues to be used, as if it does.

P: Unfortunately, Protestants have not historically agreed on how to define the central doctrines, or "essentials" of the faith, with which perspicuity largely deals.

C: And that is a major weakness (if not one of the fatal flaws) of this outlook, in my opinion.

P: Denominationalism and divisions can't be attributed to just one cause (perspicuity) . . .

C: I don't attribute it to one cause. There are indeed many possible causes in any individual instance: pride, contentiousness, stubbornness, nationalism, rebellion, inability to submit to authority, ignorance of the Bible and Christian history, exaggerated self-importance, rigorist, "puritanistic" impulses, pietism, alleged private revelations, delusions of grandeur (as in the case of many of the non-trinitarian "cults" founded by one person), anti-institutionalism, pragmatism, individualism (particularly American), the influence of foreign theological, philosophical, and cultural ideas, the influx of theological liberalism, the desire to follow a less stringent morality (especially in sexual and marital matters), etc. But it is foolish to deny that perspicuity itself is a cause, and a major one. It is the internal cause, the difference of formal principle which led to the split off of the main branch of Catholicism. Its very nature more or less makes it inevitable that division will occur, even though it is not the sole cause of division, because it places final authority in the individual rather than in a corporate group.

Chapter Six

Tradition in the New Testament

C: As an example of what I believe about Tradition in the New Testament, I would like to draw an analogy: I'll play St. Paul; my Chapter One, on "Bible and Tradition," in my first book, *A Biblical Defense of Catholicism*, will represent his letters in the New Testament, while papers on my website which are about the same general subject are my "word of mouth" or oral teaching (as if they were conversations in person). I could say, "hold fast to my teaching, whether from my book chapter or my website" [cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:15], but this would not prove that the two were synonymous. My website papers go far beyond (quantitatively) what I've written in my first book about *sola Scriptura*. The two are harmonious, and non-contradictory, but not identical. Thus, my website papers might be said to be an extensive commentary of sorts on what I believe about *sola Scriptura*, as expressed much more concisely in my book. In a sense, it is true to say that they do not go "beyond" my book, or contradict my book, but they are still different from my book in the sense that they might delve into particular issues more deeply. In any event, it is certainly not clear that Paul's oral teaching [1 Cor 11:2,23, 15:1-3, Gal 1:9,12, 1 Thess 2:13, 2 Thess 3:6, 2 Timothy 1:13-14, 2:2] must be *absolutely* the same (in content and scope and particularity) as his written, nor that it could not contain information not found in his letters. We can only ascertain that from later patristic testimony, and biblical indications. So Paul's oral teaching would be harmonious with his teaching now preserved in the written text of the Bible, but it may also offer some things not explicitly found in Holy Scripture.

P: For your analogy above to hold, you have to also postulate that one of the sources of your teaching would be incomplete or insufficient without the other. That is, would I need both your book chapter and your website papers to know what you believe about tradition and *sola Scriptura*?

C: In a practical sense, this is indeed true. My lengthy Internet papers would elaborate on, and serve as a commentary for, my compact book chapter, which might be said to be so general and broad that it could easily be misunderstood, and regarded as having less "depth" than my "fleshed-out" view in fact possesses. The analogy to Tradition and Bible in Christianity is virtually perfect: we need Tradition (and compulsory Authority) in order to fully understand the teachings of the Bible. Thus, the Bible is "insufficient" (again, in *practice*, or *application*, not in *essence*) for establishing orthodoxy, as the history of Christianity abundantly testifies. As I've noted previously, most early heresies (e.g., Monophysitism and Arianism), believed in *sola Scriptura*, and the Church refuted them by the Bible-as-interpreted-by-apostolic-Tradition, within the framework of apostolic succession.

P: Would I be misled into believing that you are really a Protestant if I had only your website papers on Bible and Tradition, *sola Scriptura*, perspicuity, etc. and not also your book chapter on the same overall topic? Of course not. But this is precisely what you are arguing is the case with Paul's theology (i.e., that to fully understand it we must have both his biblical writings and his alleged oral teachings).

C: Not quite. I'm only maintaining that the possibility exists (and seems likely from common sense and biblical indications) for Paul to have taught things other than what is recorded in writing, and that the early Church could have preserved such teachings orally.

P: I don't believe that Paul would write in his epistles (now part of the Bible) that Jesus is the one mediator between man and Christ (1 Timothy 2:5), yet at the same time pass on an oral tradition of Mary being a co-Mediatrix with Christ!

C: This is assuming what it is trying to prove. We don't believe that the Tradition we possess contradicts the Scripture. You are assuming that it does (in this particular), and so argue

accordingly. In so doing, you have moved from the basic scriptural data concerning Tradition to Protestant presuppositions about the lawfulness and relation to Scripture in whole and in this one part, of one particular Catholic Marian belief.

P: Paul certainly didn't intend to teach a Catholic notion of two forms of tradition – written and oral -- which would then be perpetually binding on the church thereafter.

C: "Certainly"? More solid evidence needs to be presented for such a firm conclusion. But we don't believe in two "different traditions" anyway, but rather, "twin fonts of the one divine wellspring." For a Catholic who believes in the material sufficiency, as I do (and this would seem to be the mainstream, conciliar position), Tradition is more of a "commentary" on the always-central scriptural data, rather than a force in opposition to it. In other words, the Church has a practical priority, not an "ontological superiority." Protestants often exaggerate the (alleged) differences in the Catholic Tradition and Scripture, rather than focus on the intrinsically organic, "symbiotic" connection which is the true Catholic viewpoint (as also in their analyses of, e.g., faith "vs." works). For us, as for the Fathers, Scripture is central, but not exclusive of Church and Tradition (which it itself acknowledges). In any event, the notion (held by some Protestant exegetes), that all of the apostolic Tradition was synonymous with the written New Testament, would seem to be utterly contradicted by John 21:25 alone (and I would add, by common sense as well).

P: To assume that Paul must be referring, in his use of "tradition" and oral preaching or teaching, to beliefs not written down elsewhere, is only the merest speculation.

C: But it is just as much speculation to assume that the content of Paul's oral *paradosis* is synonymous or identical with his written corpus, is it not? Epistemologically, it appears that Protestants and Catholics are in the exact same boat, for Protestant biblical scholars have not proven by any means that the content of

apostolic "thought," so to speak, does not go beyond scriptural confines. That's why I (and my Church) appeal to the Fathers, as the existence of such oral traditions is an historical question, just as the issue of what the "early Church" believed is an intrinsically historical question.

P: Paul might have, of course, orally taught the same things a hundred different ways, but in any case it is true that the essential core of Paul's message is included in Scripture. If not, why have Scripture? What would its purpose be? Why have a canon of Scripture as a rule of faith?

C: This point has force only if the Protestant premise of *sola Scriptura* is assumed beforehand. There is no compulsion (either scripturally or logically) to create a chasm between Scripture and Tradition, especially given the facts that the New Testament was "oral" itself in its earlier stages (e.g., Lk 1:1-2), is an encapsulation of the larger Christian *kerygma* and apostolic Tradition/*paradosis*, and was utterly dependent on Tradition (practically, not essentially, speaking) to have its own parameters defined as well. In other words, Tradition is all over Scripture, by the nature of things, even apart from all the proofs which I've tried to offer in my response. We simply cannot have one without the other. It is self-evident that the Bible is central and indispensable in any Christian perspective -- no one need argue that. Why do we need Tradition? Because we need truth and unity, and the alternate experiment of resorting to the Bible alone without necessary ecclesiastical authority (the practical outworking of Tradition) has (unarguably, I think) proven to be an abysmal failure. That's why we believe (apart from the biblical evidence itself) that God desired (and desires) that Tradition and hierarchical authority be inherent in Christianity and Christ's Church.

P: The verbal form of *paradosis* (*paradidwmi*) appears 120 times in the New Testament, and only six instances of this word refer directly to the issue of the maintaining apostolic tradition.

C: I came up with seven in the first chapter of my book, *A Biblical Defense of Catholicism*. Luke 1:1-2 is another instance of *paradidomi*, in this case referring to "the matter of the gospel," as the Greek linguist Kittel states. Also of relevance is the word *paralambano* ("received"), which refers to Christian, apostolic Tradition at least seven times (1 Cor 11:23, 15:1-2, 15:3, Gal 1:9,12 [2], 1 Thess 2:13, 2 Thess 3:6). These refer to the Eucharist (1 Cor 11:23), tradition (2 Thess 3:6), the word of God (1 Thess 2:13), and the gospel (all others).

P: There are four occurrences of *paradidomi* which do not refer merely to particular issues. Two of these clearly refer to the apostolic gospel (Rom 6:17 and 1 Cor 15:3), which Paul explains in depth in Romans 1-8 and 1 Corinthians 15:3-5.

C: We find many indications of Catholic teaching in Romans 1-8 (especially on the justification question: see, e.g., 1:5, 2:5-13, 5:17-19, 6:17 itself; cf. 10:16, 15:18-19, 16:25-26), so that is a moot point. The gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 is clearly not all that Paul passed on, or "handed on," so it cannot be used to restrict his definition of (apostolic) "tradition."

P: There is no basis here for speculating about some additional information that Paul doesn't teach us about his gospel.

C: Regarding 1 Corinthians 15:3-5: not technically within the verse itself, but certainly exegetically by recourse to other relevant Pauline and further New Testament statements.

P: *Paradidomi* in 1 Corinthians 11:23, is about the Lord's Supper (vv. 23-25). Paul presents the tradition in creedal form, which suggests that he is giving us his essential teaching of the Supper. We have this tradition presented fully in writing, so that no oral tradition is needed.

C: Agreed: our proofs for transubstantiation are solid from scriptural exegesis alone. I would, of course, maintain that the Bible and apostolic Tradition agrees with us about the Real

Presence in the Eucharist (few, if any "Catholic" doctrines are more explicitly substantiated in the Fathers). So in this case, I would argue that Protestants have created an extra-scriptural, extra-apostolic, extra-patristic "tradition of men" (precisely what we are often accused of).

P: Jude, in speaking of apostolic tradition [Jude 3], probably has in mind specifically the gospel and the Lordship of Christ (cf. v. 4), according to the themes of the rest of his letter.

C: Your "probably has in mind" is pure speculation. It remains true that if we are to determine the content and extent of the apostolic Tradition to which Paul and others refer in the Bible, we have to go to the Fathers, as this is an historical question and issue (as are a great many in Christianity). We contend that this Tradition is in essence what the Catholic Church continues to uphold today (albeit greatly developed -- not "corrupted"), and we say that several New Testament passages refer to that Tradition, which is defined by the early Church (especially the Roman See), rather than exegesis colored by a prior axiomatic commitment to *sola Scriptura*. Sure, we're biased, too, but the difference is that we have the consensus of the early Church and the Fathers on our side, and for us this is determinative.

P: You start with the false assumption that (1) oral traditions not recorded in Scripture exist, and (2) that the fathers preserved such a tradition without error. I deny both.

C: As for (1), you have not shown me otherwise. All you've demonstrated is, in my opinion, an excessive skepticism, and a denial of the force of several (I think fairly compelling) biblical indications. As for (2), I understand the Protestant position. All we believe with regard to the Fathers is what Protestants hold with regard to the canon of the New Testament -- that a consensus of opinion is normative. What you apply to the canon, we apply to all of Christian Tradition. Now, on the other hand, you must explain why it is that you utilize this method for the canon, but not for anything else, where *sola Scriptura* becomes

the ultimate arbiter? We believe, too, in the indefectibility of the Church, but not of any particular Father (e.g., St. John Chrysostom believed that Mary sinned).

P: It is strange that Rome includes in her "Tradition" tenets of faith that are not to be found in Scripture (e.g., the office of pope, papal infallibility, apostolic succession, the magisterial priesthood, the Immaculate Conception, and the Assumption).

C: All of these are there in kernel, or more explicitly (particularly, the papacy). That was the whole point of my first book. What truly is mentioned nowhere in the Bible is *sola Scriptura* and the canon of Scripture: the former being an unapostolic, late-arriving tradition of men, and the latter wholly dependent on extra-biblical Catholic Tradition and conciliar Authority. Yet Protestants manage to firmly hold both viewpoints (excepting the so-called "Apocrypha"), in opposition to (or at least in tension with) their own principles. This is very strange to *me*.

P: Where in the Bible is the kernel of the Assumption of Mary?

C: In a nutshell: in the notion of the general resurrection of the saints, of whom Mary is a forerunner, and figure of the Church. Also, from the analogy of such righteous saints as Enoch and Elijah (and possibly Paul, in his vision), who were assumed into heaven bodily. Thirdly, if the Immaculate Conception is true (which has considerably more indication), then Mary would be immune from the curse of death (decay of the body), and so, by deduction, would not have to undergo corruption. Adam and Eve would have lived forever but for disobedience. Why, then, is it so unthinkable that Mary the Mother of God (*Theotokos*), the Second Eve, could be preserved from the curse that the disobedient primal couple brought upon mankind? We don't require explicit biblical mention of every doctrine, as you do (but then again, you are inconsistent, for *sola Scriptura* and the canon of the Bible are themselves absolutely "non-biblical").

P: By what criteria does the Roman Catholic church determine which traditions to espouse and which to reject?

C: On early Church and patristic consensus, and in accord with later theological speculation in full, essential agreement with same. I ask you in return: on what basis did the founders of Protestantism jettison a whole host of doctrines previously held for multiple hundreds of years?

P: It would be possible, by your criteria above, to jettison the entire original apostolic deposit, if that action is in line with the “early Church and patristic consensus, and in accord with later theological speculation . . . “

C: Absolutely not. We believe that such a hypothetical could never occur, based on Christ's promise that the Church is indefectible (Mt 16:18), and that the Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth. Don't neglect the place of faith, which is easy to do in intense, cerebral discussions such as these. We place faith in Christ, to preserve His Church, and His truth.

P: If that is how we determine spiritual truth, why would we even need the original apostolic deposit?

C: Very broadly speaking, spiritual truth is determined by a joint appraisal of the Bible, and the history of the Church (preeminently the apostles). The Holy Spirit, working in men's hearts, will illuminate the truth for all who seek it (I think all Christians can agree with that). The neglect of Church history and patristic consensus has led to the present chaos and relativism. This is largely why I converted. I would have loved to have found evangelical Protestantism in Church history, but it "just ain't so." I had to face the music at some point.

P: The Protestant regards as essential only those things committed to writing in the sacred Scriptures – we're not selective as to which Scriptures are essential and which non-essential.

C: Oh? What then becomes of the distinction that Protestants constantly make (in order to shore up the rickety ship of perspicuity), of "central" (essential) and "secondary" (non-essential) doctrines?

P: The Catholic does not have the benefit of this sort of consistency.

C: May I ask: *what* consistency? Of what use is "one" written "tradition" when it produces doctrinal confusion? What is gained by that? It's as if you have one ruler, but everyone has different systems of measuring with it!

P: Jesus only condemns tradition; He never praises it or appeals to it as authoritative. This is strange if He viewed tradition as the interpreter of Scripture, of equal authority with Scripture, or even helpful in following its teachings.

C: This is untrue. Jesus rejects only corrupt, human, Pharisaic tradition (*paradosis*: Mt 15:3,6, Mk 7:8-9,13), not Tradition per se, so this might be thought to be an indirect espousal of true apostolic Tradition. This is also the case with Paul in Colossians 2:8. The New Testament explicitly cites oral tradition in Matthew 2:23, 23:2, 1 Corinthians 10:4, 1 Peter 3:19, and Jude 9, in support of doctrine, and also elsewhere (2 Tim 3:8, Jas 5:17, Mt 7:12). Tradition and Scripture are of a piece, in reality and in Catholic thought, and it is only logical to place Scripture in a central position (as both Jesus and Paul did), in terms of objective reference and record. The fallacy lies in thinking that somehow in so doing, Tradition is rendered irrelevant and secondary. It is not, as it is inherent in Scripture itself, and necessary for correct interpretation. This is Jesus' view, the Fathers' view, and the Catholic Church's view. Furthermore, Paul appears to irrefutably assert the authority of oral Tradition (i.e., passed on by himself) in 2 Timothy 1:13-14 and 2:2.

P: I disagree that Paul is doing that in 2 Timothy. What he is asserting here is his authority. The content of his teaching authority is found in his letters. To put it another way, Paul is not trying to teach that *oral tradition as a category* is authoritative; rather that his *teaching* (no matter *where* it is found) is authoritative.

C: Am I missing something? If Paul's teaching is authoritative "no matter where it is found," then his oral teaching is authoritative, right? You wrote it -- I merely repeat. Thus, you have arrived at a Catholic understanding of Tradition. This "Tradition" is not separate from Scripture, but of a piece with it, and in harmony with it.

Chapter Seven

The Nature of "the Church" and Catholicism

P: The New Testament indeed teaches the necessity of some earthly ecclesiastical authority, but nothing about Roman and papal authority, or apostolic succession.

C: Roman primacy comes immediately after the New Testament period, but Rome is directly apostolic, since Peter and Paul both ended up there and were martyred there, surely not for no reason, in God's Providence (and see, e.g., St. Clement of Rome's letters). I presented many biblical proofs of all of these things in my first book, *A Biblical Defense of Catholicism*, so I will not reiterate them here. Catholic authority encompasses bishops and councils as well, which most Protestants agree are certainly biblical (the Jerusalem council in Acts 15 and *episkopos*/bishop). The pope often acts formally in concert with them (or, at the very least, consults them in every major pronouncement he makes), and the papacy is grounded in Peter's extraordinary prerogatives, granted him by Christ.

P: We Protestants may not agree on the interpretation of every Scripture, but we *do* know what the Bible *cannot* mean. Hence, we all agree that Jesus is not transubstantiated.

C: I've been maintaining this for years: about all that Protestants can agree on is that the Catholic Church is wrong! Even then, you must split into at least two camps, which regard us as 1) an aberrant, or (in some areas) greatly mistaken form of Christianity, but still within the fold, or 2) the Whore of Babylon, the Beast, Pelagians, idolaters, pagans, etc. But you must hold that we are seriously in error, or demonize us, or severely criticize us, else how would you justify your own existence as separate from the Catholic Church? Yet, since you brought up this subject as an example, I find it quite interesting that Martin Luther, the founder of Protestantism, did not regard belief in transubstantiation as an obstacle to joining his party, as late as

1543, and his successor, the "gentle" Philip Melanchthon opted for the death penalty for those who denied the Real Presence (but later changed his own mind on the subject). Luther regarded Zwingli, on the other hand, as damned, because he denied the Real Presence.

P: You seem to view Luther as somehow the origin of a sort of apostolic succession of Protestants. This is false. The Anglicans have no connection to him. Calvin admired Luther, but believed that he was wrong in several areas. The Anabaptists loathed Luther. That is just about all the Protestant groups of the sixteenth century.

C: I meant in spirit, not technically, or "apostolic succession," as you put it, as if Protestants had no disagreements (which would be like saying that zebras have no stripes). Luther was the first Protestant to absolutely break with the Catholic Church. The similarities are such that I think my opinion is valid. All Protestants strongly disagree with Catholicism, and especially in opposing the pope.

P: There was a time in the history of Christianity before Roman Catholicism existed.

C: Alright, then: Please define for me: 1) *Catholicism*, and 2) *Roman Catholicism*, and inform me as to when each (or either, as the case may be) began. This viewpoint, frankly, reminds me of pro-abortionist arguments as to when a "fetus" becomes a "person," all theoretical points of origin being purely arbitrary and subjective. It will do no good to say that my question is irrelevant, since you yourself have stated that there was a time when "Roman Catholicism" did not yet exist. If you can't tell us when it *did* begin to exist, then your historical statement is unfalsifiable and therefore suspect. Is the "Roman church" yet another distinction (perhaps it means the Roman See)? I maintain that this historical/ecclesiological scenario is hopelessly muddled.

P: If the Eastern and Western churches split, on what basis do you “claim” an Eastern father as your own?

C: The Eastern Orthodox today venerate, e.g., Pope St. Leo the Great. For our part, we venerate and hold in high esteem all the Fathers. It is of no consequence to us whether they are Eastern or Western. But the fact remains that there was but one universal Christian Church at this time.

P: You simply assume that Rome was on the right side of any given issue.

C: As indeed it always was (as a matter of historical Christian doctrinal orthodoxy). This is what made Ronald Knox and Cardinal Newman sit up and take notice, so striking and far beyond coincidence was it. As I said, historically speaking (most strikingly in the early centuries of the Church), "orthodox" was equivalent to the Roman position on any given issue. It was not easy at times to know what Christian orthodoxy was (there were many competing heretical groups), apart from an acceptance of the authority of the Roman See and the papacy, which was shown (with hindsight) to be "orthodox" again and again. This, to us, is evidence of divine guidance and protection from error. On the other hand, one constantly finds in the East in those centuries heretical patriarchs, and massive, widespread defections from orthodoxy, such as the "Robber Council" of 449 and the huge, tragic Monophysite schisms after Chalcedon in 451.

P: If the Eastern Orthodox were to claim, say, Clement of Rome as one of their own against Rome, how would you feel?

C: Such talk is meaningless and moot, since there was one, undivided universal Church then, as both sides acknowledge (otherwise it would be nonsensical to speak of a “schism” or split in 1054). It is a common heritage, just as medieval England is the common antecedent of both America and Canada. One doesn't refer to Shakespeare as "American" or "Canadian."

P: Do you think that Hippo and Carthage [i.e., the councils which determined the New Testament and Old Testament canons] were ecumenical councils? They were merely local synods. Are such synods infallible and binding?

C: Obviously not. If they are orthodox then they are part of the ordinary magisterium. In this instance, they were ratified by Popes Innocent I (d.417) and Gelasius I (d.496). This is how Ecumenical Councils are determined as well. The "conciliarism" of Eastern Monophysite heretics brought us the "Robber Council" of 449. The leadership of the Western papacy, on the other hand, led to the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Before you deride this outlook, let me remind you that you have proposed nothing as a substitute for authoritative determination of the New Testament canon. Our system is consistent, but yours is incoherent. You can deny our premises (as is the case in any belief-system), but at least we proceed logically from them, whereas Protestantism is severely inconsistent and incoherent with regard to the question of the New Testament canon and how it was finalized (and *sola Scriptura* also). We Catholics eagerly await a non-contradictory, plausible alternate Protestant explanation of how Christianity came to obtain the present New Testament canon, consistent with the Protestant foundational premise of *sola Scriptura*.

P: Protestants are told that we cannot choose which doctrines we can hold and which we reject -- it is all or nothing in the Roman mentality.

C: What you're "told" is that you ought to retain doctrines which have been the historical teaching of the Church from the beginning (e.g., infused justification, baptismal regeneration, Real Presence, and apostolic succession come to mind immediately as striking examples of the general Protestant departure from historic Christian orthodoxy). Protestant "picking and choosing" of "correct" doctrines is, in the final analysis, completely arbitrary, often based historically on the whim of one man (e.g., Luther, Calvin, Zwingli). When these depart in essence from historic Christian

teaching they can only be deemed heretical. Our system, on the other hand, is neither circular, nor based on a radically individualistic, subjective, anarchical principle. We've said all along that Rome, and more specifically the pope, were the arbiters of orthodoxy. The pope (the successor of Peter, who was given His office by Jesus Christ Himself) is the final court of appeal, and he ratifies councils, whether local or Ecumenical. Both Protestants and Orthodox have a problem in determining which Council is orthodox and which not. But we have always held to papal primacy and jurisdiction. This is precisely why the pope is needed -- as a principle of unity (as even many Lutherans and Orthodox are willing to admit).

P: The specific test case for this question of authority and orthodoxy, provided by the Catholic side, is the canon.

C: In this discussion, perhaps, but of course there are many, many test cases in which the Protestant position is revealed to be incoherent as well.

P: You say that unless we deem the church of the 4th century as infallible in deciding the canon, we can't know with certitude if the church chose the right books. And the minute we agree to that instance of infallibility, then we are inconsistent if we disagree on the infallibility of the church in *all* areas.

C: Yes, you make a tacit exception to your system by bowing to a local council (not even an Ecumenical one) and conceding that a bunch of Catholics "got it right." Why would, and how could, that be? Did God make an exception to the rule of *sola Scriptura* and individualism just because the Bible was involved? Why accept *any* Ecumenical Councils (such as Nicaea in 325 or Chalcedon in 451, which defined and refined the doctrines of the Trinity and Two Natures of Christ) in the early days but not later ones? Protestants hold no councils that I'm aware of.

Chapter Eight

On Church Authority and Epistemological "Certainty"

P: In a fair and constructive discussion, both sides try to locate some common epistemological ground before proceeding on to their specific disagreements.

C: What is this common ground for Catholics and Protestants, then? You might be surprised at how much we agree (on a certain fundamental level having to do with evidence, general apologetic aspects, sufficient reason, etc.).

P: Authority matters ought to be discussed prior to discussions about Church Fathers, development of doctrine, etc.

C: I agree, which is precisely why I have so much about *sola Scriptura* and ecclesiology on my website. I like to go right to the roots, too. We are very much alike in that regard.

P: Such discussions also start with the admission that we can't know things with absolute certainty. Neither side truly has "certainty of faith."

C: I've always agreed with this; however (and a major qualification), I think this is strictly philosophy. When faith is brought in, we can have a "certainty" in the biblical or spiritual sense. But as for "absolute certainty," I have made the same argument about Protestants (Calvinist and eternal security Baptist-types), with regard to their notion of absolute assurance of salvation. I have argued that one cannot know that with certainty, as they don't know the future absolutely. There is a philosophical equivalence here. The way in which you hold to absolute assurance as a Calvinist is precisely how we hold to the "absolute assurance" of the infallibility of the Church, as the Guardian of Tradition and the Faith. You say that your salvation and your certainty of it is grounded in the promises of God and Election (and Scripture, of course).

P: But I don't believe in "absolute" certainty, and neither does any Calvinist. "And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God." (I John 3:19-21).

C: Good. How sure are you of your salvation, then (in the sense of being justified as a one-time act)? You tell me. I thought Calvinists objected to our view that we weren't sure of ours in the Calvinist sense. Yet we claim a *moral assurance* of salvation much like what John describes above. We say that the Church's infallibility is also grounded in God's promises: in the Person of the Holy Spirit: the *Paraclete* and Spirit of Truth, Who guides His people (corporately, the Church) into all truth (not to mention the papacy and all the Petrine data). And we, too, find this in the many explicit biblical indications of such an authoritative, visible, hierarchical Church. What's the epistemological difference? I see none. There is a huge *theological* difference, but not a methodological, philosophical one. If you want to go after our "bogus certainty" you need also to examine this ironclad, non-negotiable premise of TULIP Calvinism. I think it is a more or less perfect analogy. In practical terms, here is the flaw in Protestant "absolute assurance" (an argument I made for years, as an Arminian Protestant): when someone seems to be a good Calvinist, knows all the buzz phrases and evangelical/Reformed lingo, etc., and goes to church and leads a moral life according to Reformed teaching, then he is one of the "elect," and no one really doubts this in the everyday, practical sense. Now, say for the sake of argument that he "falls away" in the sense that he no longer fits these criteria? He starts falling into sin (say adultery or blatant unbelief in Jesus). Then the Calvinist – consistent with his system -- simply says (with the marvelous benefit of hindsight) that he never *was* one of them; one of the elect. We don't have to play that game, because we believe one can truly be in God's graces and then truly fall away, and possibly return to a state of grace (we call it repentance and confession).

P: This is *not* "Calvinistic", and if some self-described Calvinists hold this idea, I disagree strongly with them. It is more characteristic of Baptists.

C: That may be, but in any event, my original analogy was that the Catholic accepts the infallibility of His Church in the same fashion that most Protestants accept the "certainty" of their supposedly already-accomplished salvation. Here is epistemological parallelism. No one can know with certainty his own eternal destiny (as even you concede); we can only know at the moment if we are in the good graces of God, by a thorough examination of conscience. Catholics call that a "moral assurance" of salvation, and we assert that this is the biblical, apostolic, and patristic belief.

P: The Protestant says, "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." (Westminster Confession of Faith, 1:10).

C: We wholeheartedly agree with that; we simply do not view Scripture in isolation from Church and Tradition.

P: The witness of the Church to the canon of the Bible was only *passive*, not an *active determination*.

C: We agree; it merely proclaimed what was already inherently the Word of God; inspired Revelation. Vatican I and II state this. The Church was, however, still absolutely necessary in a practical sense, and -- this being the case -- it is reasonable to assume that it possesses authority to proclaim on other issues as well, and to command obligatory obedience of its followers.

P: Yes, all Christians today "rely" on the authority of the Church with regard to the Table of Contents in our Bibles, but that doesn't mean that the Church "verified" the Bible.

C: Correct, but you are not facing the overall implications of this authority, as just alluded to. The Church did *proclaim*, and that has been accepted by all Christians ever since. The authority lies in the proclamation. Yet you think that the Church had that supreme authority concerning the actual extent of Scripture, while denying its prerogative to proclaim on any individual doctrine of Scripture. I find that remarkably arbitrary and implausible. In this scenario, God allows one exception to *sola Scriptura*: the Church proclaiming what the Scripture is (also perhaps a few other things, such as the Two Natures of Christ). Then it fades into the background and is able to be judged by each individual Christian with the Bible and the Holy Spirit. I find this utterly ludicrous. You can't even tell me why -- on your premises -- a Christian should not reject Chalcedonian Christology or Nicaean trinitarianism (as many heretics have in fact done). You would have to allow more exceptions to your rule because the Church "got it right" in those instances. We merely say that the Church *always* "got it right" in Ecumenical Councils, because it was protected by the Holy Spirit from error, not because God decided to protect it now and then. These things are consistent with our formal principles, but are frequent anomalies and exceptions in yours. The more exceptions to a "rule," the weaker and less worthy of belief such a "rule" is.

P: Do you think that the phrase "Scripture Alone" means "Scripture is the *only* authority, period"? Obviously that is wrong.

C: I define it as being "Scripture as the *final* or *ultimate* authority; higher than any Church or Council, which "can and do err" (Luther). Luther at the Diet of Worms in 1521 is the classic exponent, though I understand that Calvin produced a more subtle and systematic version of it.

P: Vincent of Lerins' famous canon *quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus* ["what has been believed everywhere, always, and by all"] definitely disqualifies the Roman papacy as a true "development", despite John Henry Newman's teaching on development of doctrine.

C: This is a false notion. It so happens that in the very same passage that this famous dictum comes from [his *Commonitorium*], St. Vincent gives not only a clear teaching of development of doctrine, but the most explicit exposition of development in the Fathers, from which Newman heavily drew.

P: The Catholic Church claims to be derived from an unbroken line of apostolic succession, but this is her own claim about herself, so I submit that it is a circular claim.

C: It is not at all, because it is historically-verifiable and demonstrable. There are "problems" in Catholic history to mull over and attempt to resolve (e.g., three persons claiming to be the pope at the same time) just as there are "problems" in exegesis and inerrancy which Protestants devote much energy to resolving (I have Gleason Archer's *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* in my library). In neither case do the "problems" disprove the overall system. Such things are altogether to be expected in any complex system of thought. Why would you think otherwise?

P: [19th-century Presbyterian theologian] Charles Hodge writes:

No man can believe unless the ground of faith is present to his mind. If the people are to believe that the Scriptures teach certain doctrines, then they must have the evidence that such doctrines are really taught in the Bible. If that evidence be that the Church so interprets the sacred writings, then the people must know what is the Church, i.e., which of the bodies claiming to be the Church, is entitled to be so regarded. How are the people, the uneducated masses, to determine that question? The priest tells them. If they receive his testimony on that point, then

how can they tell how the Church interprets the Scriptures? Here again they must take the word of the priest. Thus the authority of the Church as an interpreter, which appears so imposing, resolves itself into the testimony of the priest, who is often wicked, and still oftener ignorant. This cannot be the foundation of the faith of God's elect. That foundation is the testimony of God himself speaking his word, and authenticated as divine by the testimony of the Spirit with and by the truth in the heart of the believer.

(“The Protestant Rule of Faith,” from his *Systematic Theology*)

C: This is remarkable and curious in that Hodge (more than sufficiently educated to know better) completely bypasses the crucial question of apostolic succession in this matter and caricatures the Catholic position and insults all Catholics by implying that the whole thing is based upon "the word of the priest." In that sense, Protestantism is condemned more so, as the word of Luther or Calvin or one's local pastor, or the favored radio or TV evangelist/expositor is given far more weight than that of a priest, who is in strict obedience to his superiors and Church Tradition.

Chapter Nine

Are Dissident "Catholics" a Disproof of the Catholic Church's Claims of Ecclesiological and Doctrinal Unity?

P: The “oneness” of Catholicism is a myth. Catholic apologists seek in vain to paint the Catholic Church as an organization in which all are agreed on all points of dogma, over against the diversity in Protestant, brought on by private interpretations and *sola Scriptura*. But this is not true. One can find many Catholics who disagree with one or other of their church’s teachings.

C: It’s true that not all *Catholics* agree on everything the Church teaches (which would be true in any large human group) but the Catholic Church’s official *teachings* are unified. We have the books, the dogmas, the decrees, the Councils, the current *Catechism*, the uniform, developed doctrinal history and Tradition. Everyone knows what the Catholic Church believes on any major topic. You know what we believe about Mary. You know our views on contraception, purgatory, the saints, the papacy, the Eucharist, etc. (which is why you fight against them so vigorously, and cite them as reasons why *not* to become a Catholic). Everyone knows. But if dissenters in the Church can't bring themselves to be honest with themselves and accept that this is what their Church holds, how is that a disproof of the oneness of Catholicism? It is none at all. They are simply straying sheep, heretical in spirit. We can say they are not Catholic theologians if we so choose. But Protestants can only fight, disagree, and form a new sect when (inevitably) no resolution can be achieved. Is this not obvious? Why is it necessary to keep reiterating it? That is why I've called this argument "desperate," and will continue to, as I've seen nothing to dissuade me from that opinion.

P: I do agree with you that all division among Christians is wrong. I detest denominationalism, and the pride associated with it.

C: Amen! Glory to God!

P: Where did Rome obtain its authority – do you claim that it came from the Bible?

C: Yes, insofar as the apostolic authority came from Jesus and the apostles, who in turn produced the Bible, which was canonized by the Catholic Church and preserved for 1120 years (from the Council of Carthage) before the first Protestant ever laid eyes or hands on it (unless you want to claim, with Dave Hunt, that the Albigensi and Cathari were evangelical Protestants). My first book, *A Biblical Defense of Catholicism*, presents hundreds of biblical proofs of the Catholic position. I'll grant you that there is (very broadly speaking) a "mere Christianity" type of unity among Protestants, but why should anyone accept this "lowest common denominator" unity? I want all the truth and nothing but the truth. Why should any Christian tolerate any error at all?

P: That sword cuts both ways. I am absolutely certain that the Bible is inerrant, that Adam was a real person who lived in history, and that Jonah was literally swallowed by a large fish or whale of some sort. But you can't possess such certainty because it hasn't been granted by your infallible interpreter, the Roman Catholic Church.

C: Oh really?: "The Church . . . teaches that our first parents, Adam and Eve, were constituted in an original 'state of holiness and justice'" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #375). It's difficult to have original sin without original parents, isn't it? Fr. John Hardon, e.g., of impeccable orthodoxy, friend and adviser to Pope Paul VI and catechist of Mother Teresa's nuns, also believed in Jonah and the whale: "An Israelite prophet . . . he lived in the 8th century B.C. . . . swallowed by a huge fish. . ." (*Pocket Catholic Dictionary*, New York: Doubleday Image,

1980, 208). Everyone knows what the Catholic Church believes on any major topic.

P: Okay, then; what does it teach about biblical inerrancy?

C: According to Harold Lindsell, former editor of the prominent evangelical magazine *Christianity Today*, in his book, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976, 54-56), our view can stand up to the most rigorous of the Protestant denominations who uphold inerrancy. He described the Catholic view as "no different from that held by the Reformers." I am not bound to the opinion of any dissenting liberal in the Church. I am bound to the *dogma* of the Catholic Church. When a Catholic differs from that he is being an unfaithful Catholic. You forget that we do not have a priesthood of theologians, commentators, and radio and TV preachers, as you do. We have higher authorities than that, so that we are not beholden to every fad, whim, fancy, and craze which happens to be current in theology. Individual theologians may be -- but not the Church. And the new *Catechism* has spectacularly confirmed that once again. The liberals gave it everything they had to subvert the Church, but they are losing. The tide has turned, and they will go the way of all heretical movements in history -- either disappear or fight each other to either death or irrelevance and inconsequence. Theological liberalism is going the way of the dinosaur. They had their day, and hour, and their fun. But God is not mocked, so they are becoming extinct, by the comet of John Paul II and a movement for orthodoxy which gains momentum by the hour. It seems that the only Protestant answer to so many of our objections is simply to parrot, "but the Catholic Church . . .," "but all those ignorant Catholics . . .", etc. I challenge you to defend your own deepest-held beliefs. Theological liberalism has been condemned very strongly, especially in some papal encyclicals. Likewise, with liberation theology. There is no internal logical conflict in our system, only in the hypocritical practice of individuals. Liberals wreak havoc on the Church that they profess to be a part of. But things are improving slowly in this regard. The Church has seen very rough periods many times before, but

it always recovers. That is the cogent point, and is one of innumerable reasons why I think the Catholic Church is uniquely the Church which Christ founded, and why I converted to it.

P: Unless you can explain the existence of dissidents in the Roman Catholic Church, you should cease using this argument against Protestantism.

C: There is wisdom in a more cautious, patient approach. Look what happened when we were more stern: whole countries left the faith. Henry VIII falls into uncontrollable lust and bloodthirsty power politics; we censure him, and so lose England. I think the Catholic Church learned from experiences such as those (but just my own speculation, mind you). On the other hand, Pope Paul VI stood up to almost the whole world in heroically reaffirming the ban on contraception in 1968, at the very height of both the sexual revolution, and the attempt of liberals within the Catholic Church to subvert it and remake it in their own image. Even Karl Barth praised him for that, shortly before his death. What in Protestantism even remotely resembles such a courageous defiance of modernism?

P: We evangelicals have a certain set of doctrines in common. But we don't have total agreement on details. So, what is your objection to that?

C: That this is (in the final analysis) theological relativism, and indifferentism to far too many biblical doctrines.

P: Do you think that *sola Scriptura* creates utter doctrinal chaos and organizational anarchy? This is not true.

C: Very well, then, I ask you again: how many sects does it *take* for you to question *sola Scriptura*? If there are no grounds whatsoever for falsifiability, then the belief itself is based on irrationality and blind faith, and thus unworthy of allegiance (besides its being unbiblical and self-defeating). We have a self-consistent mechanism to determine orthodoxy and "bind and

loose," but you don't. Thus, every Protestant in effect becomes his own pope, according to the notion of private judgment.

P: If "more restricted" is a better way to go, then the Jehovah's Witnesses look like a great Christian alternative to Rome. Yet you want to say that the narrowness of Rome is preferable to the "wideness" of Protestantism.

C: If you think an irrationalist, deliberately dishonest, Arian heresy has a theological and historical pedigree and rationale to match that of the Catholic Church, I'd love to see you make that case. It's not the number of requirements that is the key, but the fact that they can be backed up by apostolic Tradition and the history of doctrine, which is the crucial distinction.

P: Reformed Christians do not believe in the personal infallibility of anyone. Only Scripture is an error-free rule of faith, and any church's orthodoxy must be measured by this absolute, divine standard.

C: Yes, but if you can't figure out what that standard is amongst yourselves (by differing endlessly on the interpretation of biblical teaching), what good is it? You can't replace papal infallibility with paper infallibility.

Chapter Ten

“Dialogue” With the Reformed Belgic and Second Helvetic Confessions: On the True Church and Private Judgment

Belgic Confession (1561)

[Words from the *Belgic Confession* will be indented]

Article 29: The Marks of the True Church

We believe that we ought to discern diligently and very carefully, by the Word of God,

Who is to discern? The individual? Seems like it to me.

what is the true church-- for all sects in the world today claim for themselves the name of "the church." We are not speaking here of the company of hypocrites who are mixed among the good in the church and who nonetheless are not part of it, even though they are physically there. But we are speaking of distinguishing the body and fellowship of the true church from all sects that call themselves "the church." The true church can be recognized if it has the following marks: The church engages in the pure preaching of the gospel;

What is the gospel? What is “pure preaching” of it? How many errors are allowed? For example, Luther's baptismal regeneration is anathema to the Reformed, so is his gospel not a pure one; thus Lutherans -- and many Anglicans and Methodists, etc. -- are not in the “true church”; therefore not Christians? What about the Reformed Baptists who don't baptize infants -- some or many of whom would even deny that baptism is a sacrament at all? If the gospel is defined as the Calvinist TULIP or suchlike, then this is circular reasoning (the gospel is merely what these folks say it is,

on the basis of their own unproven and unsupported axioms). The Bible, which is supposedly the criteria of truthfulness here, does no such thing. It defines the gospel as the birth (incarnation), life (with all its miracles and teaching), death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, not as some technical theory of soteriology and justification. One can certainly deduce some theory of soteriology from it, but my point is that this is not what the Bible describes as "the gospel."

it makes use of the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them;

How did Christ institute them? We have seen the differences concerning baptism above. So are Lutherans and Reformed Baptists and other sorts of Baptists out of the fold? As to the Eucharist, similarly serious differences arise. Lutherans believe in consubstantiation; so their belief here is not "pure." And of course, if we look to the early Church Fathers, they unanimously accepted the Real Presence, so that one must believe that the apostasy of the early Church on this score was well-nigh universal, and that only in the 16th-century was true eucharistic belief restored, and even then not by Luther (or for that matter, Zwingli), but by Calvin. Now, what authority does he have? Certainly not apostolic authority, nor the prestige of passed-down apostolic Tradition, as his view is a novelty and an innovation. So there are a host of difficulties in almost every sentence here. The words may sound great, but they conceal myriad historical and biblical problems and contradictions, as clearly seen in this merely brief, cursory treatment.

it practices church discipline for correcting faults.

Sure, then when someone disagrees, he simply goes to another sect, on the basis of his own judgment as to what the pure church is, based on the Word of God (first sentence above). He applies the same criteria stated here to go somewhere else, because the final authority must reside in the individual, due to unresolvable difficulties and contradictions among the various

sects. These appeared at the beginning of the Protestant Revolt (inevitably) and will always remain, because of this flawed principle of how one determines theological truth. If in fact there had always been one Protestant Church and one only, then these axioms might hold at least some water, but as this has never been the case, the system is burdened by self-contradiction and an inability to consistently apply these standards to the real world.

In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and holding Jesus Christ as the only Head.

This sounds noble and glorious, but it is not nearly this simple, because there were and are foundational differences on almost every issue where Protestantism is to be distinguished from Catholicism in the first place. Until these can be resolved, then such talk within the Protestant paradigm is a pipe-dream of the most illusory sort.

By these marks one can be assured of recognizing the true church -- and no one ought to be separated from it.

The only self-consistent, historically-demonstrable way to establish this is by apostolic succession and an examination of history (as the Fathers taught). No Protestant sect can pass this test. But even using their own stated criteria of authenticity above, no one can figure out which sect is the true one, because the doctrinal disagreements run too deep and are too serious.

As for those who can belong to the church, we can recognize them by the distinguishing marks of Christians: namely by faith,

What is faith? Protestants disagree on this, too. How does regeneration and election relate to personal faith? How is one assured of saving faith? Can one lose that and fall away?, etc.

and by their fleeing from sin and pursuing righteousness, once they have received the one and only Savior, Jesus Christ. They love the true God and their neighbors, without turning to the right or left, and they crucify the flesh and its works.

This sounds great, too, but it has never occurred in an entire group. Since sin is present in all professed Christian groups, the absence of it can hardly be the "proof" of the authenticity of one sect over another.

Though great weakness remains in them, they fight against it by the Spirit all the days of their lives, appealing constantly to the blood, suffering, death, and obedience of the Lord Jesus, in whom they have forgiveness of their sins, through faith in him.

Virtually all Christian groups would adhere to this notion, so it is of no help for our task, either.

As for the false church, it assigns more authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God; it does not want to subject itself to the yoke of Christ;

What does this *mean*?

it does not administer the sacraments as Christ commanded in his Word; it rather adds to them or subtracts from them as it pleases;

The problems in this statement were already discussed. One can either appeal to the constant Tradition throughout the ages and apostolic succession, or else choose one of a host of Protestant options, all themselves ultimately arbitrary and man-centered and unable to be supported by Church history.

it bases itself on men, more than on Jesus Christ;

No Christian system is more man-centered than Protestantism, where a single man's word (Calvin, Luther, Fox et al) has the greatest authority, far greater than any pope ever dreamt of. Any local pastor has far more influence or effect on the lives of his congregation than the pope has on a Catholic, in a practical, everyday sense. That's why Protestant congregations often split in two merely because a popular pastor might feel called to move on to another assembly.

it persecutes those who live holy lives according to the Word of God and who rebuke it for its faults, greed, and idolatry.

The sin argument resolves nothing. Protestants were at least as intolerant in the 16th century as Catholics -- arguably far more, especially in light of their supposed principles of tolerance and supremacy of the individual conscience.

These two churches are easy to recognize and thus to distinguish from each other.

Not quite. Until Protestants can answer the difficulties I raised above, and many more brought about by their utter inability to resolve their own internal squabbles, any claim to a true Church in their ranks, of whatever character, visible or invisible, institutional, creedal, confessional, or metaphysical, over against the Catholic Church, is self-defeating, upon close scrutiny.

The Second Helvetic Confession (1566)

[Words from the *Second Helvetic Confession* will be indented]

Chapter 2 - Of Interpreting the Holy Scriptures; and of Fathers, Councils, and Traditions [complete]

The True Interpretation of Scripture. The apostle Peter has said that the Holy Scriptures are not of private

interpretation (II Peter 1:20), and thus we do not allow all possible interpretations.

How many are allowed then? Which ones, and why?

Nor consequently do we acknowledge as the true or genuine interpretation of the Scriptures what is called the conception of the Roman Church, that is, what the defenders of the Roman Church plainly maintain should be thrust upon all for acceptance.

Obviously not, having enthroned private judgment of individuals and traditions of men in its place . . .

But we hold that interpretation of the Scripture to be orthodox and genuine which is gleaned from the Scriptures themselves (from the nature of the language in which they were written, likewise according to the circumstances in which they were set down, and expounded in the light of like and unlike passages and of many and clearer passages) and which agree with the rule of faith and love, and contributes much to the glory of God and man's salvation.

More high-sounding, pious, noble language with little concrete or particular content. This assumes (quite absurdly) that Protestants are in sole possession of these hermeneutical tools, and that one "true" teaching on any topic will appear and be evident to all true followers of Christ. These are pipe dreams.

Interpretations of the Holy Fathers. Wherefore we do not despise the interpretations of the holy Greek and Latin fathers, nor reject their disputations and treatises concerning sacred matters as far as they agree with the Scriptures;

Who decides where they agree or disagree, and by what criteria? There are a host of doctrines where the Fathers contradict Reformed Christianity *en masse*.

but we modestly dissent from them when they are found to set down things differing from, or altogether contrary to, the Scriptures.

Who decides what the Scriptures teach? A panel of venerable, grey-bearded Reformed worthies, assembled in 1566?

Neither do we think that we do them any wrong in this matter; seeing that they all, with one consent, will not have their writings equated with the canonical Scriptures, but command us to prove how far they agree or disagree with them, and to accept what is in agreement and to reject what is in disagreement.

Yes, as judged by the apostolic Church and its authoritative Councils, and its popes, not by individuals eight, nine, or ten centuries later who count the noses of their comrades in some given sect and conclude that the majority opinion is therefore the "biblical" one.

Councils. And in the same order also we place the decrees and canons of councils. Wherefore we do not permit ourselves, in controversies about religion or matters of faith, to urge our case with only the opinions of the fathers or decrees of councils; much less by received customs, or by the large number who share the same opinion, or by the prescription of a long time. Who is the judge? Therefore, we do not admit any other judge than God himself, who proclaims by the Holy Scriptures what is true, what is false, what is to be followed, or what to be avoided.

But of course! *God* will settle all the issues! Who could argue with that? But as we are not God, but mere men -- and prophets

are a relatively rare occurrence --, there must be some human Christian authority as well -- binding in some sense; to some degree. One can, then, either believe that God promised to guide His Church and preserve it free from error, under a properly unified authority, with councils and bishops and a gift of infallibility (as Catholics believe) or that individuals *ultimately* decide what is or what is not true, dissenting from councils, Tradition, the Fathers, and apostolic succession alike if needs be. These are given lip-service above and elsewhere in similar Protestant statements, but it is obvious that the individual retains the right to dissent from all of this ecclesiastical authority, since his conscience is supreme. It all began with Luther at Worms.

So we do assent to the judgments of spiritual men which are drawn from the Word of God. Certainly Jeremiah and other prophets vehemently condemned the assemblies of priests which were set up against the law of God; and diligently admonished us that we should not listen to the fathers, or tread in their path who, walking in their own inventions, swerved from the law of God.

This is a large reason why I became a Catholic: because Protestant innovations were merely the inventions of men. They had no pedigree in Church history, and thus, no reason to be accepted. The Catholic believes that just as the Holy Spirit can teach people today, that He could do so in the past -- that Christian history of thought means something. G.K. Chesterton insightfully described Tradition as “the democracy of the dead.”

Traditions of Men. Likewise we reject human traditions, even if they be adorned with high-sounding titles, as though they were divine and apostolical, delivered to the Church by the living voice of the apostles, and, as it were, through the hands of apostolical men to succeeding bishops which, when compared with the Scriptures, disagree with them; and by their disagreement show that they are not apostolic at all. For as the apostles did not contradict themselves in doctrine, so the apostolic men

did not set forth things contrary to the apostles. On the contrary, it would be wicked to assert that the apostles by a living voice delivered anything contrary to their writings. Paul affirms expressly that he taught the same things in all churches (1 Cor. 4:17). And, again, "For we write you nothing but what you can read and understand." (2 Cor. 1:13). Also, in another place, he testifies that he and his disciples--that is, apostolic men--walked in the same way, and jointly by the same Spirit did all things (2 Cor. 12:18). Moreover, the Jews in former times had the traditions of their elders; but these traditions were severely rejected by the Lord, indicating that the keeping of them hinders God's law, and that God is worshipped in vain by such traditions (Matt. 15:1ff.; Mark 7:1 ff.).

Who determines which teachings are "traditions of men" and how? And why should we value *their* opinions or heed *their* authority more so than the venerable Fathers of the Church?

Chapter Eleven

The Catholic Understanding of "Grace Alone" and Justification by Faith

P: Do Roman Catholics believe that a person can make it to heaven based not only on what Christ did on the cross but also because of what He does inside of a person, by grace?

C: In Catholicism, the ultimate cause of our justification is always God's grace -- in Catholic/Tridentine teaching just as much as in Reformed. But we view grace as the Ultimate Cause, not in *contradiction* to works, as Luther and Calvin would say (as pertains to justification and salvation, anyway -- I understand that they place works as a requirement under the category of sanctification). Catholics believe in "justification by grace through faith" (because of Christ), but we deny the notion of "justification by grace alone through faith alone" (because of Christ alone). The latter is not a biblical concept. The difference lies in the exclusivistic, dichotomous use of the word *alone*. *Faith alone* implies that works are excluded from the formula altogether. The Catholic rejects this, on the basis of James 2 and other passages: faith and works cannot be separated in such a fashion; they are two blades of a pair of scissors, two sides of a coin. But we can assert with you that "we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ." This is a true formula. We are justified by grace (i.e., again, contrary to Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism) and through faith (as we are not robots without free agency), and (of course) because of Christ and His shed blood and redemptive, atoning work for us on the Cross. I have always thought (since converting) that the differences in this area largely boil down to a certain all-pervasive bent of mind in Protestantism which Louis Bouyer (a convert from Lutheranism) called the "dichotomous mindset," or what has been described as an "either/or" way of thinking – as opposed to the Catholic "both/and." We believe such thinking is unbiblical: James 2:24 concisely denies the formula of "faith alone." The fallacy and false premise on the Reformed side (apart from what I would

argue is an unbiblical notion of human free will) lies in asserting that to keep faith and works together in justification somehow leads to a detraction from the primacy of God's grace and the promotion of self-produced Pelagian works on the part of man. Calvinism cannot see the middle ground which I and my Church see here, because (in my opinion) its own system simply will not allow it as a logical and scriptural possibility. For the Calvinist, oftentimes, free will (and the accompanying possibility of grace-produced merit) *equals* Pelagianism (or Semi-Pelagianism). Likewise, free will is regarded as a lessening of, and "intrusion" upon God's divine prerogatives in Providence and Sovereignty and Predestination. What we argue is that God's Providence is "big" enough to incorporate human free will without impinging upon Divine Sovereignty. That's it in a nutshell.

P: The Bible is clear that true faith is proven by works, and the absence of works allows one to question whether faith is present.

C: That much we (i.e., the two broad camps) clearly agree on, and I am happy to point that out whenever I can. The argument comes over the precise soteriological connection between justification and sanctification. We say the formal theological separation of the two has great (and detrimental) consequences, which we believe have been borne out in the subsequent history of Protestantism, just as with many ostensibly "minor" distinctions throughout Church history (e.g., the *homoousios* in the controversies over the Two Natures of Christ in the 5th century). We see it as a difference concerning the *application* of salvation, whereas, unfortunately, many Protestants wish to deny that we even hold to the gospel itself because of our views on this. In this way, good works are necessary for salvation, and sanctification is not separated from justification. Rather, the two are intrinsically intertwined, just as the Bible and Tradition are: another both/and concept.

P: I would question the "origin" of these necessary good works in human effort, or human effort caused and enlivened by the Holy Spirit.

C: It is more so the latter, not at all the first, which is the ancient Pelagian heresy. If the Holy Spirit "inspires," "enables," "prompts," "causes," "initiates" (or whatever synonymous term you like) our good works, how then, can it be said (of Catholic theology) that they originate with *us*? All we're saying is that the human being in good graces can *cooperate* with God. This is -- it seems to me -- an explicit, undeniable, Pauline doctrine. You can't find something like the Assumption of Mary in Paul, true enough, but you do find this sort of thing.

P: Working *for* salvation is vastly different from working *out* our salvation. The difference is origin -- is it man towards God, or God towards man?

C: I respectfully disagree. I see this as a distinction largely without a difference. The pure Protestant, *sola fide* [*faith alone*] view can't even say "working out," because it is (when all is said and done) all determined by God, and there is no "working out," only a non-meritorious acceptance of God's sole salvific work, and an accompanying (necessary in a sense) "doing works in gratefulness for God's great, unmerited gift of salvation." No? You may say (as you did) that works must accompany true salvation and election (and we agree), but it still never directly bears on salvation in Protestant, Reformational theology (whether Calvinist or Arminian or hybrid views), as that is a settled issue. As for origin, I think you are again making a dichotomy where none need exist. I don't believe it is all "God does it" (although it is in the sense of empowerment and initiation), or all man's self-originated initiative. God begins the process, and then we merely cooperate with it (e.g., Paul uses the term "co-laborers," I believe).

P: How can someone be made "actually holy," and still need the aid of sacraments and not be consummated until they get to heaven?

C: Because it is a process, not a one-time declaration. We can be in a state of grace and without sin for a time, but being the human beings we are, almost invariably we will stumble and fall again, and we believe the sacraments are a God-ordained means of receiving both forgiveness and further grace in order to enable us to be more holy in the future. And sacraments are valuable even when one is fairly holy for a time (three minutes or whatever), since it is also a preventive aid, meant to lower the possibility of falling again.

P: Something can be "actual" and "legally declared" simultaneously in God's eyes.

C: With all due respect, I think that's an incoherent position. The fact remains that we are either holy or not at any given time. Even God can't declare something to be which simply isn't the case. He can't say the earth is square, that $2 + 2 = 5$, or that a fornicator or compulsive liar is "holy," no matter what "realm" He is in. Holiness and heaven do not preclude or annihilate logical truisms and maxims. This was one of Luther's grave mistakes.

P: God is not limited to time and space as we are.

C: Strictly speaking, no, but since in this instance He is dealing with us, who are in time and space, and in a fallen, sinful condition, He is necessarily "limited" insofar as the "materials" He has to work with (us wretched creatures) are assuredly limited. So I think this argument fails and is incoherent. It's clever, but still incoherent.

P: In time/space, we are working out our salvation, while from God's timeless perspective we are actually justified, sanctified, redeemed, etc.

C: No, it is not clear because it is indeed untrue and illogical, and beyond that, it is unbiblical as well, in my opinion, which is why the Christian Church never held to such views until Martin

Luther came onto the scene (the nominalist philosophy led intellectually to it, but no one had ever fleshed it out until Luther). True, God knows who will be saved in the end, and in that sense alone, He can see us as redeemed and "holy" at the present time (i.e., in our place in time/space), but again, that doesn't change the fact of our actual state of holiness or unholiness right now on the earth.

P: All sin leads to spiritual death (hell). All sin, mortal or venial is disallowed in heaven,

C: How, then, do you explain 1 John 5:17?: "All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin which is not mortal." (KJV: "not unto death") Are you saying that a white lie or a momentary pang of jealousy or lust (especially if unrepented of) is the moral equivalent in God's eyes of a torture, rape, and murder? That's what your position -- starkly put -- reduces to.

P: No, I don't say it, Christ Himself said it.

C: Everyone agrees that all sin is barred from heaven, but again, that is future for us, not present, and this is precisely why purgatory is such a merciful, necessary doctrine. If God gets "serious" about actual, real sin in heaven, why in the world would He not start *now*? We think God -- in practical terms -- takes sin as seriously now as He will then, and that's one reason why we think mere imputation or forensic declaration of holiness is a falsehood. Your difficulty is that 1 John 5:16-17 expressly contradicts you. John says "he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death," but you say "all sin leads to spiritual death," and that all sins are equal in God's eyes. Who shall I believe? Again, the Apostle John says, "there is a sin not unto death" in v.17. Thus he is clearly making the distinctions we make with regard to degrees of sin. Furthermore, it is not by any means certain from context that the "mortal sin" is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit alone. Some translations even have "there is sin," rather than "there is a sin." Also, the fact that there is no sin whatsoever in heaven is a different proposition from saying

which sins bar one from heaven, so I don't believe that helps to prove what you are trying to assert here.

P: I don't believe that a genuinely redeemed person can commit a sin and remain unrepentant until death.

C: Of course they can be unrepentant. I see it all the time -- in others and in myself (although obviously I haven't approached death yet).

P: The saved person will seek forgiveness eventually, if they are among the elect.

C: I think this is an abstraction literally divorced from reality. It is a morally laudable goal and position to take, in terms of sanctity, but I just don't see that it is in line with the reality of sin and man's fallen nature (and sadly, I have far too often observed that being a "Christian" doesn't make much of a difference in many Christians' lives -- which only supports my point). Your view ironically makes the assurance of salvation far more uncertain and imperiled than the Catholic view, since logically it allows you to -- in effect -- question the ultimate salvation of anyone whom you see in persistent sin (there is much truth to that principle, too). It looks to me like if you are right on this point (and assuming there is no purgatory), there would be very few who make it to heaven, and I have a problem with that vis-a-vis God's mercy.

P: This is similar to your "mortal sin" since unrepentant sinners will end up in hell.

C: If this is restricted to mortal sin, I agree. I see that you have a very Wesleyan view of sanctification, but I think that the logic of that view leads to a Catholic sacramental, infused justification view. I don't think it synthesizes particularly well with the standard Protestant *sola fide* soteriology, largely for the reasons I have outlined above.

P: The Holy Spirit draws man toward God, not our free will.

C: I agree. The latter is Pelagianism, and it is not our view. That is not the issue. The issue is whether we can cooperate with God in our salvation or not. Free will is not inherently opposed to free grace. There simply is no need to make that dichotomy. We assert that man's free will and God's sole initiative in salvation co-exist. It is difficult, paradoxical, mysterious in many ways, but it appears to be the teaching of Scripture, and is solidly backed by Christian Tradition. Even St. Augustine, whom the Calvinists love and claim as one of their "own," never denied free will. God initiates and empowers the seeking. Since we are not robots, we are actually freely choosing to act upon the grace that we receive through no merit of our own.

P: Mixing justification and sanctification leads to a salvation dependent on meritorious works of man contrasted by a grace and faith-based salvation granted by God.

C: We agree with you that salvation always is caused by God, by His free, unmerited grace. Again, I reiterate that we don't deny that God saves us, solely through the work of Jesus and His shed blood on the cross on our behalf. All we're saying is that man cooperates with God, who always enables, and this is nothing more than what St. Paul explicitly says (e.g., 1 Cor 3:9). It seems to me that you are reducing the concept of merit to Semi-Pelagianism (e.g., you imply above that we deny "a grace and faith-based salvation"), when in fact the two concepts are distinct. And I continue to contend that if man can do absolutely nothing in order to "work out" his salvation (since it is all filthy menstrual rags -- that is the literal meaning in Isaiah), then a strict Calvinist position is the only consistent form of this line of thinking.

P: You state that this is not the teaching of the Catholic Church; however, this confusion is evident amongst many Catholics and former Catholics who have become evangelicals.

C: Why should I care about the opinions of nominal, former, under-catechized Catholics any more than you care about other varieties of Protestants? All I can do is argue and defend and explain based on official Catholic teachings. All these other views of varying levels of falsity and confusion are completely irrelevant. All that proves is that the Catholic Church and individual Catholics have failed to pass down their beliefs properly, which is an educational, familial and discipleship issue, rather than a theological one. This is indeed, however, a difficult, nuanced topic, so I wouldn't blame all confusion on sheer ignorance. Some issues are best left to the (orthodox, faithful) theologians. The most important thing for the man on the street is a down-to-earth practical, daily walk with Jesus. But I'm sure that if you wanted me to better learn Baptist theology, you wouldn't want me to talk to former, disgruntled Baptists, or the most theologically under-educated member of your congregation, would you? Let's be fair here! The official teaching on matters related to merit was set down very eloquently by the Council of Trent, in its *On the Necessity and on the Fruit of Satisfaction* (session 14, November 25, 1551 -- emphasis added). Now I want you to tell me how the following in any way, shape or form denies a "grace and faith-based salvation maintained by God"?:

. . . we are made conformable to Jesus Christ, *Who satisfied for our sins* (Romans 5:10, 1 John 2:1 ff.), *from Whom all our sufficiency is* (2 Corinthians 3:5); having also thereby a most sure pledge that, if we suffer with Him, we shall also be glorified with Him (Romans 8:17). But neither is this satisfaction, which we discharge for our sins, so our own as not to be through Jesus Christ. *For we who can do nothing of ourselves, as of ourselves, can do all things, He cooperating who strengthens us* (Philippians 4:13). Thus, man has not wherein to glory, but *all our glorying is in Christ* (1 Corinthians 1:31, 2 Corinthians 10:17, Galatians 6:14): in Whom we live; in Whom we merit (cf. Acts 17:28); in Whom we satisfy; bringing forth fruits worthy of penance (Luke 3:8), which

from Him have their efficacy; by Him are offered to the Father; and through Him are accepted by the Father . . .

P: Are you saying that the Catholic position is that works do directly bear on salvation?

C: In (and only in) the precise, non-Pelagian sense as laid out by the quote above, yes.

P: Then salvation originates from both God and man.

C: Absolutely not. That is the heresy of Semi-Pelagianism. This is the point you must grasp. It *always* originates with God. This is Catholic theology. Trent is very clear, in its Canon I on Justification:

If anyone saith that man may be justified before God by his own works, whether done through the teaching of human nature or that of the law, without the grace of God through Jesus Christ; let him be anathema.

So the position you claim (or suspect) we believe is actually dogmatically anathematized by the Catholic Church, and must not be espoused by any orthodox Catholic.

P: So man, in some aspects, no matter how minute, has the power to redeem himself?

C: Yes; e.g., Protestants must "minutely" walk the aisle, say the sinner's prayer, accept the Lord's work on their behalf, repent, get baptized (i.e., an adult who converts to Christianity, who had never been baptized), give witness to their changed life, etc. All of these things are doing something, even though the Holy Spirit certainly begins all of them in the person's heart (as also in our theology).

P: We are, in the flesh, never holy, even for three minutes. All of our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. (Isa 64:6) In Christ, we

possess Christ's holiness and righteousness. Outside of Christ, we are nothing, entirely void of any virtue.

C: This sort of thought stems from nominalism, which itself was a reaction against Scholasticism: an attempt to minimize the role of reason, which was held together with revelation in the Thomistic schema. Now I suspect you probably won't like me making this analysis, since you (like most Protestants) probably think your view is simply self-evidently the "biblical" one, but I think we must always be aware of the historical pedigree of our thought. These things didn't come out of nowhere. Luther introduced new things such as *sola fide* and *sola Scriptura* (with which you concur), but he in turn was still influenced by previous thought (in this case the nominalists).

P: It is equally obvious that the separation of justification and sanctification leads to error within Protestantism concerning "easy-believism" and "fire insurance" faith. Opposite extremes.

C: This is a very good, helpful clarification, with great insight. Thanks. So we are clear that the "Pelagian" and "antinomian" distortions (at both ends of the justification "pole") are errors (among the two camps) in *practice*, not of "official" doctrine. I concur wholeheartedly with your analysis of this shortcoming-in-practice in both our parties.

P: I would point out 1 Corinthians 6:9:

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, 10: Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. 11: And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

C: Yet the passage never denies that these same people might stumble back into such horrible sins (which many other verses do assert -- there's your exegetical considerations). This is a general statement of how people who are slaves to sin will not be saved. That is no different than our conception of mortal sin. We believe this passage literally. A person who dies while fornicating, stealing, etc., is in grave danger of hellfire, in our outlook. The Catholic Church detests all sin, and regards it as detrimental to right relationship with God (as do you). Ironically, this is a proof-text of mine, since in verse 11, baptism, justification, and sanctification are all associated closely together by St. Paul, whereas Protestants don't want *us* to put them together . . .

P: God is not speaking here to people already 'holy' by good works.

C: You act as if none of us can rise above (by God's grace) these rotten sins! That is clearly not the case. We can, and do overcome them, with His enabling power.

P: Notice the verb, present tense *are*. No qualifications, no "processes."

C: This doesn't contradict our view. One can be free of all of these sins, yet fall back into them tomorrow, given the right set of circumstances. That is why it is a process. We fall, repent, and get on our feet again. It will do no good to take a view that God simply pretends that the sins aren't there. The removal of sin is literal: the word for sins "blotted out" (*exalipho*) in Scripture is the same that is used, e.g., in describing the cleansing of lepers. This is actual, infused justification, not imputed, extrinsic, forensic. In Romans 5:19 we find that since Adam's "disobedience" led to actual, real original sin in all of us, likewise, the "righteousness" spoken of is literal, too, not merely "imputed." I think the context is clear, too: Paul goes on to explicitly pit sin against justification (not coinciding with it, as in *sola fide* Protestantism), in 6:1-4. It makes no sense to me to interpret all this as occurring only in heaven, in God's mind

(imputation). No, I truly think the passage suggests a literal freedom from sin, in this life, in actuality, in the person, not just in God's mind.

P: How do you know if someone is truly redeemed?

C: “You shall know them by their fruits. The fruit of the Spirit is..... We know that those who are born of God do not sin” (1 John 5:18). This is yet another proof for our side. In other words, the essence of the Christian is to be sin-free; not merely regarded as such by God, otherwise it should read:*are not regarded by God as sinners*..... But it doesn't say that. It says*do not sin* (i.e., actual, real, in this world, not just the next). It is not absolute, since we still sin, but rather, speaking of the ideal Christian, the obedient, repentant, justified and sanctified one.

P: To depend on a hollow ritual (as infant baptism must be to the baby) is absurd. No personal choice is being made by the individual at all in such cases. How can a baby heed the Holy Spirit?

C: I guess then, that the act of God choosing anyone to be among His elect before the foundation of the world is equally absurd, on the same grounds? Nothing you or I ever do will be anywhere near approaching the importance and profoundly causative nature of God's choosing us. And we had nothing to do with that election, did we (this is Catholic doctrine, remember -- Thomism is almost Calvinistic in many ways)? You may have various arguments against infant baptism, but this isn't one of them, since it is quite self-defeating.

P: I will question my own “salvation” until the moment I die, checking to make sure I have not just bought a policy of “fire insurance” from hell.

C: Well, this is good in that it illustrates perfectly and eloquently my "ecumenical" point I have often made about the two systems working out identically when it comes to a practical, day-to-day

walk with Jesus. I could say largely the same thing as a Catholic. In that sense, how much does all our abstract theologizing count for, in an important sense, in the final analysis? We know that God will ask us what we *did* when it comes around to Judgment Day (Matt 25:34-36), not which abstract theory of soteriology we held.

Chapter Twelve

Repentance and Salvation

P: I agree with you that the *gospel* is -- as Paul teaches -- the death, burial and Resurrection of Jesus.

C: Excellent! One wonders, then, why so many Protestants seem to think that the *gospel* is the equivalent of some variant of Protestant soteriology, rather than the basic facts of the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus.

P: Jesus taught that we are to be motivated by a love relationship towards God, not a legalistic attempt to fulfill a prescribed act.

C: Yes. As I've said, "works" in Catholic theology (i.e., soteriology) are never intended in the sense of mere "legalism" or in isolation from God's prevenient and enabling grace (which view is the heresy Pelagianism). Being opposed to "faith alone" is not equivalent to the denial of "grace alone." The latter we vigorously affirm, with you, as the cause, origin, and ground of every man's salvation. The issue between Catholics and Protestants is thus not the all-encompassing and absolute necessity of God's grace, but rather, the relationship of justification to sanctification, and the latter to eschatological salvation itself.

P: In both the Old and New Testaments the way of salvation is the same. In the Old Testament, salvation was not a reward for keeping the Law, but rather a gift to those who sought repentance from their sinful state, by faith in God alone.

C: Absolutely true. God doesn't change, and neither does the way of salvation. It is interesting to note that current Bible and historical scholarship also is reaching a new consensus that the Jews also believed in salvation by grace, just as we Christians do -- not by works. Thus, the common contrary accusation by

Protestants against both Catholics and Jews is both unjust and wrongheaded.

P: His righteousness, imputed to us by faith, in fact does exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, and on His merit we shall be saved.

C: Except that imputation of justification is, in my opinion, an eisegetical concept, imposed on the Scriptures from outside. It is curious to me that Matthew 5:20, which refers to "your righteousness" (i.e., ours, that of believers), can be interpreted as referring in fact to Christ's righteousness alone and not ours at all. I think this is also clearly eisegesis -- but all belief-systems (quite understandably and necessarily) presuppose ideas and this affects interpretation and comparison of scripture with scripture. Nevertheless, perhaps some significant common ground can be had even here. As long as the "your" is not intended in the sense of an individual's own self-produced righteousness (Pelagianism again), but rather, as "your righteousness [produced always by Christ, as a result of His atoning work, but willfully accepted]," then our views are not far apart. We believe that what God declares, He thus produces, as in creation itself. Therefore, His righteousness can become our righteousness in reality, not just in abstract, "imputed" terms. In this sense -- and this sense alone -- do we participate, and "merit." The whole question of our participation in our own salvation (e.g., Rom 2:5-13, Phil 2:12-13) reduces to one's view on free will. If there is no freedom whatever and man is totally evil, a "worm," then of course God must do all, and we can do nothing. But if we have a free will and a small measure of good left in us (after all, we are made in God's image, so we can't be reduced to wormhood), we can participate in the sense of cooperation, even though every good thing still comes from God. And if this be true, then infused justification makes all the sense in the world.

P: In Deuteronomy 10:16 God distinguishes between manipulative obedience to the Law and the loving obedience of faith.

C: Good. That's right: the "loving obedience of faith." This is what we Catholics are saying (and St. Paul often does). "Faith without works is dead." Protestants often use the phrase, "faith that works." Catholics say "faith and works are two sides of the same coin of salvation." I see very little practical difference, which is why I stated that both sides accept the primacy of grace and the necessity of works in some sense. If we could agree on simply doing the good works, rather than arguing over how they fit into the overall scheme of things, much good would be accomplished, I think. Both sides fully accept all the supernatural facts of Christ's divinity and man's fallenness and believe that salvation comes solely as a result of His atoning work on our behalf -- always ultimately His work of grace, whether or not works enter into the equation also, both sides agree that good works ought to be present in every Christian's life, whether they are required for salvation, or done in gratitude for salvation already accomplished.

P: Jesus told the rich young ruler to forsake his false god of worldly security and riches so that he might begin to love the Lord God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength. This was a prerequisite for repentance, not salvation. Repentance and faith are bound together in the Bible.

C: First of all, the rich man asked our Lord what he had to do to "inherit eternal life" (Lk 18:18), not what he needed to do to "repent." This is crucial to my whole reply. And Jesus first inquires as to whether he has kept the Commandments (18:20-21). Upon hearing that he has, He says "there is still one thing lacking....." (18:22), thus implying that these "works" are indeed prerequisites for salvation, to be supplemented now by selling everything he owns and giving the money to the poor. Then Jesus describes what is going on as "enter[ing] the kingdom of God" or refusing to do so (18:24-25). And the onlookers exclaim, "then who can be saved?" (18:26). Note that Jesus utters not a word about believing in Him, accepting Him as his Savior, etc. Not to say that He *never* says that -- but I find the absence here

inexplicable, granting Protestant *sola fide* assumptions. So I respectfully dissent from your opinion that the repentance called for here was not directly tied in to the man's salvation. It clearly was, by our Lord's explicit testimony. Or so it sure seems to me at any rate . . . We all agree that repentance is necessary for salvation. For the Protestant, furthermore, one need only truly repent, "accept Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior" and then imputed justification occurs and salvation is accomplished, and either can't be lost (Calvinists and Baptists) or only with very great difficulty or outright rebellion and blasphemy against Christ (Arminians). So from whence derives your distinction between "repentance" and "salvation?" Let me put this in syllogistic terms, if I may:

1. If and only if I repent and accept Jesus as my Savior, will I be saved.
2. In other words, nothing else need be added to such repentance in order to be saved, other than the "faith" which God grants simultaneously with the newly-acquired imputed justification and salvation.
3. Ergo: true repentance (i.e., in this context, a willingness to completely turn from a life in bondage to sin and in rebellion against God) and true salvation are one and the same thing.
4. Therefore, saying the rich young ruler could "inherit eternal life" (18:18) and "enter the kingdom of God" (18:24-25) by forsaking his riches, thus indicating such true repentance, is the same as being "saved."

In order to maintain your disjunction between "repentance" and "salvation" in this particular instance, you would have to alternately explain the contextual references to "eternal life," entering the "kingdom of God," and being "saved."

P: I don't think Jesus is stressing that the key is that he should come and follow Him.

C: Yes, but that doesn't rule out keeping of Commandments as a "prerequisite" to salvation. Both are true, and right from Jesus.

P: I believe that (according to context) the one thing lacking was not the selling, but the following. The "salvation issue" is not what we bring into the deal, but Whom we choose to follow, and why.

C: Good point. However, the following is itself a meritorious work, what St. Paul repeatedly calls the "obedience" or "works" of "faith." Choosing to follow, or "believing" in, Jesus as Lord and Savior is "obeying" him, hence a meritorious "work" of some sort. This is clearly seen in, e.g., John 3:36, where "believing" and "obeying" the Son are presented as equivalent, parallel concepts (cf. 1 Pet 2:7, Titus 1:16, 3:3). The common Baptist terminology, e.g., of "nonmeritorious act of acceptance" or synonymous expression, is simply semantics: a distinction without a difference, in my opinion. The fact remains that a human being has to *do* something to accept, or appropriate, or initiate salvation (as applied to him by God, not as the origination of grace). We must "work out" our salvation (Phil 2:12). Nevertheless, "God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." (Phil 2:13). This is precisely the Catholic view, and seems to run contrary to the Protestant denial of merit and espousal of imputed justification. The necessity of "works" and "merit" is also indicated, in addition to the rich young ruler passage, in, e.g., Mt 5:20, 7:16-27, 16:27, 25:42, Lk 12:33, 14:9-14, Rom 2:5-13 (esp. v.6), 1 Cor 3:8, 12:24, 2 Cor 4:17, 1 Tim 4:8, Titus 3:5-8, Heb 5:9, 10:23-4,36, 1 Pet 1:2,17, 2 Pet 1:10, Rev 2:10, 22:12, Jas 1:22, 2:14-26. I think this many verses are quite sufficient to prove a doctrine. In this regard, I always use the example of the Virgin Birth, concerning which only two or three passages exist, yet it is firmly believed as a "fundamental" by all Christians. So why the difficulty accepting a notion supported by more than a score of (I think) clear passages? As for

Galatians and its supposed opposition to such works, these are the works of the Jewish ceremonial Mosaic Law (circumcision, sabbath-keeping, etc.), done in expectation of special, undue favor as the Chosen People, not cooperative works per se, which is now admitted by an increasing number of evangelical Bible scholars, including some of the most highly-regarded. This is seen in, e.g., Gal 2:16, 3:11, 5:6, 6:13-15; cf. Rom 3:27-29, 10:3-4, 1 Cor 7:19. Otherwise, Paul would massively contradict himself, as there are seven passages of his above which teach the necessity of works for salvation (and other related ones as well). But even in Galatians, concerned more with pure grace than any other biblical book, we find phrases such as "doing what is right" (6:7-9), "let us work for the good of all" (6:10), "faith working through love" (5:6), "obeying the truth" (5:7), "all must test their own work" (6:4), and "through love become slaves to one another" (5:13). Thus human exertion and "works" are no more excluded here than in any of Paul's other writings. And we know that Paul does indeed tie such effort in with salvation itself, from the citations above concerning "merit" and Gal 5:6 and 6:7-9 in particular. Of course we Catholics do not believe in one-time, declaratory salvation. Since Protestants do (which was my argument), you will have to work out what the relationship between repentance and salvation in this passage is.

P: I believe that the rich young ruler was relying on his own efforts to gain entrance into the Kingdom of God. Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5, 6, and 7, expands on the commandments rather than obliterate them. The one that the young man missed was Matt.6:24: "ye cannot serve God and mammon." This is the crux of the issue. Whom was he serving? And why?

C: Yes, it is clear that idolatry, be it to money, fame, sex, or anything else, is incommensurate with following Christ wholeheartedly. No disagreement there. You do seem somewhat ambiguous in your opinions as to what exactly is the necessity of keeping the Law for the Christian. Is that true? It is surely a very big issue to be worked out for all Christians. I certainly don't

pretend to have a very good grasp of it -- I believe that the Law is still binding in some sense.

P: We must not intertwine repentance with works, however. Good works are the fruit of repentance. Or, they are the outward proof that repentance is present, and part and parcel of repentance, as my reading of Luke 18:18 ff. and the Lord's teaching there informs me. And repentance can also be the fruit of good works as well. Repentance leads to faith.

C: Or, the Calvinist would say that being among the elect and thus being granted faith by God's decree alone, leads to repentance. This is where you two would differ, I think. The Catholic view is actually a sort of combination of both views.

P: Goods works in themselves cannot save anyone, nor do they lead to repentance.

C: Yes, if "in themselves" is meant in the self-originated, Pelagian sense, I wholeheartedly concur.

P: John 15:5:

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

C: Here is a place where Protestants and Catholics can find (abundant) common ground and simply agree to follow Jesus wholeheartedly as Lord and Savior, obey Him and live a "good life." I'm all for practical Christianity – orthopraxis.

P: Luther's "The just shall live by faith . . ." had little to do with what "salvation" has become in this era. I can't stand the "accepting Jesus" baloney that is everywhere nowadays.

C: Good for you. A.W. Tozer wrote a lot about that, and so did Bonhoeffer, with his famous phrase of "cheap grace."

P: When an individual repents of sin and turns to Jesus Christ for salvation, depending totally upon Him and Him alone, immediately he is declared righteous in God's eyes.

C: We differ in that we call this *initial* justification: the beginning of a lifelong process. We believe many of these "forensic" benefits are received at baptism, as that is where we place regeneration (e.g., John 3:5 and several other passages).

P: You nailed it on the head when you said "what God declares, He produces."

C: This is the commonality. God will produce it apart from our definitional and theological endeavors to explain *how* He does it. And this is the ecumenical point I've sought to make with many of my Protestant brothers and sisters in Christ. We think good works are technically part and parcel of justification; you classify them under non-salvific "sanctification." But by far the most important thing is that we both regard them as *absolutely necessary* in every Christian's life (i.e., their *existence*, as opposed to their effect and *meaning*). So the practical effect is the same, and I think that will be (at least partially) what Jesus looks for when He judges us on the last day, as indeed seems to be indicated by the "sheep and the goats" passage in Matthew 25. And that because the truly, eschatologically saved individuals will perform good works, according to either perspective. Theological precision will be secondary at that point, I believe strongly (not to say that it is ever unimportant).

P: Was the fall of man total? Or partial? If it was partial, which part?"

C: It is "total" in the sense that it reached every human being except of course the God-Man and, in our theology, the lone exception Mary, who required an extraordinary, special, wholly unmerited act of grace from God in order to avoid original sin and its fruits. It is "partial" from the Protestant perspective of our

view because we don't think man is absolutely "spiritually dead" or that he possesses a "sin nature" as a result of the Fall. He retains a small measure of good and free will. However, we are at one in believing that God's grace is primary and necessarily causative in all of man's good actions and approaches to God, righteousness, repentance, love, etc. In other words, neither view is "Pelagian" or "Semi-Pelagian" in that they don't allow for man to initiate on his own any process of righteousness or salvation. At that point, the discussion turns to merit and cooperation with God in "working out" our salvation "in fear and trembling." Some measure of free will also ameliorates what I feel is the huge difficulty of a situation where God predestines people to hell without their free will entering into the equation at all.

P: As to the fall of man--total, partial, or whatever: I submit Romans 5:12:

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.

C: This passage (and surrounding verses) does, of course, deal with the Fall and original sin. My view is that the primary reference here is to physical death, especially in verses 12 and 14 (cf. Gen 3:1-19). There is also reference to spiritual death (either primarily or secondarily) in verses 15, 17, and 21. However, Catholics might interpret the latter (I'm not sure) in terms of hellfire and damnation (cf. Jude 12, Rev 2:11), not a sin nature while alive on earth. Physical death is the separation of soul from body, whereas spiritual death is the separation of the entire man from God, which, in its absolute sense, can only refer to the state of hell. Yet, on the other hand, we Catholics believe that a severe separation from God can indeed occur in this life, a view somewhat approximating the Protestant "sin nature" (see, e.g., Rom 8:6 and 1 Jn 3:14 and 5:16; in the latter we see our notion of "mortal sin"). So again, it is worthwhile to point out that the practical application of either viewpoint amounts to the same thing. We must follow God wholeheartedly. In our view, the

"Catholic" in mortal sin will probably go to hell if he dies, and in yours the Protestant in perpetual, habitual, serious sin casts doubt on his justification in the first place, and will also go to hell. He fails to "prove" his justification by the works that ought to necessarily follow (as in the best Protestant traditions). Faithful, committed Christians in either camp are in the place they should be, and hence "secure" in God and the hope of eternal life.

P: John 3:36:

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

C: No disagreement here. Linguistically, *believe* (Gk., *pisteuo*) includes "following," "discipleship," and "action," not mere *mental assent* (I think you would agree with that).

P: Romans 3:9-12:

What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; 10: As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: 11: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. 12: They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

C: We agree, insofar as this describes the inability of man to lift himself out of his predicament and bondage by his own bootstraps. It is still an assumption to say that this amounts to total "spiritual death."

P: Galatians 3:10-11:

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth

not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. 11: But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.

C: Yes; the Law saves no one, but rather, faith in Christ's work. This doesn't, however, eliminate at all the need for works in the sense in which James describes it.

P: Ephesians 2:3-5:

Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. 4: But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, 5: Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

C: Deserving of wrath still is not equivalent to possessing a "sin nature." We were "dead in sins" in the sense that we couldn't free ourselves from them.

P: God created us with a free will. Adam chose to sin, and through that sin we all are under condemnation and spiritual death.

C: If by "spiritual death" you mean we will go to hell, but for Christ, then I can agree.

P: Do we have a free will to choose or reject His redeeming grace? Yes. This is clearly taught in Scripture. Does God draw us to Himself irresistibly?

C: Not without our consent, even though He causes that, too (Phil 2:13). A paradox, one of many in this area . . .

P: Is mankind totally unable to perform any act that would generate favor or mercy in God's eyes? Yes, according to clear Scripture.

C: I agree, if this is meant in the Pelagian sense of an exclusion of God's prevenient grace. I disagree to the extent that you intend this to exclude meritorious action. Merit is simply "God crowning His own gifts," as St. Augustine put it.

P: Are these facts exclusive and contradictory? Only in the fallible, limited eyes of man. God says both are true in His Word, so they both are true. To insist on pushing one facet of the doctrine to the exclusion of the other is folly.

C: Excellent. This is a refreshing acknowledgement of paradox and mystery, which is often present in true Christianity, but lacking in many individual Christians. C.S. Lewis said faith without works is like talking about which blade in a pair of scissors is more necessary. I would say the same about grace and free will / human cooperation, Tradition and Bible, and many other things which are thought to be intrinsically opposed to each other.

Chapter Thirteen

Justification, the Law, and Grace

C: Show me imputed, extrinsic justification in the Fathers (i.e., explicit, unmistakable statements, not just "apparent" when one has Protestant glasses on). I say it just isn't there.

P: I think there are a lot of implicit indications in the fathers that works done in grace are not sufficient to merit justification.

C: I think in most cases they would be talking about initial justification, or distinguishing works done in grace/faith with self-induced Pelagian-type works which indeed would not merit.

P: Here is what St. John Chrysostom taught:

Now since the Jews kept turning over and over the fact, that the Patriarch, and friend of God, was the first to receive circumcision, he wishes to show, that it was by faith that he too was justified. And this was quite a vantage ground to insist upon. For for a person who had no works, to be justified by faith, was nothing unlikely. But for a person richly adorned with good deeds, not to be made just from hence, but from faith, this is the thing to cause wonder, and to set the power of faith in a strong light.

[Homily On Romans viii]

C: I'd have to look at this more closely in context, but we have to balance what a Father said with other of his statements (just as we do with Paul in Scripture). St. John Chrysostom also wrote:

'Is it then enough,' saith one,'to believe on the Son, that one may have eternal life?' By no means. And hear Christ Himself declaring this, and saying, "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of

heaven" (Matt. vii. 21); and the blasphemy against the Spirit is enough of itself to cast a man into hell. But why speak I of a portion of doctrine? Though a man believe rightly on the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, yet if he lead not a right life, his faith will avail nothing towards his salvation.

[*Homilies on John*, 31:1 (A.D. 391)]

P: Likewise, John Chrysostom writes:

Ver. 6. "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness."

Even the miracles done by themselves, he says, declare the power of Faith, but I shall attempt if you will suffer me to draw my proofs from ancient narratives also. Then, as they made great account of the Patriarch, he brings his example forward, and shows that he too was justified by Faith. And if he who was before grace, was justified by Faith, although plentiful in works, much more we. For what loss was it to him, not being under the Law? None, for his faith sufficed unto righteousness.

[*Homily On Galations* Chapter 3]

C: We can say that we are justified by faith, yet in a way that it is not separated from works. So a Father could write like this (and so could I in certain contexts), yet you must also see what they say about works elsewhere, and its relation to faith. Faith, along with grace, might be construed as the beginning of salvation, but that doesn't necessarily mean that works have nothing to do with salvation, because it is a process, and can be lost. Works will have to play a part later. Protestants relegate these to sanctification, but in a large sense, I think this is a distinction without a difference. Works are a necessity in the Christian life in both systems. In Chrysostom's Homily on Galatians Chapter 3, I believe (on the face of it, anyway) that he is dealing with the

notion of "Faith vs. Law as the Savior to the Exclusion of Faith and Grace," not "Faith vs. Meritorious Acts of Human Effort." And in St. Augustine's *On the Spirit and the Letter*, he is discussing Grace Alone, over against the Pelagians. And he is also discussing initial justification, because he doesn't believe it is a one-time event. All of this is not the equivalent of Faith Alone, as taught by Luther and Calvin. Regarding St. Augustine, Luther wrote:

Augustine has sometimes erred and is not to be trusted. Although good and holy, he was yet lacking in the true faith, as well as the other fathers . . . But when the door was opened for me in Paul, so that I understood what justification by faith is, it was all over with Augustine.

[*Luther's Works*, 54, 49]

It was Augustine's view that the law...if the Holy Spirit assists, the works of the law do justify . . . I reply by saying "No".

[*Ibid.*, 54, 10]

St. Augustine:

When you shall have been baptized, keep to a good life in the commandments of God so that you may preserve your baptism to the very end. I do not tell you that you will live here without sin, but they are venial sins which this life is never without. Baptism was instituted for all sins. For light sins, without which we cannot live, prayer was instituted. . . . But do not commit those sins on account of which you would have to be separated from the body of Christ. Perish the thought! For those whom you see doing penance have committed crimes, either adultery or some other enormities. That is why they are doing penance. If their sins were light, daily prayer would suffice to blot them out. . . . In the Church, therefore, there are three

ways in which sins are forgiven: in baptisms, in prayer, and in the greater humility of penance.

[Sermon to Catechumens on the Creed 7:15, 8:16]

When one looks at individual Fathers' teaching as a whole (and the Fathers *en masse*), it is impossible to maintain that they are more Protestant than Catholic -- it's not even close.

P: I haven't seen any of the fathers distinguish between initial justification and ongoing justification. I found that many -- if not all -- fathers interpreted justification similarly.

C: I showed you what Augustine thought above. It would be easy (but time-consuming) to do the same for other Fathers. Oftentimes Protestants cite things which sound like they fit in with Protestant theology, but ignore other passages which demolish the notion that *sola fide*, etc. is being taught.

P: I believe that by trusting solely in the merits of Christ that I can attain to salvation. The Council of Trent condemns me for that.

C: It condemns faith alone but not grace alone. Faith alone is the heresy which is explicitly condemned in James, and which was never taught from Paul to Luther, according to Protestant scholars Norman Geisler and Alister McGrath.

P: I don't believe in a pope as the divinely-instituted head of the church, and Trent condemns me for that also.

C: Trent is saying that this is a heresy which removes one in a formal sense from the Church, but not that one is necessarily damned (because we don't proclaim that *anyone* is damned -- not even Judas).

P: Faith and works are distinguished in justification and in the eyes of God.

C: In initial justification, yes. After that, we can perform meritorious works in faith, "works of faith" or "the obedience of faith," as Paul would put it.

P: Look at what Pauls tells us:

Romans 3:21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

This can't be the ceremonial law; it must refer to the Ten Commandments. The righteousness is attained apart from the Ten Commandments, just as in Romans 1.

C: No; I believe what Paul is saying is that the Law never could save anyone. It was always faith and grace (made available via the Cross for all time) which did so. Thus, Gentiles could be saved, because the Law always pointed to faith and grace (and ultimately to Christ). Those who trust in their "works of the law" such as circumcision, sabbath-keeping, etc. to save them will likely not be saved, because their trust is misplaced. So Paul says that the Jews could not boast (3:27) simply because they were chosen, or observant Jews, etc. That is precisely what he meant by "works of the Law" -- *not* all human effort whatever. The problem isn't the Law itself, supposedly resolved by an abolishing of it in favor of the new dispensation of grace, but rather, a thorough and deep misunderstanding of the purpose and nature of the law in the first place. The Law was wonderful and good, but it could not save anyone in and of itself, and that is what Paul was driving at in his overall theme in Romans (and a constant theme in Jesus' blasts against Pharisaical hypocrisy and pride). This is not the equivalent of "faith alone" in the classical

"Reformational" sense, or anything of the sort. That was merely Martin Luther's subjective view, superimposed (eisegeted) onto Paul's teaching, when in fact it is not contained there at all.

P: It is the gospel, *not* the law, that saves (Romans 1).

C: We agree. Who ever said that the Law saves? Certainly not the Catholic Church. In fact, even the Jews did not believe this. Corrupt Pharisees may have, but Judaism as a whole in the first century believed that salvation was through God's grace, not Law-keeping per se.

P: It seems to me that the only reasonable interpretation of Romans 3-4 is to hold that works play *no* part whatsoever in our justification.

C: For you, justification is a one-time event, and works play no part. For us, works play no part in initial justification, just as in your view (to deny that would be Pelagianism). But we believe that justification is an ongoing process, including sanctification, and works (originated in God's grace always) do play a part in that. So the debate is really over whether justification is ongoing, and whether it includes sanctification (therefore also works) within itself. Works certainly do play a part in justification, as stated straight out by Paul in Romans 2:13 (see 2:5-13; also Phil 2:12-13; James 2:14-26).

P: We perform works because they are produced by our faith (itself granted, or imputed, by God), *not* in order to be justified; otherwise Romans 3-4 is inexplicable.

C: Maybe in your preconceived system, but biblically (in my humble opinion), then Romans 2:5-13, Philippians 2:12-13, and James 2:14-26 would make no sense. Our system incorporates all of your "proof text" passages -- and many more we produce -- into a harmonious synthesis. We don't have to ignore or minimize anything in Scripture to maintain our position.

P: What do you think was the purpose of the Ten Commandments?

C: To help us become more righteous and closer to God.

P: Did they justify us before God by means of our works done in his grace?

C: Not initially. Later our faith must produce good works or it is no faith at all. Our dispute is over the status of the Law in the New Covenant, and whether Paul teaches that all works are excluded from an ongoing justification.

P: The law was given to people who thought they were being righteous and began to trust in themselves. But the law cannot compel us to fulfill the requirements for salvation or righteousness; only the gospel can do that. We offer the law to God, but the gospel is something we receive in word and sacrament.

C: I think this is a caricature of the Law. You (and Luther) seem to have an animus and hostility against it. St. Paul does not; his problem is with the *abuse* and *misunderstanding* of the Law. To say that the Law cannot save anyone is not an "attack" on the Law as some sort of "bad thing," any more than saying that "Martin Luther cannot save anyone" is an attack on Luther. One must understand that the impossible cannot be overcome. The Law can't save. That doesn't make it bad or now null and void in the Christian worldview. Bears can't fly; infant girls can't bench press 500 pounds; the Detroit Lions can never win a Super Bowl. So what? And the Law was not just the Jews giving something back to God. God gave the Law to the Jews. Remember Moses on Mt. Sinai? Love and mercy were always the heart of the Law, so that its essence was little different from the gospel. This was stressed by the prophets, and also Jesus and Paul. This is far from the false dichotomy of pitting Law against Gospel, as if they were antithetical to each other. They are not at all (Matthew 5:17-20).

P: The Bible teaches us that we are justified apart from works of the law.

C: Meaning, of course, the Jewish marks such as circumcision, sabbath-keeping, etc. The Pauline phrase *works of the law* does *not* mean "works period." Context makes that abundantly clear.

P: Paul said, "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law" (Romans 3:28).

C: Precisely. The Law never justified anyone. How could it? It is just a set of ethical precepts, do's and don'ts. Only God in His grace and work on the cross can justify.

P: Righteousness and salvation must come apart from the law. This is different from the Old Testament situation, where the Jews offered God propitiatory offerings for their sins, according to the law. Now, the direction is from God to us, rather than from us to God, as in the Old testament law.

C: It always was from God to us. In Hebrews 10:4 we are informed that "it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins." This was *always* the case, but difficult to understand until the New Covenant was revealed, as foretold in Jeremiah 31:31-34. The author of Hebrews then goes on to cite Psalm 40:6-8 (Hebrews 10:5-7), in the same sense. I'm sure I could find many more indications. E.g., Matthew 9:13 (Jesus speaking) cites Hosea 6:6: "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings." In other words, blind obedience to laws, to the exclusion of devotion from the heart and obedience to God's moral will and love of neighbor were what God hated (the abuse of the Law, and hypocrisy, not the Law itself), and this was what Jesus excoriated in the Pharisees. The New Covenant was only a reform, not a revolution; it entailed getting back to the roots and essence of the system already in place. Faith was always the primary element, from the beginning. And this faith (after initial justification) includes works within itself, lest it be "dead."

P: Nothing that we do for God can merit forgiveness of sins or justification.

C: It can after initial justification, because, as Augustine says, merit is nothing but us offering God's gifts back to Him.

P: In Galatians 3 Paul assumes that the Galatians are already regenerated. His argument is that they were now trying to attain justification by works.

C: This is exactly what I remarked upon earlier: an example of *works of the law* (3:2,5,10) as the marks of Jewish identity. This is by no means merely a Catholic view, or a fringe view of biblical scholarship (it currently has many prominent Protestant advocates). The whole point of Galatians was to refute the Judaizers, who thought that a Gentile must first become a Jew before he can be a Christian. This is made clear in 2:15-16, 3:24-25, and 6:12-15. The dispute about the Judaizers is entirely different from the question of the relationship of faith and works, generally speaking (as opposed to the legal Jewish sense).

P: St. Augustine often seems to dichotomize law and grace.

C: With Augustine, more than anyone else, it is important to look at all his teachings on a given subject (or at least as many as can be found), because he is extremely nuanced and uses different senses (in his dazzling intellectual brilliance). For example, he seems at first glance to teach both a symbolic and literal Eucharist. But in actuality he believed in a literal Eucharist which was also a sign (there is no inherent dichotomy). So Protestants who take the symbolic view cite his "symbolic" statements and ignore the literal ones. So either one must assert that Augustine contradicted himself or changed his mind on this subject, or make some attempt to harmonize his utterances.

Chapter Fourteen

The “Reformed” Definitions of *Protestant* and *Pelagian*

C: Present-day Protestantism extends far beyond "historic, classical Protestantism." This is simply a sociological fact, whether those who refer to themselves as the “classic” or “Reformation” Protestants (like yourself) like it or not. You take pride in your unique preservation of the "Reformation heritage," and indeed, to a very large extent you are correct. But that does not mean that your group constitutes the lone “real” Protestants in existence. You can define the word *Protestant* as you wish, I suppose (as a matter of free speech, if nothing else), but there is a standard, accepted (scholarly) definition which you have to grapple with, no matter what your own preferred definition might be. John Wesley (whom I greatly admire) was a Protestant Christian. So were Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and A.W. Tozer, and C.S. Lewis, and Dorothy Sayers, and many others who were not Calvinists: supposedly the only "real" or "consistent" Protestants. Likewise, the fundamentalists whom you disdain are Protestants as well. What *else* would they be?: Zoroastrians? Druids? Farsi? You can only take terminological controversies so far. Strictly speaking, there can be no "official Protestant" positions (in terms of statements, creeds, or confessions to which all Protestants are bound; to which they all adhere), simply because there is no institutional way to determine them, or to determine “orthodoxy” per se. So you cite the Westminster Confession or Calvin's *Institutes*. This is of little import for Protestantism-at-large (and that gets back to the circular self-definition many Protestants make: the assumption that they are the elite corps of Protestantism, and the only ones truly worthy of the name). One has to accept these works, and there is no way to demand obedience if someone is not in the Reformed camp to begin with. If they dissent, then they go and join another group or form their own. Or they start to go liberal, as J. Gresham Machen and Francis Schaeffer have documented, with regard to "official" Presbyterianism in particular, during the 1920s and 1980s, respectively. The only way to attain real, apostolic authority is to

trace it back in an unbroken line to the apostles and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and that is precisely what you and any other Protestant cannot do (without joining yourself to the ["Roman"] Catholic Church). You cannot show that your peculiar doctrines were present in the early Church. Just today a book by a Southern Baptist was mentioned to me, where the author agrees that *sola Scriptura* could not be found in the early Church (and this is a bedrock principle of all Protestants). Protestant scholars Norman Geisler and Alister McGrath have admitted the same concerning faith alone, or *sola fide*, the other pillar of Protestantism.

P: Somebody has to correct Catholics who don't understand what the Reformation really taught, and what a true, educated, thoughtful, historically-minded, confessional Reformed Protestantism entails.

C: I think that's a worthwhile endeavor, as long as you don't promulgate this myth that your own brand of Protestantism is the only one. You say the "other [Protestant] guys" (the fundamentalists, pentecostals, Arminians, etc.) distort "true" Protestantism? Very well, then, please explain to me how you determine what true Protestantism *is*? Right off the bat (in the first fifty years), you had five major strains (Lutherans, Calvinists, Zwinglians, Anabaptists, Anglicans), competing against one another, contradicting each other, mutually anathematizing – with Anabaptists being drowned by other Protestants for being “heretics” --, and each claiming the glorious mantle of "true Protestantism." Now you want me to believe that John Calvin carries more inherent authority than Martin Luther, who (unarguably) started the movement? On what (non-circular) logical or ecclesiological or biblical basis can such claims be made? In my apologetics and critiques of Protestantism, I deal in "official" Protestantism as much as possible, defined by what the creeds, confessions, and major theologians and exponents of each Protestant tradition teach about their own beliefs. With *sola Scriptura*, e.g., I have been careful (in my website papers) to cite prominent authorities such as G.C. Berkouwer, R.C. Sproul, Charles Hodge [Reformed], and Bernard Ramm [Baptist] as to its

definition. I didn't make up my own definition, based on the distortions and inadequate understandings which abound amongst *Joe Q. Protestant* with Bible in hand.

P: Don't you acknowledge that there is a huge difference between the Protestantism of Luther and Calvin and the prevailing Arminian evangelical "Protestantism" of today?

C: Yes. The difference between you and I, though, is that I don't render Arminian Protestantism out of existence as a legitimate sociological/religious (historically orthodox Protestant) category, or put quotation marks around it, as if it is not what it is. Is it different from Reformed Protestantism? Yes, of course, in significant ways (though not quite as much as you would have us believe).

P: Many Arminians [non-Calvinist Protestants who accept free will and believe that one can lose their salvation] are virtually Semi-Pelagians [those who believe that man is able to save himself to some extent, by good works, rather than being saved wholly by God's grace].

C: You need to prove that Wesleyan, Arminian soteriology reduces to Semi-Pelagianism. I say that it cannot be done, because this is a slanderous, misinformed accusation. Catholic soteriology [theology of salvation] cannot be thusly defined, either (this false doctrine having been thoroughly condemned at the Council of Trent), but the charge against both Arminian Protestantism and Catholicism is made all the time.

P: After I converted to the Reformed faith, I read a lot about the doctrinal lunacies and heretical practices of contemporary "evangelical" Christianity.

C: But you still exhibit the contradiction of affectionately referring to your experiences of communal worship with your "Lutheran brothers" [see below] while at the same time you detest their soteriology as Semi-Pelagian.

P: Apparently I need to explain what I mean when I use "Protestants" in quotations?

C: Yes; please do.

P: Essentially I do this because the Reformation was primarily about the gospel.

C: What *is* the gospel? I define it from the Bible. But Calvinists so often want to define it on a non-explicitly biblical basis, which is, of course, highly ironic and somewhat inconsistent, given their ostensible fundamental principles.

P: The Reformation was not primarily about the pope, the Apocrypha, apostolic succession, baptismal regeneration, or any number of other controversial issues of today.

C: And was it also not about things like political power, desire for freedom, anti-clericalism, anti-Latinism, mass propaganda, etc., in addition to all the sincerely-held doctrinal differences?

P: Luther even said that he'd be glad to tolerate much false teaching from Rome if they would simply admit that they had compromised and twisted the gospel.

C: And he assumes that *he* knows what the "gospel" is, over against the entire history of the Church up till his time? Quite amazing . . .

P: So I asked myself, "what sort of 'gospel' is preached in non-Reformed churches that act as if they are 'Protestant' "?

C: You will need to show me, of course, what the true gospel itself is, from Scripture, or -- if you must -- from some man-made tradition.

P: The official explanations of the gospel that these folks give are watered-down versions of the 'gospel' taught by Rome.

C: This means little unless you spell it out.

P: Both modern evangelicalism and Roman Catholicism are Arminian.

C: But you haven't explained to me how Arminianism is somehow Semi-Pelagian (or outright Pelagian), or how it denies the biblical gospel. If you claim to be following the principle of *sola Scriptura*, you need to demonstrate this from the Bible: give us a biblical definition of the *gospel*.

P: Arminians and Catholics accept the autonomy of the sinner's will in the process of conversion.

C: What do you mean by "autonomy"? Unless you carefully define all your key terms, this discussion will go nowhere.

P: Both systems involve the ludicrous and unbiblical scenario whereby a sinner can "decide" to accept God's grace, and be saved, as if their will or their work were the determinative or decisive factor.

C: You have to elaborate what you mean. I categorically deny that either orthodox Protestant Arminianism or Catholic soteriology is Pelagian or Semi-Pelagian in any way, shape or form.

P: For this reason, Billy Graham, the most successful "Protestant" evangelist of the 20th-century, is so ecumenical towards Rome. He's preaching the same essential message: men cooperate with God in order to be justified.

C: Does this "cooperation" include initial justification and the first move into the realm of "salvation"? Who causes the first move? God or man (in your estimation of what Arminianism

would teach)? Now even Billy Graham is a Pelagian too and a Protestant-in-quotes? On what basis? Give me some documentation! This is very shoddy argumentation.

P: It is ironic that the most bitterly “anti-Roman Catholic” evangelicals are themselves little more than cardboard copies of those whom they oppose and abhor.

C: Interesting perspective . . .

P: The Reformed have always taken note of this, especially when Arminianism first appeared in the Reformed areas of the world.

C: And us non-Reformed have always seen clearly the biblical and theological difficulties of certain aspects of Calvinism.

P: Arminianism retained enough similarities to Rome to make necessary the Synod of Dort's strong condemnations.

C: All you've given me is summary statements, themselves all highly debatable.

P: A person who describes himself as a "Protestant" but doesn't protest what he should be protesting, is falsely identifying himself.

C: So because these Protestants are not Calvinists (TULIP), they are not Protestants? Only Calvinists are Protestants, in any true sense of the word? Is this not circular reasoning, or am I missing something? Why and how is it that a denial of free will, and an acceptance of limited atonement, double predestination, and perseverance is somehow essential for "classic" Protestantism, when even Luther didn't accept all these notions (so I guess he, too, was compromised with Rome), nor did the supposed exemplary precursor St. Augustine (so now he was a Pelagian, even as he fought them!). Only Calvin got it right. Why? Because he *said* he did? That's what your argument logically reduces to. Luther himself is out of the fold, as well as all non-Reformed

Protestants since Calvin devised in the 1530s the highest version of Christianity known to man -- never known in its fullness by anyone prior to his time -- not St. Augustine, not any of the Fathers, nor the early Councils, etc. And you consider this a plausible, true opinion? The Catholic acknowledges distinctions among Protestants, and a mainstream of the so-called "Reformation." It does not thereby follow that we think Arminians (let alone Catholics) are Pelagians, or that they deny the "gospel" which I believe both these parties, and Orthodox and Catholics hold in common. The "gospel," as clearly defined in Holy Scripture and proclaimed by the first Christians so as to turn the world upside down, is neither TULIP nor *sola fide*. The Gospel is the incarnation, virgin birth, atoning death, Resurrection, and Ascension of our glorious Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the implications of that for the attainment of salvation and eternal life.

P: I think we should all be more careful in defining the term *Christian*.

C: And in our definitions of *Protestant* too . . . There are different usages of the word *Christian*, but one would think that people who are Christians could come up with some consistent ways of thinking about this. My own overarching definition is: 1) those who have been baptized properly, 2) acceptance of the Nicene Creed; particularly trinitarianism and all its defined nuances -- to the extent that the person can grasp the intricacies of it.

P: Christians as diverse as Baptists and Presbyterians are actually able to live harmoniously and even worship together, believe it or not -- despite disagreements on baptism and other things!

C: What's so shocking or incredible about that? I can worship with these people (and have). I can worship with fellow baptized, trinitarian Christians who no longer believe in the Eucharist because what they *do* do when they worship is not all that inconsistent with Catholic belief; it is just (from our point of view) a truncated and abridged version of Catholic Christianity. I

can sit there and sing hymns and pray to God and recite the Creed, etc. I can listen to a sermon and weed out the relatively small percentage of error (we have to do that with some of our liberal priests). I can participate in a "least common denominator" / "mere Christianity" religion because my religion possesses virtually all these characteristics, and also many more, as it is the fullness of apostolic Christianity. But many Protestants have a hard time worshipping with me because they are under the illusion that idolatry is taking place, and an undue sacramental realism, with pagan accretions, superstitions, excessive sacerdotalism, vain repetition, necromancy, a Pelagian soteriology, hyper-authoritarianism, etc., etc. Protestants often can't comprehend what has been long since arbitrarily discarded from their religion. But Catholics can easily comprehend what are basic and elementary aspects of ours. What shocks and amazes us is how Protestants (well, except for the Arminians, according to you) can claim a common gospel and an alleged commonality in the "basics" or "core beliefs" or "essentials," yet nevertheless still feel compelled to denominationally separate from each other. In a large sense that is even more sinful than if the splits were over something truly substantial. You yourself unjustly and absurdly place the Arminians in the Semi-Pelagian camp (along with us). You even refuse to call them by the title *Protestant*. Then you turn around and speak glowingly about this semi-mythical "unity" that Protestants have with each other.

P: Your polemics against Protestant disunity fall flat once you observe the brotherly love and true spiritual unity I have experienced firsthand with my Baptist and Lutheran brothers.

C: This is absurd. You are blessed by all these "touchy-feely" good feelings and "spiritual unity," yet you won't even admit that your beloved Lutheran brethren are "real Protestants." They have forsaken the "Reformation heritage" or "classic Protestantism," etc. They are Arminians, hence similar to Catholic soteriology, hence immersed in a false gospel, hence barely Christian: only by virtue of their baptism (and perhaps trinitarianism). Yet you have this hunky-dory "unity" with them that you don't have with us!

Why? Just because both of you are not *Catholics*? Back to "my enemy's enemy is my friend (no matter how much he resembles my enemy at key points)"? Arminians may be many things, but they are not Catholics, and so that becomes the basis for a profound, brotherly spiritual unity. I must admit that I immensely enjoy humorous irony, so please excuse my amusement. At the same time many Calvinists think that St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas were these wonderful, spiritual "proto-Protestants" and theological ancestors, and overlook the fact that they are in actuality the quintessential Catholics.

[Note: the factually-erroneous notion of the alleged affinity between Arminianism (and/or Catholic soteriology) and Semi-Pelagianism has been dealt with in my second book, *More Biblical Evidence for Catholicism*, in chapter six, pages 30-34, with citations from the creedal Arminian *Remonstrance* of 1610, the Catholic councils of 2nd Orange and Trent, and Methodist and Lutheran creeds, showing that the two concepts are – beyond any doubt -- diametrically opposed]

P: Paul urges an avoidance of judging Christian brothers on debatable matters (Romans 14:4).

C: The immediate context of this passage was the matter of what food was clean and what was unclean (the ceremonial law). This is hardly on the level of constructing entirely new ecclesiologies, denominations, and formal principles.

P: Protestants believe that no institution has biblical sanction to demand faith and absolute obedience.

C: Then you must have an awful big problem with Paul and the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), which bound the consciences of the faithful.

P: "God alone is the Lord of the conscience and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men." (Westminster Confession of Faith).

C: This very anti-ecclesiastical notion is a "doctrine of men" not a divine, apostolic, biblical one.

P: Most denominational divisions are not in accord with biblical and classic Protestant principles.

C: And these "classic Protestant principles are: *sola Scriptura*, (an ultimately) invisible church, supremacy of conscience and private judgment . . . I say you may have it exactly backwards. They are *following* the principles at their presuppositional level and acting *consistently* with them.

P: For that, we Reformed need to repent.

C: All groups have that problem. But I am talking mainly about ideas and premises, and how people tend to act consistently on the basis of their own presuppositional framework.

P: In the Old Testament, lineal descent was never any sort of proof for the truthfulness of someone's claims (as apostolic succession is for the Roman Catholic).

C: Apostolic succession was not an Old Testament concept, except for the rough analogy of the Jews as Chosen and God's eternal covenant with David. It was pretty much a new notion of the New Covenant, founded upon the twin gifts of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and infallibility. When Jesus established His Church on Peter as the Rock, this was a new entity altogether. One might cite, however, the Old Testament priestly line, coming from the same tribe, as a precursor.

P: Who cares if the Fathers were "far more like present-day Catholics than like Protestants"?

C: Precisely my point. Protestantism is almost always a-historical in the end (because Church history condemns it), no matter how

much more sophisticated types like Sproul try to co-opt Catholic history for their side.

P: Historical theology does not determine what is true; biblical theology does.

C: That's your view, but it is not the biblical, apostolic, or patristic one (apostolic succession) which no one seriously questioned until 1500 years after Christ -- unless you count people like the Gnostics and other Platonic-type, anti-incarnational cults which didn't care about history and the lineal, documented descent of orthodox Christian doctrine.

Chapter Fifteen

The Biblical Evidence for Infant Baptism and Baptismal Regeneration

C: There are many indications in the Bible that infants were baptized, along with adults:

Acts 16:15 And when she was baptized, with her household

Acts 16:33 . . . he was baptized at once, with all his family.

Acts 18:8 Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with all his household; and many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized.

1 Corinthians 1:16 (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas . . .

P: Passages that say "all the household" was baptized do not necessarily prove that every single member of the household, including infants, were baptized. You are making a circular argument, which assumes what it is trying to prove.

C: It doesn't beg the question as long as we don't say this "proves" infant baptism." What we are saying is that a straightforward reading of it suggests that in all likelihood, children were involved, and that it is perfectly consistent with such a view. Who are the members of a household? In my own household, the "members" are my wife and I, three sons, and a daughter. People generally had more children in those days, so it is quite reasonable to assume that children were included in the baptism. The very fact that Acts 16:15, for instance, mentions "household" rather than simply "husband," is a clear indication of others being involved. In that time and culture, that probably would have included parents as well, maybe grandparents, or

siblings or cousins. Almost always it would also include children (even if the individual referred to was elderly, because he or she would have been living with younger relatives). In Acts 18:8 the phrase used is *all his household*. Again, “all” of *my* “household” is myself, my wife, and four children. That is the straightforward reading. You may try to pick at the edges of this interpretation, because it isn't airtight, looking for a loophole to avoid the difficulty for your position, but I think that is stretching it. There is such a thing as a plausible explanation, whether or not something is proven beyond any doubt. Many biblical passages connect *household* and *children* (if indeed such a demonstration is necessary, so obvious is it; see Genesis 18:19, 31:41, 36:6, 47:12, Numbers 18:11, 1 Chronicles 10:6, Matthew 19:29, 1 Timothy 3:12). Furthermore, the Greek word for *house* or *household* in four passages connecting it with baptism (Acts 16:15,33, 18:8, and 1 Cor 1:16) is *oikos* (from which the English *economy* derives). Thayer's *Greek-English Lexicon* defines it in its usage at Acts 18:8, 1 Corinthians 1:16, and Acts 16:31 (in the immediate context of 16:33), as “the inmates of a house, all the persons forming one family, a household” (p. 441; Strong's word #3624).

P: In John 4:53, where the “all” of a man's "household" believes in Christ, it is obvious that this excludes babies who can't understand theology and salvation.

C: No, it doesn't obviously exclude babies -- not with regard to being saved/baptized -- because elsewhere entire households are referred to as being saved. To be saved (or baptized), one doesn't necessarily have to be aware of what is happening. For example, say a child was born a vegetable, with severe brain defects, and died at ten years of age, still incapable of rational thought or communication. Is that child damned simply because she couldn't "believe"? I think not. I think that God's mercy extends to those who do not yet know or understand the gospel, or else all aborted babies, children who die at a young age, or before the age of reason, etc. go to hell. I don't believe that for a second. As for salvation of whole households, see the relevant verses: Luke

19:19, Acts 11:14 and 16:31. Also, Paul in Colossians 2:11-13 makes a connection between baptism and circumcision:

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ; and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,

Israel was the church before Christ (Acts 7:38, Romans 9:4). Circumcision, given to 8-day old boys, was the seal of the covenant God made with Abraham, which applies to us also (Galatians 3:14,29). It was a sign of repentance and future faith (Romans 4:11). Infants were just as much a part of the covenant as adults (Genesis 17:7, Deuteronomy 29:10-12, cf. Matthew 19:14). Likewise, baptism is the seal of the New Covenant in Christ. It signifies cleansing from sin, just as circumcision did (Deuteronomy 10:16, 30:6, Jeremiah 4:4, 9:25, Romans 2:28-9, Philippians 3:3).

P: No one can "accept Christ" for you. Infant baptism makes no sense.

C: The baby obviously doesn't consciously "accept Christ," but is made a member of God's covenant by grace, just as the Old Testament circumcised child was part of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants (and the young girls were, too, as part of the family). People get grace all the time based on other people's actions. That's what intercessory prayer is about! When the child is old enough, he or she chooses to be a follower and disciple of Christ of their own accord. This is the function of confirmation in Catholicism, Anglicanism, and Lutheranism.

P: If we say that children are "saved" by their parents' decision before they can choose salvation themselves, wouldn't they also be "lost" by the absence of such a parental decision?

C: No; we believe that they will not be punished without mercy, if they die before the age of reason. They are included in the covenant by "proxy," so to speak, but they don't lose their salvation if the parents go astray. They receive grace from the baptism itself, for those who accept baptismal regeneration, as we do.

P: Oftentimes in Holy Scripture our salvation is spoken of and baptism is not mentioned at all.

C: That is a rather weak argument. Much more important are verses where they are connected, which have to be explained. If one tries to merely appeal to other places where this isn't the case, that is not sufficient. Once is enough. The Virgin Birth is only mentioned once or twice in Scripture too. There is far less biblical evidence for that (if we simply count numbers of verses) than for baptismal regeneration. But all (non-liberal) Christians accept the Virgin Birth.

P: I don't understand how any Protestant could believe in salvation by faith alone but still hold that baptism (which is a work) is required for salvation.

C: If you are correct, then Martin Luther, John Wesley, and C.S. Lewis (and others in their denominations) are not Protestants (and perhaps not Christians, either, according to your interpretation). I find that ludicrous, of. It is far more likely that those who accept adult, believer's baptism don't understand biblical sacramentalism and sin (particularly original sin), and their relation to justification, regeneration, and salvation.

P: The "washing" referred to in Titus 3:5 and 1 Corinthians 6:11 does not have to refer to baptism, since it could just as plausibly mean "washing in the blood of the Lamb."

C: That's not the most straightforward reading of Titus 3:5:

he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit.

Compare this to John 3:5:

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (cf. 3:3: "unless one is born anew ...")

The two passages are almost exactly parallel:

- a) Titus: "saved" / John: "enter the kingdom of God"
- b) Titus: "washing of regeneration" / John: "born of water"
- c) Titus: "renewal in the Holy Spirit" / John: "born of. . . the Spirit"

This is how one interprets Scripture: by comparing it with itself when there are obvious parallels, to help determine what the less clear passages might mean. I think this one is undeniable. What is "washing" in one verse (with two other common elements) is shown to be "water" in the other. Thus, baptism is tied to salvation, in accord with the other verses above. The evidence is strong. Most people wash with water, as it is, not blood. What my dialogue partner refers to is Revelation 7:14:

. . . These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

That is an interesting verse as well, but it is far less parallel to Titus 3:5 than John 3:5 is, and seems to refer, in context, to

martyrdom, not salvation per se. 1 Corinthians 6:11 is also much more similar to Titus 3:5:

And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

So the "justified" is the parallel of "kingdom of God" and "saved" in Titus 3:5 and John 3:5; "washed" goes along with "washing of regeneration" and "born of water," and all this was done by the "Spirit." Once again, it is a striking threefold parallelism (now for three passages). Baptism is again being discussed. Furthermore, it is notable in that baptism, justification, and sanctification are all mentioned together. The past tense justification fits in with the Catholic notion of initial justification. But in Protestantism, justification (for any true, "saved," elect Christian) is past, and sanctification is in the future, or (more accurately) ongoing. Paul -- not seeming to understand the rules for Protestant theology, places sanctification with justification, not apart from it, and also in the past tense.

P: Mark 16:16 doesn't say that those not *baptized* will be lost; rather, it refers to those who do not *believe*. So it cannot be used for a proof of baptismal regeneration.

C: Mark 16:16:

He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

[Note: Most Bible scholars think Mark 16:9-20 is not even supposed to be in the Bible, according to the most reliable and oldest biblical manuscripts; nevertheless, the thought it expresses is entirely consistent with the other passages we have been examining, and it would illustrate (as an historical proof) what the earliest Christians thought, even if it is not in the Bible itself]

The first part of the passage offers two conditions for salvation: belief and baptism. Catholics believe that even if one is baptized as an infant, that they must also believe of their own free will when they are able to do so (after the age of reason: usually thought to be 6 to 8 years of age) -- and avoid later mortal sin and so forth -- , so there is no inconsistency here with our views. Grammatically, it is possible to break down the first half of the sentence dealing with salvation, into the two following ones:

Whoever believes will be saved.

Whoever is baptized will be saved.

Logically, however, it does not follow that the two derivative sentences are true like the first one is, since two conditions were stated as necessary prerequisites for salvation, and must therefore exist together. In other words, the two derivative sentences do not express the fuller truth (the "whole truth," to use legalese for a second) of two conditions being necessary for salvation rather than one only. To be true, they would both have to substitute the word "may" for the word "will." This is analogous to the following proposition:

Whoever finishes first in the men's speed skating competition in the Winter Olympics and does not do drugs in order to get an unfair advantage, will get the Gold Medal.

This can be broken down into:

Whoever finishes first in the men's speed skating competition in the Winter Olympics will get the Gold Medal.

or:

Whoever does not do drugs in order to get an unfair advantage, will get the Gold Medal.

Neither derivative sentence is true (on the same basis, that two conditions are necessarily together). The truth of the first depends upon the athlete being drug-free, since even if a winner is found to have been using drugs, he will be stripped of his medal (as indeed happened in the recent Olympics). The second is obviously untrue as it is now far too vague, and would include every athlete at the Olympics who didn't do drugs. Thus, to return to the verse under consideration, since two conditions for salvation are being offered, (logically speaking) they must stand or fall together. You can only accept both or reject both. If you accept them both, your case against baptismal regeneration collapses. If you reject them both, then this includes belief as well as baptism, and you cannot accept that position either. Or you could reject them by saying they are not part of Scripture. That's easy to do in this instance because it is likely true! But even then, it provides a strong historical example of what the earliest Christians believed, just as, e.g., the earliest apostolic writings such as the Didache, or the letters of St. Ignatius of Antioch do. And then we must immediately ask why the early Christians believed in this (as they did, en masse) when it is so supposedly "clearly" unbiblical. My logical point still stands. I'm sure you would have no problem accepting other verses which assert belief in Jesus (and the Greek word for "belief" includes a true following of Him, and obedience, incidentally) as the criterion of salvation, such as Romans 10:9 or John 3:16. They are true, but they don't exclude baptism as an additional criteria, because part of the obedience of the Christian is to follow the oft-repeated command to be baptized. But my immediate point is that you accept them because (on the surface, and in your mind) they fit into your point of view. Baptism as part of salvation does not, so you must avoid equally clear verses which make baptism necessary for salvation, even though there are no grounds to do so other than your predetermined bias that "this isn't possible, so it can't possibly be!" Mark 16:16 is one such verse, but it is textually dubious. Nevertheless, other verses are equally clear:

Acts 22:16: '. . . Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name.'

1 Peter 3:21: Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

Acts 2:38: And Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

It couldn't be more clear than it is. If these passages were concerned with a doctrine that all Protestants accepted, we can be sure they would be trumpeted from the rooftops as "clear and indisputable proof texts." But because they clash with a preconceived theology of many Protestants which is -- it turns out -- contrary to many biblical teachings, they somehow become strangely "unclear," when in fact it is clear as a bell that all these passages, taken in conjunction, form a compelling proof of the doctrine. There is a good reason why most Christians through history have believed this. Your argument about the second clause was that it spoke only of disbelief as the cause of condemnation, not baptism: whoever does not believe will be condemned. It certainly does not mention baptism, but logically, it doesn't *have* to, since (as we shall see below) *belief* in Scripture includes the concept of obedience (which would include baptism in this instance). Even if the clause is interpreted in a more "absolute" sense, it would not follow that baptismal regeneration is either disproven or not supported in the overall verse, because disbelief alone (whether or not baptism has occurred) is enough to render salvation unattainable. Following the analogy to the Olympics above, the second clause of Mark 16:16 would read:

Whoever does not finish first in the men's speed skating competition in the Winter Olympics will not get the Gold Medal.

or:

Whoever does drugs in order to get an unfair advantage,
will not get the Gold Medal.

[depending on which analogy one chooses to be parallel to
"belief"]

Note that both sentences are true as they read, because negative assertions are different from positive assertions. The simple fact that only one thing is mentioned in Mark 16:16 with regard to condemnation, does not mean that there are no other things which also condemn. There clearly *are*: any number of other sins (besides unbelief) unrepented-of would also exclude one from heaven (see, e.g., 1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Furthermore, there are "loopholes" (discussed above) in situations where a person cannot possibly be baptized, whereas he may desire to before death (e.g., the thief on the cross next to Jesus). Thus, Catholics believe in a "baptism of desire." The normative situation in Christianity is that baptism (if no insuperable hindrance is present) is necessary for salvation.

P: Acts 22:16 ultimately fails to support baptismal regeneration because the phrase "wash away your sins" is not directly connected to the clause, "be baptized." It seems to be more connected with "calling on his name." This is consistent with other Bible passages, such as Romans 10:13; where by calling on Christ we are saved. Baptism is only mentioned here because it is closely associated with conversion to Christianity (it is the rite of initiation).

C: The sentence is very clear. The easiest way to illustrate this is to utilize an analogy whose doctrines most Protestants will agree with:

Get up, say the sinner's prayer and repent and wash your sins away, calling on his name.

Now, I think you would agree to the truth of this sentence. I have replaced baptism with repentance and saying the sinner's prayer. In evangelical theology, the repentance and confession of Christ and heartfelt desire to henceforth be a disciple of Christ "wash away sins" because they allow Jesus to do His cleansing work of justification or salvation. Yes, it's all grace (as in Catholicism), but the sinner decides to take this step in order to appropriate the saving grace that God wishes to give to him. However, if we use your logic we must conclude that the repentance and saying the sinner's prayer doesn't support non-baptismal regeneration or justification. Why? Well, because it is separated from the clause "wash your sins away"! That being the case, we must re-write the sentence so as not to unduly confuse people, who might see in it something which isn't there:

Get up, say the sinner's prayer and repent . . . , calling on his name.'

This takes the heart out of the sentence, and of the meaning. My point is that you would never make such an argument if the verse in question supported something you were already willing to believe. Let's try another example:

Get up [two-year-old], be bathed and wash your dirt away, calling on mommy's name.

This is a good analogy, because obviously the water of baptism is a metaphor for washing away the "dirt" of sin (another reason why "washing" in several of the verses we have considered is reasonably equated with baptism), and we are like small children compared to God. The bathing washes the dirt away. Likewise, calling on mommy washes the dirt away. Both things cause the same result (though in different measure and in different ways -- the water is the "intermediate" between mommy's washcloth and soap and the child's body), just as calling on God and repenting washes away sin, and baptism also does, being a God-ordained

way to accomplish the same end, by His grace. But again, by your logic, the sentence would read:

Get up [three-year-old], be bathed . . ., calling on mommy's name.

What sense does that make? The entire point of the sentence is now altered. This sort of desperate argument is simply not made unless there is no other recourse to avoid the clear implication of a biblical verse. The only other argument you made about Acts 22:16 was that you interpreted it in light of Romans 10:13: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." This is fine; it doesn't exclude baptism. It cannot, because baptism is too tied-in with salvation in other passages, and our task is to synthesize *all* of Scripture in a harmonious, non-contradictory fashion. You say that baptism is in the passage because it merely accompanies justification or salvation (as a symbolic rite), which itself is obtained by means other than baptism. This at least is a logical possibility for some of these verses, but it can't really be sustained when all of them are considered together. For example, in 1 Corinthians 6:11, God does three things: justifies, sanctifies, and indwells the believer with His Spirit. The only thing the believer does is to get baptized ("you were washed"). It says nothing about belief or repentance or saying the sinner's prayer, etc. Nor does the context. The same applies to John 3:5 and Titus 3:5. In both passages God saves us or lets us enter the kingdom by His Holy Spirit. The only thing these passages mention that we *do* is get baptized. This doesn't disprove that other things are required also (indeed they are), or that one can never lose the salvation thus gained (which is another discussion), but it does show that baptism is not so easily separated from salvation and justification, and that it has a saving power and grace, by God's will. For the same principle applies: if one wants to state that belief alone is sufficient to be saved (as one interpretation of Romans 10:9,13 and John 3:16 might hold), because those verses associate it and it alone with salvation, then verses which mention baptism alone in connection with salvation would prove baptismal regeneration. You can't say one thing and

refuse the other. The only reasonable interpretation is to hold that baptism is part of salvation, as are repentance, God's grace, the believer's obedience and avoidance of grave sins, etc. How all these elements are related or their relative importance is a separate discussion. But this approach incorporates all the relevant biblical data and doesn't try to exclude any of it

In my book, *A Biblical Defense of Catholicism*, in the chapter on justification, I made related arguments:

John 3:36 He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him.

The Greek word for *believes* is *pistuo*, and the Greek for *does not obey* is *apitheo*. The interesting thing in this verse is the parallelism, whereby belief and obedience are essentially identical. When all is said and done, *believing* in Christ is *obeying* Him. This ought to be kept in mind by Protestant evangelists and pastors who urge penitents to "believe on Christ," "accept Christ," etc. To disobey Christ is to be subject to the wrath of God. Thus, again, we are faced with the inescapable necessity of good works -- wrought by God's grace, and done in the spirit of charity -- for the purpose and end of ultimate salvation, holiness, and communion with God.

St. Peter, in 1 Peter 2:7, uses the same parallelism, with the same two identical Greek words (*believe / disobedient* in KJV). St. Paul uses *apitheo* with regard to disobedience to parents in Romans 1:30 and 2 Timothy 3:2, and in a more general sense (describing sinners) in Titus 1:16 and 3:3. Obviously, no one disbelieves in the existence of their parents. St. Paul is speaking of disobeying their commands. In the same sense, such disobedience (not mere lack of faith) is said to be the basis of the loss of eternal life in John 3:36.

To speculate further, if it be granted that *pistuo* ("believe") is roughly identical to "obeying," as it indisputably is in John 3:36, by simple deduction, then its use elsewhere is also much more commensurate with the Catholic view of infused justification rather than the more abstract, extrinsic and forensic Protestant view: For example, the "classic" Protestant evangelistic verse John 3:16, Jesus' constant demand to believe in Him in John 5 through 10, and St. Paul's oft-cited salvific exhortations in Romans 1:16, 4:24, 9:33, and 10:9, generally thought to be irrefutable proofs of the Protestant viewpoint on saving faith.

P: 1 Peter 3:21 denies that the power of baptism is through the washing away of physical dirt, but locates it in the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. Thus, it seems to imply that the important thing about baptism is not the outward act but the inner disposition or spiritual state vis-a-vis God. Peter is speaking of Baptism in the Spirit, which is symbolized by water baptism.

C: Once again, you try to explain away the water baptism by overly-emphasizing the "clear conscience" which Peter also mentions. I think context is decisive in upholding the Catholic interpretation of 1 Peter 3:21. We see that by adding verse 20 and part of verse 19:

1 Peter 3:19-21: . . . he went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were *saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,*

The meaning is much more clear in context. This is a typical Hebraic parallelism or what is called "types and shadows"; very common in Scripture. In the Old Testament, when "salvation"

was mentioned, it usually referred to winning a battle, being saved from an enemy, having one's life or town saved, etc. (in other words, "physical salvation"). This became a metaphor for spiritual salvation later on, in New Testament thought (or the parallel between physical death and spiritual death; losing one's life and losing one's soul). So here, Peter makes the same sort of analogy. The eight persons in Noah's ark were *saved through water* (i.e., primarily saved from drowning). The water of the flood symbolized the *baptism that now saves you*. Baptism saves us spiritually, not physically. In no way can water baptism be thought to save us physically, so in order to maintain the symbolism Peter is referring to, we must conclude that it saves us spiritually (baptismal regeneration). The "symbolism" referred to is the parallel between the Flood and water baptism. It is not referring to a symbolic baptism. This is proven by the clause "Baptism, which corresponds to this," which refers back to the preceding clause, "saved through water" (referring to the Flood and Noah's ark). As Noah and his family were saved through water, so Christians are saved by baptism, not merely "symbolically saved," or "doing a symbolic ritual after being saved," which makes no sense of the passage and twists the parallelism itself. Likewise, we see a similar analogy when Jesus talks about the "sign of Jonah" (Matthew 12:38-41). He compares Jonah's being swallowed by the fish with His Resurrection, after being "in the heart of the earth" (i.e., as Jonah appeared when it would be thought that he was dead, so would Jesus). This is another comparison of a physical "salvation" or near-miracle, with an event of great spiritual import. Jesus wasn't saved like we are but He conquered death, just like we can, in Him. We can conquer spiritual death, by means of Jesus' redemption on the cross. So it is another instance of comparing an Old Testament physical event with a New Testament occurrence of spiritual significance. Peter ties in the Resurrection of Jesus with water baptism, by showing that the former provides the power for the latter. St. Paul does the same thing:

Romans 6:3-4 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his

death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

(cf. Romans 8:11, 1 Cor 15:20-23, Col 2:11-13)

P: Acts 2:38 connects baptism to repentance, so that brings into question the notion of infant baptism.

C: Not at all. Once again, context (a crucial part of good biblical exegesis) is decisive. The context is the Day of Pentecost. A miracle had just occurred. The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4) and began speaking in tongues. A crowd gathered to see what was happening, and those from many nations each heard tongues in their own language (2:6). Peter, the leader of the apostles, then stood up to explain to them what all the commotion was about (2:14). He interprets Pentecost and presents the gospel (nowhere mentioning either faith alone or Scripture alone, of course). At the end of his talk, the people were "cut to the heart" and asked Peter and the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" (2:37). And Peter replied (2:38):

. . . Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Obviously, these were adults who could talk (and think, in most cases), who asked the question that Peter answered. This is a narrative, so it simply recorded actual words. Claiming that such a reply applies also to infants is nonsensical, as it was a response to people who understood what Peter had said in the first place, and his answer was specifically meant to address their question and them. Now, when an adult or someone past the age of reason becomes a Christian, obviously they have to repent before baptism (presuming they have ever sinned). Repentance is a necessary part of the "mature" following of Christ. So is baptism. For example, when one is received into the Catholic Church (as I

was) one verbally renounces error and sin, confesses, and is conditionally baptized (meaning that if an earlier "baptism" was not valid, the current one would be). I imagine that conversion to most Protestant groups would involve a similar process. You don't simply baptize a person who shows no sign of repentance. This is what adult converts do; how they are accepted into the fold. It does not rule out infant baptism at all, because the application of what Peter said in that particular circumstance is not universal. Moreover, when Peter was at the Gentile Cornelius' house (Acts 10), he was preaching the gospel, when "the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word" (Acts 10:44) Who was in the house?: Cornelius' "kinsmen and close friends" (10:24) and "many persons gathered" (10:27) I think the presumption should be -- from common sense -- that some young people, even babies, were present. Arguably, they were included in the description, "all who heard the word." After the Holy Spirit came on them, Peter said, "Can any one forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" So Peter "commanded them to be baptized" (10:47-48). In recounting the incident to other believers in Jerusalem, he told of Cornelius' story of what an angel had said to him (cf. 10:30-33), and how the angel told him that Peter would "declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household" (11:14).

We have dealt with the meaning of "household" above. It is admittedly speculative to connect all the dots here and not a solid conclusion by any means, but I would submit (as something to merely consider) that:

- 1) The "many persons gathered" (including relatives) would likely include children.
- 2) The Holy Spirit falling on "all who heard the word" might possibly include such children.

3) Since Peter tied together the receiving of the Holy Spirit to baptism, then the ensuing baptism might include children, if indeed #1 and #2 are true.

4) The reference to "household" likely includes children.

5) The reference to the "household" being "saved" implies the inclusion of children as well (if #1 and #4 are true).

6) The "household" being "saved" might be thought to include baptism as part of the salvation taking place (thus illustrating baptismal regeneration), as Peter ties baptism and salvation together elsewhere.

7) If children received the Holy Spirit (#2) and were "saved" along with the others (#5), then this salvation might be as a result of baptism (infant baptism and baptismal regeneration).

P: There is a linguistic argument here also. The Greek preposition in Acts 2:38 can mean "because of" as well as "for." The text would then read, "Be baptized...because of the forgiveness of sins."

C: I don't buy it, but I'm not going to get bogged down dealing with a Greek preposition (which can mean a million different things, and so is not very helpful for either position). You still have to explain 1 Peter 3:19-21. Furthermore, Paul seems to see forgiveness as one of the results of baptism in Colossians 2:11-13 (cited above). According to Paul's frequent analogy of baptism to the Resurrection of Christ (see also Romans 6:3-4, 8:11, 1 Cor 15:20-23) in Colossians 2:11-13 he appears to teach that we are spiritually dead (as Jesus was physically dead). Then we were "buried with him in baptism" (Col 2:12). Then after baptism (parallel to the Resurrection itself), we have new life. The grace and new life and forgiveness are all given to us by God. Baptism removes the debt of original sin from us; it is, in effect granting

"forgiveness" of original sin (see Col 2:13). Moreover, what about this verse?:

Titus 3:5 he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit.

Here, "mercy" could easily be interpreted as synonymous with forgiveness. So He saved us because He was willing to forgive us (to exercise mercy). And how did He save us, according to Paul in his letter to Titus?: He saved us through "the washing of regeneration" (which has been shown above to be almost certainly a reference to baptism, by seeing how Paul expresses similar things elsewhere). So forgiveness is tied to salvation, which in turn is tied to baptism, through which it is applied to us. Also, the clause "be baptized and wash away your sins" from Acts 22:16 (where Paul is reporting what Ananias said to him, thus implying agreement) makes it difficult to separate forgiveness from baptism by recourse to a preposition. Solid cross-referencing and comparative exegesis will trump a speculative argument from Greek prepositions every time.

It might be good to briefly review the history of Christian teaching on baptism. St. Hippolytus wrote in 215:

And they shall baptise the little children first. And if they can answer for themselves, let them answer. But if they cannot, let their parents answer or someone from their family.

(Apostolic Tradition, 21)

Origen wrote in 244:

The Church received from the apostles the tradition of baptizing infants too.

(Homily on Romans, V:9)

St. Cyprian wrote in 251:

But in respect of the case of the infants, which you say ought not to be baptized within the second or third day after their birth, and that the law of ancient circumcision should be regarded, so that you think one who is just born should not be baptized and sanctified within the eighth day...And therefore, dearest brother, this was our opinion in council, that by us no one ought to be hindered from baptism...we think is to be even more observed in respect of infants and newly-born persons.

(To Fidus, Epistle 58(64):2,6)

As for baptismal regeneration:

"I have heard, sir," said I, "from some teachers, that there is no other repentance except that which took place when we went down into the water and obtained the remission of our former sins." He said to me, "You have heard rightly, for so it is."

(*The Shepherd of Hermas*, [c. 140] 4:3:1-2)

They had need [the Shepherd said] to come up through the water, so that they might be made alive; for they could not otherwise enter into the kingdom of God, except by putting away the mortality of their former life. These also, then, who had fallen asleep, received the seal of the Son of God, and entered into the kingdom of God. For, [he said,] before a man bears the name of the Son of God, he is dead. But when he receives the seal, he puts mortality aside and again receives life. The seal, therefore, is the water. They go down into the water dead [in sin], and come out of it alive.

(*Ibid.*, 9:16:2-4)

For as we are lepers in sin, we are made clean, by means of the sacred water and the invocation of the Lord, from our old transgressions, being spiritually regenerated as new-born babes, even as the Lord has declared: "Except a man be born again through water and the Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

(St. Irenaeus, Fragment 34 [c. 190])

Speaking of the view of the early Church (first two centuries) on baptism, respected Protestant Church historian J.N.D. Kelly stated that baptism "was always held to convey the remission of sins" (*Early Christian Doctrines*, San Francisco: Harper Collins, rev. ed., 1978, 194-195). Likewise, *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (ed. J.D. Douglas, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, rev. ed., 1978, 100, "Baptism"), another respected Protestant reference work, which shows no inclination for Catholicism at all, in its tone or content, stated that baptism "early on" was understood as "an instrumental means of regeneration" and that "infant baptism was practiced in the second century." Many Protestants may not give much credence to the facts of Church history or apostolic Tradition (passed down in apostolic succession), but in this instance (as with so many others which uphold Catholic Tradition), it ought to be pondered how it is that the entire Church could get the biblical teaching so "wrong," so early, when it is utterly "clear" and uncontroversial to those who deny these doctrines? Belief in Jesus' Real Presence in the Eucharist is another viewpoint that was absolutely universal in the early Church. How could the whole Church have gotten it so wrong, right after the age of the apostles (and led even by some students of the apostles)? Didn't they ever read the Bible? How could "Roman Catholicism" have come to dominate "biblical" Christianity so early and cause it to adopt false views? Whether these facts have an effect on the beliefs of evangelicals or not, I should think that they are at least highly curious and odd

to them, and something to be pondered and explained in some sort of rational fashion.

Appendix One

Martin Luther and the New Testament Canon

Martin Luther's opinions with regard to the canon of the New Testament can be found in his prefaces to various books of the Bible. Scanning a primary Luther source (*Works of Martin Luther*, Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1932, copyrighted by the United Lutheran Church in America, vol. 6. 363 ff., these portions translated by Charles M. Jacobs), I discovered that Luther denied that the books of Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation were written by apostles. Luther states of James, for example, that it is "flatly against St. Paul and all the rest of Scripture."

If a book in the Bible contradicts another, then it is clearly not God-breathed (as God can't contradict Himself or be in error about anything), hence not inspired, and therefore not part of Scripture at all. And that is basically Luther's conclusion (at least the *logical* result of his thinking), although the overwhelming weight of Tradition pertaining to the biblical canon led (forced?) him to retain these books in his Bible, albeit separately, as a sort of New Testament "Apocrypha." In his Preface to Revelation, from 1522 -- from the time period in which he was translating the Bible), he states:

I miss more than one thing in this book, and this makes me hold it to be neither apostolic nor prophetic . . . I think of it almost as I do of the Fourth Book of Esdras, and can nohow detect that the Holy Spirit produced it . . . It is just the same as if we had it not, and there are many far better books for us to keep . . . Finally, let everyone think of it as his own spirit gives him to think. My spirit cannot fit itself into this book. There is one sufficient reason for me not to think highly of it, -- Christ is not taught or known in it; but to teach Christ is the thing which an apostle is bound, above all else, to do, as He says in Acts 1, "Ye shall be my witnesses." Therefore I stick to the books which give me Christ, clearly and purely.

(in Jacobs, *ibid.*, 488-489)

The Book of Hebrews fares little better under Luther's gaze:

. . . this Epistle is not St. Paul's, nor any other apostle's . . . there is a hard know in the fact that in chapters vi and x it flatly denies and forbids to sinners repentance after baptism, and in chapter xii, it says that Esau sought repentance and did not find it. This seems, as it stands, to be against all the Gospels and St. Paul's epistles . . . My opinion is that it is an epistle of many pieces put together, and it does not deal with any one subject in an orderly way. However that may be it is a marvellously fine epistle . . . it is plain that it is the work of an able and learned man, who was a disciple of the apostles . . . And although, as he himself testifies in chapter vi, he does not lay the foundation of faith, which is the work of an apostle, nevertheless he does build finely thereon gold, silver, precious stones, as St. Paul says in I Corinthians iii. Therefore we should not be hindered, even though wood, straw, or hay be mixed in with them, but accept this fine teaching with all honor; though to be sure, we cannot put it on the same level with the apostolic epistles . . .

(in Jacobs, *ibid.*, 476-477; from the year 1522)

Of special noteworthiness and relevance is Luther's Preface to the New Testament (1522; revised 1545), where he expresses many astonishing things (including the famous "epistle of straw" remark). After expounding generally for a few pages, Luther concludes:

From all this you can now judge all the books and decide among them which are the best . . . John's Gospel is the one, tender, true chief Gospel, far, far to be preferred to the other three and placed high above them. So, too, the

Epistles of St. Paul and St. Peter far surpass the other three Gospels -- Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In a word, St. John's Gospel and his first Epistle, St. Paul's Epistles, especially Romans, Galatians and Ephesians, and St. Peter's first Epistle are the books that show you Christ and teach you all that is necessary and good for you to know, even though you were never to see or hear any other book or doctrine. Therefore St. James' Epistle is really an epistle of straw, compared to them; for it has nothing of the nature of the Gospel about it.

(in Jacobs, *ibid.*, 443-444)

In Luther's Preface to the Epistles of Saint James and Saint Jude (1522; revised 1545), we find the same judgmental attitude:

. . . this Epistle of St. James . . . to state my own opinion on it, though without injury to anyone, I consider that it is not the writing of any apostle. My reasons are as follows. First: Flatly against St. Paul and all the rest of Scripture, it ascribes righteousness to works, and says that Abraham was justified by his works, in that he offered his son Isaac . . . This fault, therefore, leads to the conclusion that it is not the work of any apostle. Second: Its purpose is to teach Christians, and in all this long teaching it does not once mention the Passion, the Resurrection, or the Spirit of Christ . . . What does not teach Christ is not apostolic . . . But this James does nothing more than drive to the law and its works; and he mixes the two up in such disorderly fashion . . . In a word, he wants to guard against those who relied on faith without works, and is unequal to the task [in spirit, thought, and words, and rends the Scriptures and thereby resists Paul and all Scripture], and would accomplish by insisting on the Law what the apostles accomplish by inciting men to love. Therefore, I cannot put him among the chief books . . . Concerning the Epistle of St. Jude . . . He also speaks of the apostles as a

disciple coming long after them . . . it is an epistle that need not be counted among the chief books, which are to lay the foundation of faith.

(in Jacobs, *ibid.*, 477-479)

And so we have observed this tendency of emphasizing certain New Testament books and neglecting others in some strains of Protestantism to this day. Luther biographer Hartmann Grisar, S.J. (author of a massive six-volume biography), writes:

. . . his criticism of the Bible proceeds along entirely subjective and arbitrary lines. The value of the sacred writings is measured by the rule of his own doctrine. He treats the venerable canon of Scripture with a liberty which annihilates all certitude. For, while this list has the highest guarantee of sacred tradition and the backing of the Church, Luther makes religious sentiment the criterion by which to decide which books belong to the Bible, which are doubtful, and which are to be excluded . . .

(*Martin Luther: His Life and Work*, tr. Frank J. Eble, ed. Arthur Preuss, Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1930, 263-264)

Appendix Two

The Origins of *Sola Scriptura* and Perspicuity (Hartmann Grisar)

[Hartmann Grisar, a German Jesuit priest and author of a six-volume critical and penetrating biography of Luther, gives the historical and psychological background of the development of *sola Scriptura*]:

Luther's theological opinions . . . are in great part . . . the result of his experiences, inward and outward . . . The specifically Lutheran doctrine of the Bible as sole judge in matters of faith . . . was first broached by the author of the schism only when the opposition between his newly discovered views and the Church's teaching determined him to set aside both her claim to act as judge, and all other outward authority on doctrine . . .:

[Luther]: Any believer who has better grounds and authority from Scripture on his side, is more to be believed than the Pope or a whole Council.

(Hartmann Grisar, *Luther*, translated by E.M. Lamond, edited by Luigi Cappadelta, six volumes, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1917, vol. 4, 387)

Luther only gradually reached his teaching concerning the supremacy of Holy Scripture. His examination at Augsburg [in October, 1518] drew forth from him his first statements on the subject . . . In his appeal to the Council he . . . places the Bible and its decision (i.e., his interpretation) above the Pope. Even then, however, he admitted the authority of the Council side by side with that of the Bible only in so far as he confidently looked to the Council for a decision in his favour . . . Without having as yet formally proclaimed the new principle on Holy Scripture, he nevertheless declared at the Leipzig Disputation [July, 1519], that Scripture ranked above a Council, and that Ecumenical Councils had already erred in matters of faith. Only when driven into a

corner by his defence of the heresy of Hus, and after fruitless evasions, were these admissions wrung from him by Eck . . . After the Leipzig Disputation [he asserts] . . . :

Faith does not originate in authority but is produced in the heart only by the Holy Ghost.

(*Ibid.*, vol. 4, 388-389)

In his bias against his foes he does not pause to consider that the very point at issue is to discern what the "pure Word of God" is . . . "Thy Word is the truth" was his habitual battle-shout, though about this there had never been the least dispute.

(*Ibid.*, vol. 4, 389-391)

In the last resort it is on an inward experience of having been taught by the Spirit the truth and meaning of the Divine words that the Christian must firmly take his stand . . . :

Each man must believe solely because it is the Word of God and because he feels within that it is true, even though an angel from heaven and all the world should preach against it.

We must not regard the "opinion of all Christendom" but each one for himself alone" must believe the Scriptures.

(*Ibid.*, vol. 4, 391-392 / in 1522)

Luther simply ignores the objection, that, if every man is judge, unutterable discord must ensue. The way in which he continued so long to conceal this from himself is psychologically remarkable . . . We can only wonder at the idealism that could expect such results in a world inhabited by human beings . . . We know to what extent Luther had to suffer from the discord born of his principle, . . . not merely from the fanatics and Anabaptists . . . or from the Zwinglians . . . but even, so to speak, in his own

family, from Melancthon, who was rash enough to incline to the Swiss reformed doctrines . . . "What did Luther set up, instead of tradition?" another Protestant theologian [W. Kohler] recently queried. He answers: "In theory, that Scripture interprets itself; in practice however, as it doesn't, his own theology."

(*Ibid.*, vol. 4, 403,405-407)

In order to uphold his own reading of the Bible against others who differed from his, Luther incidentally appealed with the utmost vigor . . . to the Church, to Tradition and to the Fathers, whose authority he had nevertheless solemnly renounced. This was true especially in the controversies on the Zwinglian doctrine of the Supper . . . There is no doubt, that in 1527, Luther did have to go through some severe struggles of conscience . . . [Luther] wavers between tradition, to which he frequently appeals almost against his will, and that principle of independent study of the Bible under enlightenment from on high . . . The latter principle he never denied, in spite of his sad experiences . . . Yet -- strange as it may seem . . . the last word on matters of faith belongs, according to him, to authority. This is his opinion for practical reasons, because not everyone can be expected, and but few are able, to undertake the task of finding their belief for themselves in the Bible.

(*Ibid.*, vol. 4, 409-411)

On this fundamental question of the possibility of a regula fidei ["rule of faith"] in Luther's case, we may listen to the opinion of another esteemed Protestant historian of late years. Friedrich Paulsen, in his much-prized *History of German Education*, writes:

The Word of God does not suffice as a regula fidei, but a personal authority is also needed to decide on questions of doctrine, this is what the Luther of 1535 says and thereby confutes the Luther of 1521, who refused to allow anyone on earth to point out to him the faith unless he himself

could gather its truth from the Word of God . . . What Luther had relied on in 1521 against the Papists, viz. inability to refute him from Scripture, was used against him in his own struggle with the 'fanatics' . . . For the confuting of heretics a rule of faith is needed, and what is more, a living one to decide in each case. The principle of 1521, to allow no authority on earth to prescribe the faith, is anarchical . . . This the Reformers also saw and thus there was nothing left for them, if they were to retain a 'Church,' than to set up their own authority in the stead of the authority of Pope and Councils. On one vexatious point they were, however, at a loss: Against the later Luther it was always possible to appeal to the Luther of Worms. The starting-point and *raison d'etre* of the whole Reformation was the repudiation on principle of all human authority in matters of faith; after this, to find Luther installed as Pope, was scarcely pleasing . . . The hole in Luther's teaching still remains a hole in the principle of the Protestant Church today: There can be no earthly authority in matters of faith, and: Such an authority there must be; this is an antinomy which lies at its very root.

(Ibid., vol. 4, 485)

Perspicuity: the Self-Interpretation of Scripture: The Original Vision of Protestantism

From that time forward [after the Leipzig disputation of 1519] Luther gives the most varied expression to the principle of the free interpretation of Scripture: He declares that the Bible may be interpreted by everyone, even by the "humble miller's maid, nay, by a child of nine if it has the faith." "The sheep must judge whether the pastors teach in Christ's own tone."

(Ibid., vol. 4, 389)

Luther . . . [eventually] was less insistent in his assertion that the Spirit instructed by the inward Word, each one who read the Scriptures; so much more did he emphasize the supposed "clearness of the outward Word," viz. the Bible, and deprecate any wanton treatment of it (by anyone save himself) . . . This outward, so he now fancies, will surely avail to decide every issue, seeing that it is so clear . . . looked at fairly it at once settled every question -- needless to say in Luther's favour . . . As to the alleged clearness of the Word of Scripture it is sufficient to recall that he himself indirectly challenged it by accusing the whole Church of having misunderstood the Bible . . . But above all . . . he himself had thrown light on the Bible by his knowledge of languages; his interpretation, thanks to the "light" of the languages, had effected "such great things that . . . now we have the Gospel almost as pure and undefiled as the Apostles had it . . ." [in 1524] Luther's self-contradiction in speaking, first, of the great clearness of the Bible, and then of its great obscurity, cannot fail to strike one . . . He says, for instance, . . .

Should anyone say that it is necessary to have the interpretation of the Fathers and that Scripture is obscure, you must reply, that that is untrue. There is no book on earth more plainly written than Holy Scripture; in comparison with all other books it is as the sun to any other light

If the words are obscure in one passage, they are clear in another [*The Bondage of the Will*] . . .

. . . clearer, easier and more certain than any other writing.

It is in itself quite certain, quite easy and quite plain; it is its own explanation . . . and makes all clear to all.

Later, however, the idea that Holy Scripture was obscure preponderated with him. Two days before his death Luther wrote . . . his thoughts on the difficulty of understanding Scripture: . . .

In order to understand aright the epistles of Cicero a man must have been full twenty years in the public service of a great State. No one need fancy he has tasted Holy Scripture who has not ruled Churches for a hundred years with . . . John the Baptist, Christ and the Apostles. [*Table-Talk*]

In all likelihood his experiences with the sectarians in his own camp led him towards the end of his life to lay more stress on the difficulty of understanding the Bible.

(*Ibid.*, vol. 4, 392-395)

Appendix Three

Catholic Biblical Exegesis and Hermeneutics (*Catholic Encyclopedia*)

It is often argued by Protestants that the exegetical School of Alexandria, and Fathers such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen, following Philo and Platonic thought, introduced foreign Greek philosophies into biblical commentary and hermeneutics, thus poisoning the well for perspicuity and popular understanding of the "clear" Scripture for subsequent generations throughout the Middle Ages until Luther and Calvin restored the true belief once again.

The 15-volume *Catholic Encyclopedia* from 1913 (edited by Charles G. Herbermann et al, New York: Encyclopedia Press, Inc.) in its article on "Exegesis, Biblical," by A.J. Maas (vol. 5, 692-706), presents a summary of the Fathers' approach to the literal and allegorical senses of Scripture, particularly that of Origen, who was an exception to the rule (emphases added):

The Fathers of the Church were not blind to the fact that the literal sense in some Scripture passages appears to imply great incongruities, not to say insuperable difficulties. On the other hand, **they regarded the language of the Bible as truly human language, and therefore always endowed with a literal sense, whether proper or figurative.** Moreover, St. Jerome (in Is., xiii, 19), St. Augustine (De tent. Abrah. serm. ii, 7), St. Gregory (Moral., i, 37) agree with St. Thomas (Quodl., vii, Q. vi, a. 14) in his conviction that **the typical sense is always based on the literal and springs from it. Hence if these Fathers had denied the existence of a literal sense in any passage of Scripture, they would have left the passage meaningless.** Where the patristic writers appear to reject the literal sense, they really exclude only the proper sense, leaving the figurative.

Origen (De princ., IV, xi) may be regarded as the only exception to this rule; since he considers some of the Mosaic laws as either absurd or impossible to keep, he denies that they must be taken in their literal sense. But even in his case, attempts have been made to give to his words a more acceptable meaning (cf. Vincenzi, "In S. Gregorii Nysseni et Origenis scripta et doctrinam nova recensio", Rome, 1864, vol. II, cc. xxv-xxix). The great Alexandrian Doctor distinguishes between the body, the soul, and the spirit of Scripture. His defendants believe that he understands by these three elements its proper, its figurative, and its typical sense respectively. He may, therefore, with impunity deny the existence of any bodily sense in a passage of Scripture without injury to its literal sense. But **it is more generally admitted that Origen went astray on this point**, because he followed Philo's opinion too faithfully.

. . . It was Origen, too, who fully developed the hermeneutical principles which distinguish the Alexandrian School, though **they are not applied in their entirety by any other Father.**

Note that Origen's views were not accepted as exegetical and hermeneutical norms for "official" Catholic interpretation. The historical truth about medieval and present-day Catholic exegesis is much more nuanced and complex. Origen spoke for himself in this instance, and he was wrong. The same article elaborates upon the history and biblical basis for the "mystical" or "spiritual" or "typical" (typological) sense of Scripture:

The typical sense has its name from the fact that it is based on the figurative or typical relation of Biblical persons, or objects, or events, to a new truth. This latter is called the antitype, while its Biblical correspondent is named the type. The typical sense is also called the spiritual, or mystical, sense: mystical, because of its more recondite nature; spiritual, because it is related to the

literal, as the spirit is related to the body. What we call type is called shadow, allegory, parable, by St. Paul (cf. Rom., v, 14; I Cor., x, 6; Heb., viii, 5; Gal, iv, 24; Heb., ix, 9); once he refers to it as antitype (Heb., ix, 24), though St. Peter applies this term to the truth signified (I Pet., iii, 21) . . .

Scripture and tradition agree in their testimony for the occurrence of the typical sense in certain passages of the Old Testament. Among the Scriptural texts which establish the typical sense, we may appeal to Col., ii, 16-17; Heb., viii, 5; ix, 8-9; Rom., v, 14; Gal., iv, 24; Matt., ii, 15 (cf. Os., xi, 1); Heb., i, 5 (cf. II K., vii, 14). The testimony of tradition concerning this subject may be gathered from Barnabas (Ep., 7, 8, 9, 12, etc.), St. Clement of Rome (I Cor., xii), St. Justin, Dial. c. Tryph., civ, 42), St. Irenæus (Adv. hæc., IV, xxv, 3; II, xxiv, 2 sqq.; IV, xxvi, 2), Tertullian (Adv. Marc., V, vii); St. Jerome (Ep. liii, ad Paulin., 8), St. Thomas (I, Q. i, a. 10), and a number of other patristic writers and Scholastic theologians. That the Jews agree with the Christian writers on this point, may be inferred from Josephus (Antiq., XVII, iii, 4; Pro m. Antiq., n. 4; III, vi, 4, 77; De bello Jud., V, vi, 4), the Talmud (Berachot, c. v, ad fin.; Quiddus, fol. 41, col. 1), and the writings of Philo (de Abraham; de migrat. Abrahæ; de vita contempl.), though this latter writer goes to excess in the allegorical interpretation . . .

All Catholic interpreters readily grant that in some passages of the Old Testament we have a typical sense besides the literal; but this does not appear to be granted with regard to the New Testament, at least not subsequently to the death of Jesus Christ. Distinguishing between the New Testament as it signifies a collection of books, and the New Testament as it denotes the Christian economy, they grant that there are types in the New-Testament books, but only as far as they refer to the pre-

Christian economy. For the New Testament has brought us the reality in place of the figure, light in place of darkness, truth in place of shadow (cf. Patrizi, "De interpretatione Scripturarum Sacrarum", p. 199, Rome, 1844). On the other hand, it is urged that the New Testament is the figure of glory, as the Old Testament was the figure of the New (St. Thom., Summa, I, Q. i, a. 10).

Again, in Scripture the literal sense applies to what precedes, the typical to what follows. Now, even in the New Testament Christ and His Body precedes the Church and its members; hence, what is said literally of Christ or His Body, may be interpreted allegorically of the Church, the mystical body of Christ, tropologically of the virtuous acts of the Church's members, anagogically of their future glory (St. Thom., Quodl., VII, a. 15, ad 5um). Similar views are expressed by St. Ambrose (in Ps. xxx, n. 25), St. Chrysostom (in Matt., hom. lxvi), St. Augustine (in Joh., ix), St. Gregory the Great (Hom. ii, in evang. Luc., xviii), St. John Damascene (De fide orth., iv, 13); besides, the bark of Peter is usually regarded as a type of the Church, the destruction of Jerusalem as a type of the final catastrophe.

. . . It may be said in general that these earliest Christian writers admitted both the literal and the allegorical sense of Scripture. The latter sense appears to have been favoured by St. Clement of Rome, Barnabas, St. Justin, St. Irenæus, while the literal seems to prevail in the writings of St. Hippolytus, Tertullian, the Clementine Recognitions, and among the Gnostics.

. . . Among the eminent writers of the Alexandrian School must be classed Julius Africanus (c. 215), St. Dionysius the Great (d. 265), St. Gregory Thaumaturgus (d. 270), Eusebius of Cæsarea (d. 340), St. Athanasius (d. 373),

Didymus of Alexandria (d. 397), St. Epiphanius (d. 403), St. Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444), and finally also the celebrated Cappadocian Fathers, St. Basil the Great (d. 379), St. Gregory Nazianzen (d. 389), and St. Gregory of Nyssa (d. 394). The last three, however, have many points in common with the School of Antioch.

. . . (c) **The Latin Fathers. The Latin Fathers, too, admitted a twofold sense of Scripture, insisting variously now on the one, now on the other.** We can only enumerate their names: Tertullian (b. 160), St. Cyprian (d. 258), St. Victorinus (d. 297), St. Hilary (d. 367), Marius Victorinus (d. 370), St. Ambrose (d. 397), Rufinus (d. 410), St. Jerome (d. 420), St. Augustine (d. 430), Primasius (d. 550), Cassiodorus (d. 562), St. Gregory the Great (d. 604). St. Hilary, Marius Victorinus, and St. Ambrose depend, to a certain extent, on Origen and the Alexandrian School; St. Jerome and St. Augustine are the two great lights of the Latin Church on whom depend most of the Latin writers of the Middle Ages.

. . . (ii) Second Period of Exegesis, A.D. 604-1546

We consider the following nine centuries as one period of exegesis, not on account of their uniform productiveness or barrenness in the field of Biblical study, nor on account of their uniform tendency of developing any particular branch of exegesis, but rather on account of their **characteristic dependence on the work of the Fathers.** Whether they synopsised or amplified, whether they analysed or derived new conclusions from old premises, **they always started from the patristic results as their basis of operation . . .**

The School of Antioch. The Fathers of Antioch adhered to hermeneutical principles which insist more on the so-called grammatico-historical sense of the Sacred Books than on their moral and allegorical meaning. It is true that

Theodore of Mopsuestia urged the literal sense to the detriment of the typical, believing that the New Testament applies some of the prophecies to the Messiah only by way of accommodation, and that on account of their allegories the Canticle of Canticles, together with a few other books, should not be admitted into the Canon. **But generally speaking, the Fathers of Antioch and Eastern Syria, the latter of whom formed the School of Nisibis or Edessa, steered a course midway between Origen and Theodore, avoiding the excesses of both, and thus laying the foundation of the hermeneutical principles which the Catholic exegete ought to follow.** The principal representatives of the School of Antioch are St. John Chrysostom (d. 407); Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 429), condemned by the Fifth Ecumenical Synod on account of his explanation of Job and the Canticle of Canticles, and in certain respects the forerunner of Nestorius; St. Isidore of Pelusium, in Egypt (d. 434), numbered among the Antiochene commentators on account of his Biblical explanations inserted in about two thousand of his letters; Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus in Syria (d. 458), known for his Questions on the Octateuch, the Books of Kings and Par., and for his Commentaries on the Psalms, the Cant., the Prophets, and the Epistles of St. Paul. The School of Edessa glories in the names of Aphraates who flourished in the first half of the fourth century, St. Ephraem (d.373), Cyrillonas, Balæus, Rabulas, Isaac the Great, etc.

It is obvious, then, that the consensus amongst the Fathers (and the medievals following them) is the belief that Scripture can be properly interpreted in a typological, allegorical, figurative, and "mystical" sense, while not denying the fundamental nature of the literal, "historical" sense. The above summary (if it is accepted at all as accurate) reveals that the Fathers en masse accepted multiple forms of interpretation all along (and that the medieval exegetes followed their method: they didn't deviate from them).

Protestants cannot prove with extensive documentation that the Fathers -- taken as a whole -- uphold their notions of *sola Scriptura*, perspicuity, an invisible church, literal interpretation to the exclusion of other methods, or a denial of apostolic succession. History in this instance (as well as Scripture, I believe) is again on the Catholic side.

Appendix Four

The Antiochene School of Literal Grammatico-Historical Hermeneutics (John Henry Newman)

[Venerable John Henry Cardinal Newman, in his classic work *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Part 2, Chapter 7, section 4: "Scripture and its Mystical Interpretation" -- emphases added), penetratingly wrote about the orthodoxy of the mystical sense as the norm within the Christian (Catholic) Church, and the excesses of the Antiochene School of hermeneutics and "hyper-literalism." I cite him at length, because his analysis is so relevant to the current-day disagreements over proper exegesis and hermeneutics]:

Several passages have occurred in the foregoing Chapters, which serve to suggest another principle on which some words are now to be said. Theodore's exclusive adoption of the literal, and repudiation of the mystical interpretation of Holy Scripture, leads to the consideration of the latter, as one of the characteristic conditions or principles on which the teaching of the Church has ever proceeded. Thus Christianity developed, as we have incidentally seen, into the form, first, of a Catholic, then of a Papal Church. **Now it was Scripture that was made the rule on which this development proceeded in each case, and Scripture moreover interpreted in a mystical sense;** and, {339} whereas at first certain texts were inconsistently confined to the letter, and a Millennium was in consequence expected, the very course of events, as time went on, interpreted the prophecies about the Church more truly, and that first in respect of her prerogative as occupying the orbis terrarum, next in support of the claims of the See of St. Peter. This is but one specimen of a certain law of Christian teaching, which is this,—a reference to Scripture throughout, and **especially in its mystical sense** [Note 14].

1. This is a characteristic which will become more and more evident to us, the more we look for it. **The divines of the Church are in every age engaged in regulating themselves by Scripture, appealing to Scripture in proof of their conclusions, and exhorting and teaching in the thoughts and language of Scripture. Scripture may be said to be the medium in which the mind of the Church has energized and developed** [Note 15]. When St. Methodius would enforce the doctrine of vows of celibacy, he refers to the book of Numbers; and if St. Irenaeus proclaims the dignity of St. Mary, it is from a comparison of St. Luke's Gospel with Genesis. And thus St. Cyprian, in his Testimonies, rests the prerogatives of martyrdom, as {340} indeed the whole circle of Christian doctrine, on the declaration of certain texts; and, when in his letter to Antonian he seems to allude to Purgatory, he refers to our Lord's words about "the prison" and "paying the last farthing." And if St. Ignatius exhorts to unity, it is from St. Paul; and he quotes St. Luke against the Phantasiasts of his day. We have a first instance of this law in the Epistle of St. Polycarp, and a last in the practical works of St. Alphonso Liguori. St. Cyprian, or St. Ambrose, or St. Bede, or St. Bernard, or St. Carlo, or such popular books as Horstius's *Paradisus Animae*, are specimens of a rule which is too obvious to need formal proof. It is exemplified in the theological decisions of St. Athanasius in the fourth century, and of St. Thomas in the thirteenth; in the structure of the Canon Law, and in the Bulls and Letters of Popes. It is instanced in the notion so long prevalent in the Church, which philosophers of this day do not allow us to forget, that all truth, all science, must be derived from the inspired volume. And it is recognized as well as exemplified; recognized as distinctly by writers of the Society of Jesus, as it is copiously exemplified by the Ante-nicene Fathers.

. . . "Holy Scripture," says Cornelius à Lapide, "contains the beginnings of all theology: for theology is nothing but the science of conclusions which are drawn from principles certain to faith, and therefore is of all sciences most august as well as certain; but the principles of faith and faith itself doth Scripture contain; whence it evidently follows that Holy Scripture lays down those

principles of theology by which the theologian begets of the mind's reasoning his demonstrations. He, then, who thinks he can tear away Scholastic Science from the work of commenting on Holy Scripture is hoping for offspring without a mother." [Note 19] Again: "What is the subject-matter of Scripture? Must I say it in a word? Its aim is de omni scibili; it embraces in its bosom all studies, all that can be known: and thus it is a certain university of sciences containing all sciences either 'formally' or 'eminently.'" [Note 20]

Nor am I aware that later Post-tridentine writers deny that the whole Catholic faith may be proved from Scripture, though they would certainly maintain that it is not to be found on the surface of it, nor in such sense that it may be gained from Scripture without the aid of Tradition.

[Thus Newman confirms that Catholics acknowledge material sufficiency of Scripture]

2. And this has been the doctrine of all ages of the Church, as is shown by the disinclination of her teachers to confine themselves to the mere literal interpretation of Scripture. Her most subtle and powerful method of proof, whether in ancient or modern times, is the mystical sense, which is so frequently used in doctrinal controversy as on many occasions to supersede any other. Thus the Council of Trent appeals to the peace-offering spoken of in Malachi {343} in proof of the Eucharistic Sacrifice; to the water and blood issuing from our Lord's side, and to the mention of "waters" in the Apocalypse, in admonishing on the subject of the mixture of water with the wine in the Oblation. Thus Bellarmine defends Monastic celibacy by our Lord's words in Matthew xix., and refers to "We went through fire and water;" &c., in the Psalm, as an argument for Purgatory; and these, as is plain, are but specimens of a rule. **Now, on turning to primitive controversy, we find this method of interpretation to be the very basis of the proof of the Catholic doctrine of the Holy Trinity.** Whether we betake ourselves to the Ante-nicene writers or the Nicene, certain texts

will meet us, which do not obviously refer to that doctrine, yet are put forward as palmary proofs of it. Such are, in respect of our Lord's divinity, "My heart is inditing of a good matter," or "has burst forth with a good Word;" "The Lord made" or "possessed Me in the beginning of His ways;" "I was with Him, in whom He delighted;" "In Thy Light shall we see Light;" "Who shall declare His generation?" "She is the Breath of the Power of God;" and "His Eternal Power and Godhead."

On the other hand, the School of Antioch, which adopted the literal interpretation, was, as I have noticed above, the very metropolis of heresy. Not to speak of Lucian, whose history is but imperfectly known, (one of the first masters of this school, and also **teacher of Arius** and his principal supporters), Diodorus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, who were the most eminent masters of literalism in the succeeding generation, were, as we have seen, the **forerunners of Nestorianism**. The case had been the same in a still earlier age;—the Jews clung to the literal sense of the Scriptures and hence rejected the Gospel; the Christian Apologists proved its divinity by means of the allegorical. The formal connexion of this mode of interpretation with {344} Christian theology is noticed by Porphyry, who speaks of Origen and others as borrowing it from heathen philosophy, both in explanation of the Old Testament and in defence of their own doctrine. **It may be almost laid down as an historical fact, that the mystical interpretation and orthodoxy will stand or fall together.**

This is clearly seen, as regards the primitive theology, by a recent writer, in the course of a Dissertation upon St. Ephrem. After observing that Theodore of Heraclea, Eusebius, and Diodorus gave a systematic opposition to the mystical interpretation, which had a sort of sanction from Antiquity and the orthodox Church, he proceeds; "Ephrem is not as sober in his interpretations, nor could it be, since he was a zealous disciple of the orthodox faith. For all those who are most eminent in such sobriety were as far as possible removed from the faith of the Councils . . . On the other hand, all who retained the faith of the Church never entirely

dispensed with the spiritual sense of the Scriptures. For the Councils watched over the orthodox faith; nor was it safe in those ages, as we learn especially from the instance of Theodore of Mopsuestia, to desert the spiritual for an exclusive cultivation of the literal method. Moreover, the allegorical interpretation, even when the literal sense was not injured, was also preserved; because in those times, when both heretics and Jews in controversy were stubborn in their objections to Christian doctrine, maintaining that the Messiah was yet to come, or denying the abrogation of the Sabbath and ceremonial law, or ridiculing the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, and especially that of Christ's Divine Nature, under such circumstances ecclesiastical writers found it to their purpose, in answer to such exceptions, violently to refer {345} every part of Scripture by allegory to Christ and His Church." [Note 21]

. . . The use of Scripture then, especially its spiritual or second sense, as a medium of thought and deduction, is a characteristic principle of doctrinal teaching in the Church.

Appendix Five

The Council of Trent: Canons on Justification

CANON I.-If any one saith, that man may be justified before God by his own works, whether done through the teaching of human nature, or that of the law, without the grace of God through Jesus Christ; let him be anathema.

CANON II.-If any one saith, that the grace of God, through Jesus Christ, is given only for this, that man may be able more easily to live justly, and to merit eternal life, as if, by free will without grace, he were able to do both, though hardly indeed and with difficulty; let him be anathema.

CANON III.-If any one saith, that without the preventient inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and without his help, man can believe, hope, love, or be penitent as he ought, so as that the grace of Justification may be bestowed upon him; let him be anathema.

CANON IV.-If any one saith, that man's free will moved and excited by God, by assenting to God exciting and calling, nowise co-operates towards disposing and preparing itself for obtaining the grace of Justification; that it cannot refuse its consent, if it would, but that, as something inanimate, it does nothing whatever and is merely passive; let him be anathema.

CANON V.-If any one saith, that, since Adam's sin, the free will of man is lost and extinguished; or, that it is a thing with only a name, yea a name without a reality, a figment, in fine, introduced into the Church by Satan; let him be anathema.

CANON VI.-If any one saith, that it is not in man's power to make his ways evil, but that the works that are evil God worketh as well as those that are good, not permissively only, but properly, and of Himself, in such wise that the treason of Judas is

no less His own proper work than the vocation of Paul; let him be anathema.

CANON VII.-If any one saith, that all works done before Justification, in whatsoever way they be done, are truly sins, or merit the hatred of God; or that the more earnestly one strives to dispose himself for grace, the more grievously he sins: let him be anathema.

CANON VIII.-If any one saith, that the fear of hell,-whereby, by grieving for our sins, we flee unto the mercy of God, or refrain from sinning,-is a sin, or makes sinners worse; let him be anathema.

CANON IX.-If any one saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified; in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification, and that it is not in any way necessary, that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will; let him be anathema.

CANON X.-If any one saith, that men are just without the justice of Christ, whereby He merited for us to be justified; or that it is by that justice itself that they are formally just; let him be anathema.

CANON XI.-If any one saith, that men are justified, either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ, or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, and is inherent in them; or even that the grace, whereby we are justified, is only the favour of God; let him be anathema.

CANON XII.-If any one saith, that justifying faith is nothing else but confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ's sake; or, that this confidence alone is that whereby we are justified; let him be anathema.

CANON XIII.-If any one saith, that it is necessary for every one, for the obtaining the remission of sins, that he believe for certain, and without any wavering arising from his own infirmity and disposition, that his sins are forgiven him; let him be anathema.

CANON XIV.-If any one saith, that man is truly absolved from his sins and justified, because that he assuredly believed himself absolved and justified; or, that no one is truly justified but he who believes himself justified; and that, by this faith alone, absolution and justification are effected; let him be anathema.

CANON XV.-If any one saith, that a man, who is born again and justified, is bound of faith to believe that he is assuredly in the number of the predestinate; let him be anathema.

CANON XVI.-If any one saith, that he will for certain, of an absolute and infallible certainty, have that great gift of perseverance unto the end,-unless he have learned this by special revelation; let him be anathema.

CANON XVII.-If any one saith, that the grace of Justification is only attained to by those who are predestined unto life; but that all others who are called, are called indeed, but receive not grace, as being, by the divine power, predestined unto evil; let him be anathema.

CANON XVIII.-If any one saith, that the commandments of God are, even for one that is justified and constituted in grace, impossible to keep; let him be anathema.

CANON XIX.-If any one saith, that nothing besides faith is commanded in the Gospel; that other things are indifferent, neither commanded nor prohibited, but free; or, that the ten commandments nowise appertain to Christians; let him be anathema.

CANON XX.-If any one saith, that the man who is justified and how perfect soever, is not bound to observe the commandments

of God and of the Church, but only to believe; as if indeed the Gospel were a bare and absolute promise of eternal life, without the condition of observing the commandments; let him be anathema.

CANON XXI.-If any one saith, that Christ Jesus was given of God to men, as a redeemer in whom to trust, and not also as a legislator whom to obey; let him be anathema.

CANON XXII.-If any one saith, that the justified, either is able to persevere, without the special help of God, in the justice received; or that, with that help, he is not able; let him be anathema.

CANON XXIII.-If any one saith, that a man once justified can sin no more, nor lose grace, and that therefore he that falls and sins was never truly justified; or, on the other hand, that he is able, during his whole life, to avoid all sins, even those that are venial,-except by a special privilege from God, as the Church holds in regard of the Blessed Virgin; let him be anathema.

CANON XXIV.-If any one saith, that the justice received is not preserved and also increased before God through good works; but that the said works are merely the fruits and signs of Justification obtained, but not a cause of the increase thereof; let him be anathema.

CANON XXV.-If any one saith, that, in every good work, the just sins venially at least, or-which is more intolerable still-mortally, and consequently deserves eternal punishments; and that for this cause only he is not damned, that God does not impute those works unto damnation; let him be anathema.

CANON XXVI.-If any one saith, that the just ought not, for their good works done in God, to expect and hope for an eternal recompense from God, through His mercy and the merit of Jesus Christ, if so be that they persevere to the end in well doing and in keeping the divine commandments; let him be anathema.

CANON XXVII.-If any one saith, that there is no mortal sin but that of infidelity; or, that grace once received is not lost by any other sin, however grievous and enormous, save by that of infidelity; let him be anathema.

CANON XXVIII.-If any one saith, that, grace being lost through sin, faith also is always lost with it; or, that the faith which remains, though it be not a lively faith, is not a true faith; or, that he, who has faith without charity is not a Christian; let him be anathema.

CANON XXIX.-If any one saith, that he, who has fallen after baptism, is not able by the grace of God to rise again; or, that he is able indeed to recover the justice which he has lost, but by faith alone without the sacrament of Penance, contrary to what the holy Roman and universal Church-instructed by Christ and his Apostles-has hitherto professed, observed, and taught; let him be anathema.

CANON XXX.-If any one saith, that, after the grace of Justification has been received, to every penitent sinner the guilt is remitted, and the debt of eternal punishment is blotted out in such wise, that there remains not any debt of temporal punishment to be discharged either in this world, or in the next in Purgatory, before the entrance to the kingdom of heaven can be opened (to him); let him be anathema.

CANON XXXI.-If any one saith, that the justified sins when he performs good works with a view to an eternal recompense; let him be anathema.

CANON XXXII.-If any one saith, that the good works of one that is justified are in such manner the gifts of God, as that they are not also the good merits of him that is justified; or, that the said justified, by the good works which he performs through the grace of God and the merit of Jesus Christ, whose living member he is, does not truly merit increase of grace, eternal life, and the

attainment of that eternal life,-if so be, however, that he depart in grace,-and also an increase of glory; let him be anathema.

CANON XXXIII.-If any one saith,that,by the Catholic doctrine touching Justification, by this holy Synod inset forth in this present decree, the glory of God, or the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ are in any way derogated from, and not rather that the truth of our faith, and the glory in fine of God and of Jesus Christ are rendered (more) illustrious; let him be anathema.

Appendix Six

The Catholic View of Non-Catholics (Karl Adam)

[Abridged version, by Dave Armstrong, of "The Church Necessary for Salvation," chapter 10, pages 169-186 of *The Spirit of Catholicism*, by Karl Adam (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Image, 1924, translated by Dom Justin McCann)]

"And if he will not hear the Church, let him be to thee as the heathen and publican" (Matthew 18:17).

The Catholic Church as the Body of Christ, as the realisation in the world of the Kingdom of God, is the Church of Humanity . . . the exclusive institution wherein all men shall attain salvation . . .

The Church would belie her own deepest essence and her most outstanding quality, namely her inexhaustible fulness and that which guarantees and supports this fulness, her vocation to be the Body of Christ, if she were ever to recognise some collateral and antagonistic Christian church as her sister and as possessing equal rights with herself. She can recognise the historical importance of such churches, She can even designate them as Christian communions, yes, even as Christian churches, but never as the Church of Christ. One God, one Christ, one Baptism, one Church. There can never be a second Christ, and in the same way there cannot be a second Body of Christ . . .

The Catholic Church can and will appraise generously, and will countenance, all the communities of non-Catholic Christendom . . . But she cannot recognise other Christian communions as churches of like order and rights with herself. To do so would be infidelity to her own nature, and would be the worst disloyalty to herself. In her own eyes the Catholic Church is nothing at all if she be not *the* Church, *the* Body of Christ, *the* Kingdom of God. This exclusiveness is rooted in the exclusiveness of Christ, in His claim to be the bringer of the new life, to be the way, the truth and the life . . .

There is "no other name under heaven given to men, whereby they must be saved" (Acts 4:12). But we can grasp Christ only through His Church. It is true that He might, had He so willed, have imparted Himself and His grace to all men directly, in personal experience. But the question is not what might have been, but what Christ in fact willed to do. And in fact He willed to give Himself to men through men, that is by the way of a community life and not by the way of isolation and individualism . . .

It was not His will to sanctify a countless multitude of solitary souls, but a corporate kingdom of saints, a Kingdom of God

From the very beginning, as St. Matthew testifies (Matthew 18:17) the necessity for salvation of belonging to the one fellowship was established on the basis of an express saying of our Lord's:.....St. Cyprian [d.258] afterwards expressed this conviction of primitive Christianity . . . :

"To have the one God for your father, you must have the Church for your mother" (Ep. 74,7). "No man can be saved except in the Church" (Ep. 4,4). "Outside the Church there is no salvation" (Ep. 73,21).

Thus was formulated that sentence which puts the Church's claim to be the only source of salvation in the most concise form: "Outside the Church no salvation" (*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*). the Fourth Lateran Council (A.D. 1215) adopted this formula verbatim . . .

. . . But, we may ask, does that mean that all heretics and non-Catholics are destined to hell? . . .

To begin with, it is certain that the declaration that there is no salvation outside the Church is not aimed at individual non-Catholics, at any persons as persons, but at non-Catholic churches and communions, in so far as they are non-Catholic communions. Its purpose is to formulate positively the truth that there is but one Body of Christ and therefore but one Church which possesses and imparts the grace of Christ in its fulness . . . So that the spiritual unfruitfulness which is predicated in the doctrine is not to be affirmed of the individual non-Catholic, but primarily of non-Catholic communions as such . . .

. . . [But] non-Catholic communions are not merely non-Catholic and anti-Catholic. When they set themselves up against the original Church of Christ, they took over and maintained a considerable amount of the Catholic inheritance, and also certain Catholic means of grace, in particular the sacrament of Baptism. They are therefore, if we regard them as a whole, not mere antithesis and negation, but also to a large extent thesis and affirmation of the ancient treasure of truth and grace that has come down to us from Christ and the apostles . . . And in so far as they are genuinely Catholic in their faith and worship, it can and will and must happen that there should be, even outside the visible Church, a real growth and progress in union with Christ. So is the promise of Jesus fulfilled: "And other sheep I have that are not of this fold" (John 10:16). Wherever the Gospel of Jesus is faithfully preached, and wherever baptism is conferred with faith in His Holy Name, there His grace can operate . . .

The Church . . . upheld the validity of baptism in the Name of Jesus conferred by heretics. And it was Rome, Rome that is so violently attacked for her intolerance, and Pope Stephen, who even at the peril of an African schism would not allow heretical baptism to be impugned . . .

. . . The Jansenists in the seventeenth century . . . advocated the . . . principle that "outside the Church there is no grace" (*extra ecclesiam nulla conceditur gratia*). But again it was Rome and a pope that expressly rejected this proposition . . .

. . . Non-Catholic sacraments have the power to sanctify and save, not only objectively, but also subjectively. It is therefore conceivable also, from the Church's standpoint, that there is a true, devout and Christian life in those non-Catholic communions which believe in Jesus and baptize in His Name. We Catholics regard this Christian life, wherever it appears, with unfeigned respect and with thankful love . . .

And not merely a Christian life, but a complete and lofty Christian life, a life according to the "full age of Christ," a saintly life, is possible -- so Catholics believe -- even in definitely non-Catholic communions. It is true that it cannot develop with that luxuriance which is possible in the Church, where is the fulness of Jesus and His Body; and it will never be anti-Catholic in its

quality. Yet it will be a genuine saintly life; since, wherever grace is, the noble fruits of grace can ripen . . . it is Catholic teaching that the grace of Christ operates, not only in the Christian communions, but also in the non-Christian world, in Jews and in Turks and in Japanese. Every Catholic catechism, when it explains the ordinary form of baptism, lays emphasis also on that extraordinary form which is called baptism of desire. By that is meant that perfect love, evoked and supported by the redeeming grace of Jesus, has power to sanctify the soul, and that that soul so decisively affirms the will of God that it would at once receive baptism, if it knew of that sacrament or could receive it. As God sends His rain and His sunshine upon all, so does He send His conquering grace into the hearts of all those who hold themselves ready for it, who do what in them lies, who perform what their conscience bids them . . . Wherever conscience is astir, wherever men are alive to God and His Holy Will, there and at the same time the grace of Christ co-operates and lays in the soul the seeds of the new supernatural life . . .

. . . The Church rightly maintains and continually reiterates, in decisive and uncompromising fashion, her claim to be the sole true Body of Christ; but at the same time she holds a generous and large-minded view regarding the activity of Christ's grace. That activity has no bounds or limits, but is as infinite as the love of God . . .

In the Catholic Church the saving power, which was revealed in Christ, flows into the world with original force, in untroubled purity, and in complete and exhaustive fulness . . .

. . . she does not choose only this or that precious jewel, but she calls her own the whole inheritance of revealed truth contained in Scripture and Tradition . . . because and in so far as the Body of Christ comprehends all those who are saved by Christ, those also who are visited by His grace in this immediate way belong to His Church. It is true that they do not belong to its outward and visible body, but they certainly belong to its invisible, supernatural soul, to its supernatural substance. For the grace of Christ never works in the individual in an isolated fashion, but always in the unity of His Body . . . And thus it holds good, even for those brethren who are thus separated from the

visible organism of the Church, that they too are saved in the Church, and not without her or in opposition to her . . .

From the purely theological standpoint, . . . the only possible conclusion regarding all heretics and schismatics, Jews and pagans, is that judgment of condemnation which the Council of Florence [1438-1445] pronounced upon them . . . It is thus, from this purely theological standpoint, that we are to understand the sharp anathemas pronounced by the Church against all heretics and schismatics . . . In these pronouncements the Church is not deciding the good or bad faith of the individual heretic. Still less is she sitting in judgment on his ultimate fate. The immediate purport of her condemnation is that these heretics represent and proclaim ideas antagonistic to the Church. When ideas are in conflict, when truth is fighting against error, and revelation against human ingenuity, then there can be no compromise and no indulgence . . . Dogmatic intolerance is therefore a moral duty, a duty to the infinite truth and to truthfulness.

But so soon as it is a question, not of the conflict between idea and idea, but of living men, of our judgment on this or that non-Catholic, then the theologian becomes a psychologist, the dogmatist a pastor of souls. He draws attention to the fact that the living man is very rarely the embodiment of an idea, that the conceptual world and mentality of the individual are so multifarious and complicated, that he cannot be reduced to a single formula. In other words the heretic, the Jew and the pagan seldom exist in a pure state . . . Therefore the Church expressly distinguishes between "formal" and "material" heretics. A "formal" heretic rejects the Church and its teaching absolutely and with full deliberation; a "material" heretic rejects the Church from lack of knowledge, being influenced by false prejudice or by an anti-Catholic upbringing. St. Augustine [354-430] forbids us to blame a man for being a heretic because he was born of heretical parents, provided that he does not with obstinate self-assurance shut out all better knowledge, but seeks the truth simply and loyally (Ep. 43,1,1). Whenever the Church has such honest enquirers before her, she remembers that our Lord condemned Pharisaism but not the individual Pharisee, that He

held deep and loving intercourse with Nicodemus, and allowed Himself to be invited by Simon . . .

It is true that heretics were tried and burnt in the Middle Ages. But that was not done only in Catholic countries, for Calvin himself had Servetus burnt. And capital punishment was employed against the Anabaptists, especially in Thuringia and in the Electorate of Saxony [i.e., Luther's home regions]. According to the Protestant theologian, Walter Kohler, even Luther after 1530 regarded the penalty of death as a justifiable punishment for heresy. (*Reformation und Ketzerprozess*, 1900, p.36) The fact that the persecution of heresy was approved as a justifiable thing by non-Catholic bodies, and in certain cases carried out in practice, goes to show that such persecution did not spring from the nature of Catholicism, or in particular from its exclusive claims. The origin of such persecutions is to be sought rather in the Byzantine and medieval conception of the state, whereby every attack on the unity of the faith was regarded as an open crime against the unity and stability of the state, and one which had to be punished according to the primitive methods of the time

...

The religion of the medieval man embraced his whole life and outlook . . . So that every revolt against the Catholic faith seemed to him to be a moral crime, a sort of murder of the soul and of God, an offence more heinous than parricide. And his outlook was logical rather than psychological. He rejoiced in the perception of truth, but he had little appreciation of the living conditions of soul by which this perception is reached In dealing with the living man we have to take account not only of the logical force of truth, but also of the particular quality of the mental and spiritual endowment with which he reacts to the truth. Because they were not alive to the infinite variety of such spiritual endowment, they were all too ready, especially when truth was impugned, to conclude at once that it was a case of "evil will" (*mala fides*) and to pass sentence of condemnation, even though there were insuperable intellectual obstacles (*ignorantia invincibilis*) in the way of the perception of the truth. This pre-eminently logical attitude of mind is characteristic of the Middle Ages. That epoch had no feeling for life as a flowing

thing with its own peculiar laws, no appreciation of history, whether within us or without us. And this attitude was not to be overcome and corrected, until the spirit of the time changed, until in the course of centuries and by a long evolution a new outlook took its place. Therefore the persecutions of heretics did not proceed from the nature of Catholicism, but from the political and mental attitude of the Middle Ages . . .

The theologian has by means of psychological and historical studies attained a wider understanding and become increasingly cautious in attributing an "evil will" to the heretic. He has become more alive to the thousand possibilities of invincible and therefore excusable error . . .

Wherefore the Church's claim to be the Church of salvation by no means excludes a loving and sympathetic appreciation of the subjective conditions and circumstances under which heresy has arisen. Nor is her condemnation of a heresy always at the same time a condemnation of the individual heretic . . .

But those also who know her not receive these gifts from her; yes, even those who misjudge and fight against her, provided they are in good faith, and are simply and loyally seeking the truth without self-righteous obstinacy . . . Though they be outwardly separated from the Church, they belong to its soul.

So that the non-Catholic of good will is already fundamentally united to the Church. It is only that he sees her not. Yet she is there, invisible and mysterious. And the more he grows in faith and in love, the more plainly will she become actually visible to him . . . And it is because we believe that very many non-Catholics are already thus invisibly united with the Church, that we do not abandon our conviction that this invisible union will one day be made visible in all its beauty. The more consciously and completely we all of us exhibit the spirit of Christ, the more certainly will that hour of grace approach, when the veils will fall from all eyes, when we shall put away all prejudice and misunderstanding and bitterness, when we shall once again as of old extend to one another the hand of brotherhood, when there shall be one God, one Christ, one shepherd and one flock.

About the Author

Dave Armstrong is a Catholic writer, apologist, and evangelist, who has been actively proclaiming and defending Christianity for more than twenty years. Formerly a campus missionary, as a Protestant, Dave was received into the Catholic Church in 1991, by the late, well-known catechist and theologian, Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J.

His conversion story was published in the bestselling book *Surprised by Truth* (edited by Patrick Madrid; San Diego: Basilica Press, 1994). Dave's articles have appeared in many Catholic periodicals, including *The Catholic Answer*, *This Rock*, *Envoy*, *Hands On Apologetics*, *The Coming Home Journal*, *Credo*, and *The Latin Mass*. Dave's apologetic and writing apostolate was the subject of a feature article in the May 2002 issue of *Envoy*.

His large and popular website, *Biblical Evidence for Catholicism* (<http://ic.net/~erasmus/RAZHOME.HTM>), has been online since March 1997, and received the 1998 *Catholic Website of the Year* award from *Envoy Magazine*. (Dave was also nominated for *Best New Evangelist* by the same magazine: the only nominee who appeared in both categories).

Dave's first book, *A Biblical Defense of Catholicism* (Foreword by Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J.) was published by 1stBooks Library in 2001, and the companion-piece, *More Biblical Evidence for Catholicism* (Foreword by Dr. Scott Hahn) appeared in 2002. He also wrote all of the apologetic commentary (44 inserted articles on various topics) for *The Catholic Answer Bible*, scheduled to be published by Our Sunday Visitor in 2002. His fourth book: *Development of Catholic Doctrine: Evolution, Revolution, or an Organic Process?*, is to be released in late 2002.

Dave's writing has been enthusiastically endorsed by many leading Catholic apologists, authors, and catechists, including Dr.

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