

# ROMAN CATHOLIC TRADITION

*Claims and Contradictions*

*Additional Books Offered by Christian Resources:*

Holy Scripture: The Ground and Pillar of Our Faith, Volume I,  
A Biblical Defense of the Reformation Principle of *Sola Scriptura*

Holy Scripture: The Ground and Pillar of Our Faith, Volume II,  
An Historical Defense of the Reformation Principle of *Sola Scriptura*

Holy Scripture: The Ground and Pillar of Our Faith, Volume III,  
The Writings of the Church Fathers Affirming the Reformation Principle of *Sola Scriptura*

The Gospel of the Reformation

The Church of Rome at the Bar of History

The Matthew 16 Controversy: *Peter and the Rock*

Salvation, the Bible and Roman Catholicism

Saving Faith: *How Does Rome Define It?*

The Christian: *Following Christ As Lord*

Must Jesus Be Lord To Be Savior?

Thou Shalt Love the Lord Thy God

Roman Catholic Tradition  
*Claims and Contradictions*

William Webster

CHRISTIAN RESOURCES INC.

CHRISTIAN RESOURCES INC  
1505 NW 4th Avenue  
Battle Ground, WA 98604  
(360) 687-7311

Email: [ChristianResources@aol.com](mailto:ChristianResources@aol.com)  
WebPage: [www.christiantruth.com](http://www.christiantruth.com)

© William Webster 1999  
Revised and Updated

First Published in 1994

ISBN 1-893531-01-5

Printed and Bound by Christian Resources

## CONTENTS

Introduction	7
1. The Authority of Scripture	8
2. Tradition	12
3. The Canon	21
4. The Papacy	28
5. Unanimous Consent and Infallible Interpretation	36
6. Mary	39
7. Necessity of the Church and Sacraments for Salvation	49
8. The Priesthood	51
9. Baptism	54
10. The Eucharist	56
11. Confession and Penance	60
12. Purgatory	63
13. Indulgences	65
14. No Salvation Outside the Roman Catholic Church	68
15. Justification	72
16. Repentance and Faith	76
17. Summary and Conclusion	78



## INTRODUCTION

This book is a survey and comparison of the teachings and claims of the Roman Catholic Church for its Tradition with the teaching of Scripture and the facts of history. These teachings cover the two issues of authority and salvation under the topics of Scripture, the Canon, Tradition, Infallible Interpretation, the Papacy, Mary, the Sacraments, Indulgences, Purgatory, Salvation and the Roman Church, Justification, Repentance and Faith.

We are dealing with the issue of truth—both biblical and historical. The Roman Catholic Church makes certain claims which it says can be validated by Scripture and history. It claims that it alone is the one true Church and has faithfully preserved the apostolic teaching of the gospel, which was received from Jesus. Furthermore, it places under an eternal anathema<sup>1</sup>—that is, it condemns to hell, unless there is repentance—all who disagree with its teachings. But are those claims true? Can they in fact be validated by Scripture and history?

The following survey of the biblical and historical facts reveal with certainty that the answer must be No.

---

<sup>1</sup>The *Catholic Encyclopedia* gives the following background and definition for the term anathema: 'To understand the word anathema ... we should first go back to the real meaning of *herem* of which it is the equivalent. *Herem* comes from the word *haram*, to cut off, to separate, to curse, and indicates that which is cursed and condemned to be cut off and exterminated....In the New Testament anathema no longer entails death, but the loss of goods or exclusion from the society of the faithful....But he who is separated from God is united to the devil, which explains why St. Paul, instead of anathematizing, sometimes delivers a person over to Satan (1 Tim. 1:20; 1 Cor. 5:5)....Anathema remains a major excommunication which is to be promulgated with great solemnity....In passing this sentence the pontiff takes his seat in front of the altar or in some other suitable place, and pronounces the formula of anathema which ends with these words: "Wherefore in the name of God the All-powerful, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, of the Blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles, and of all the Saints, in virtue of the power which has been given to us of binding and loosing in Heaven and on earth, we deprive N-himself and all his accomplices and all his abettors of the Communion of the Body and Blood of Our Lord, we separate him from the society of all Christians, we exclude him from the bosom of our Holy Mother the Church in Heaven and on earth, we declare him excommunicated and anathematized and we judge him condemned to eternal fire with Satan and his angels and all the reprobate, so long as he will not burst the fetters of the demon, do penance and satisfy the Church; we deliver him to Satan to mortify his body, that his soul may be saved on the day of judgment' (*The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Universal Knowledge Foundation), Volume 1, pp. 455-456).

## The Authority of Scripture

The term commonly used to describe the Protestant position on the authority of Scripture is the Latin phrase *sola Scriptura* which means Scripture alone. *Sola Scriptura* is the teaching that there is only one special revelation from God, the written Scriptures (the Bible), and that the Scriptures are materially sufficient and are, by their very nature as being inspired by God, the ultimate and sufficient authority for the Church in all matters related to faith and morals. The teaching of *sola Scriptura*, however, is rejected by the Roman Catholic Church as being unscriptural. But such an assertion is false. It is the express teaching of Scripture and in particular of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Scriptures claim divine inspiration (2 Tim. 3:15-17), a claim never made for Tradition. Consequently, they are sufficient as God's revelation to man. The Roman Catholic Church takes issue with the word *sufficient* stating that this word is not found in the word of God to describe Scripture. Such an objection however is unfounded. The word Trinity is not found in Scripture and yet the concept and doctrine of the Trinity is taught throughout the Scriptures. The same is true with the teaching of *sola Scriptura* and the sufficiency of Scripture. It is as clear as the teaching of the Trinity.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Jesus Himself confirms the truth of *sola Scriptura*. He used Scripture alone authoritatively for His life and ministry. He always appealed to the written word

---

<sup>2</sup>Scripture is described as being: pure, perfect, eternal, sure, truth, forever settled in heaven, it sanctifies, causes spiritual growth, is God-breathed, authoritative, it gives wisdom unto salvation, makes wise the simple, is living and active, is a guide, a fire, a hammer, a seed, the sword of the Spirit, it gives knowledge of God, is a lamp to our feet, a light to our path, produces reverence for God, heals, makes free, illuminates, produces faith, regenerates, converts the soul, brings conviction of sin, restrains from sin, is spiritual food, is infallible, inerrant, irrevocable, searches the heart and mind, produces life, defeats Satan, proves truth, refutes error, is holy, equips for every good work, is the final judge of all tradition, is the word of God (Heb. 4:12, Ps. 119: 9-11,38,105,130,133,160; Ps. 19:7-11; Ps. 111:7-8; Is. 40:8; Eph. 5:26; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; Jer. 5:14; Jer. 23:29; Mt. 13:18-23; Eph. 6:17; Ps. 107:20; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet. 1:23; 1 Pet. 2:2; Acts 20:32; Jn. 8:32, 10:35, 17:17; Mt. 15:2-9). Where are we told these things about Tradition?

of God, never to oral tradition, to settle any dispute. He never referred to the 'oral' word of God, but rather to the written Scriptures. For Jesus, Scripture was the final judge of all Tradition. In actuality, he never has one positive thing to say about Tradition.<sup>3</sup> If the Son of God himself teaches that all Tradition is to be judged by its conformity to Scripture, then Tradition is subordinate to Scripture. It is Scripture that has ultimate authority. No one denies the fact that Jesus and the Apostles taught orally. But the Protestant teaching is that the oral revelation that God wanted preserved is contained in the Scriptures. It is the Scriptures alone which are the revelation of God to us. This means there is no portion of that revelation which has been preserved in the form of oral tradition independent of Scripture.

The Council of Trent in the sixteenth century, on the other hand, declared that the revelation of God was not contained solely in the Scriptures, but partly in the written Scriptures and partly in oral tradition, and therefore the Scriptures are not materially sufficient.<sup>4</sup> This was the universal view of Roman Catholic theologians for centuries after the Council of Trent and remains the predominant view today.<sup>5</sup>

This view, however, is contradictory to and a repudiation of the belief and practice of the Church of the patristic age. The Roman Catholic

---

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Mt. 15:2-9; Mt. 5:17-19; Mt. 22:29-32; Mt. 4:4.

<sup>4</sup>Trent states: 'This [Gospel], of old promised through the Prophets in the Holy Scriptures, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, promulgated first with His own mouth, and then commanded it to be preached by His Apostles to every creature as the source at once of all saving truth and rules of conduct. It also clearly perceives that these truths and rules are contained in the written books and in the unwritten traditions, which, received by the Apostles from the mouth of Christ Himself, or from thye Apostles themselves, the Holy Ghost dictating, have come down to us, transmitted as it were from hand to hand. Following then the example of the orthodox Fathers, it receives and venerates with a feeling of piety and reverence all the books both of the Old and New Testaments, since one God is the author of both; also the traditions, whether they relate to faith or morals, as having been dictated either orally by Christ or by the Holy Ghost, and preserved in the Catholic Church in unbroken succession' (*The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Rev. H.J. Schroeder, O.P., Translator (Rockford: Tan, 1978), Fourth Session, Decree Concerning te Canonical Scriptures, p. 17).

<sup>5</sup>James Cardinal Gibbons, writing in the 19th century, states: 'The Scriptures alone do not contain all the truths which a Christian is bound to believe...The Scriptures alone cannot be a sufficient guide and rule of faith because...they do not contain all the truths necessary for salvation' (*The of Our Fathers* (Rockford: Tan, 1980), pp. 72-73).

Roman Catholic theologian John Hardon says: 'We find the truths revealed by God in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. Both Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition are the inspired word of God, and both are forms of divine revelation. Sacred Scripture is divinely

Church claims that the teaching of *sola Scriptura* is unhistorical, that it contradicts the universal teaching of the early Church. But the facts do not support this claim. *Sola Scriptura* was the universal teaching of the Church Fathers<sup>6</sup> and for the church as a whole up through the latter part of the middle ages in that it believed that all doctrine must be proven from Scripture and if such proof could not be produced the doctrine was to be rejected. The statements of Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory of Nyssa and Basil the Great (cited below) are representative of the Church throughout the entire patristic age. The fathers taught that all teachings must be validated by the written Scriptures. Furthermore, they taught that the extent of the authority of any teacher, be he bishop or layman, was limited to Scripture. They do affirm the authority of the Church, but an authority grounded in fidelity to Scripture, not principally to succession. Therefore, according to the Church Fathers, the Church is subject to the final authority of Scripture and is to be disregarded if it moves outside of that authority in its teaching.

---

inspired writing, whereas Sacred Tradition is the unwritten word of divinely inspired persons...Sacred Tradition is the unwritten word of God that the prophets and apostles received through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and, under His guidance, the Church has handed on to the Christian world...Sacred Tradition, which is divine revelation in oral form, has been handed on by the Church's doctrine, life and worship...The Bible and Sacred Tradition are of equal authority because they are equally the word of God...Sacred Tradition can never be in conflict with Sacred Scripture because the same Holy Spirit, working in the Church, is the source of both sources of revelation. Each source either adds to the other or explains the other, but they are never in contradiction' (*The Question and Answer Catholic Catechism* (Garden City: Image, 1981), Questions 59, 60, 84, 87, 89, 91).

<sup>6</sup>Cyril of Jerusalem (315-386 A.D.). Cyril was bishop of Jerusalem. He is the author of what is known as the *Catechetical Lectures*. This work is an extensive series of lectures given to catechumens expounding the principle doctrines of the faith. It is a complete explanation of the faith of the Church of his day. And his teaching is thoroughly grounded in Scripture. It is significant that Cyril of Jerusalem, who is communicating the entirety of the faith to these catechumens, did not make a single appeal in the entirety of the Lectures to an oral Apostolic Tradition that is independent of Scripture to support his teachings. What he writes here is reflective of the overall view of the fathers: 'Concerning the divine and sacred Mysteries of the Faith, we ought not to deliver even the most casual remark without the Holy Scriptures; nor be drawn aside by mere probabilities and the artifices of argument. Do not then believe me because I tell thee of these things, unless thou receive from the Holy Scriptures the proof of what is set forth: for this salvation, which is our faith, is not by ingenious reasonings, but by proof from the Holy Scriptures' (*A Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church* (Oxford: Parker, 1845), *The Catechetical Lectures* IV.17).

The treatise, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, by Gregory of Nyssa says: 'We are not entitled to such license, I mean that of affirming what we please; we make the Holy Scriptures the rule and the measure of every tenet (dogma); we necessarily fix our eyes upon that, and approve that alone which may be made to harmonize with the intention of those writings.' (Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Peabody: Hendrikson, 1995), Second Series: Volume V, Philosophical Works, *On the Soul And the Resurrection*, p. 439).

Interestingly, the term *sola Scriptura* did not originate with the Reformers but was a term commonly employed by theologians for centuries preceding the Reformation.<sup>7</sup> The Protestant teaching of *sola Scriptura* is not a novel doctrine but the reaffirmation of the faith of the early Church. It is both biblical and historical.

---

**Basil the Great**, the bishop of Caesarea from 370 to 379 A.D., testifies to his belief in the all-sufficient nature of the Scriptures in these words taken from a letter he wrote to a widow: 'Enjoying as you do the consolation of the Holy Scriptures, you stand in need neither of my assistance nor of that of anybody else to help you comprehend your duty. You have the all-sufficient counsel and guidance of the Holy Spirit to lead you to what is right' (Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Peabody: Hendrikson, 1995), Second Series: Volume VIII, Basil: Letters and Select Works, Letter CCLXXXIII, p. 312).

<sup>7</sup>For example, Thomas Aquinas, writing in the 13th century, makes the following comment: 'The canonical scriptures alone are the rule (measure) of faith (Sola canonica scriptura est regula fidei)' (*Commentary on John XXI. 24-25*, paragraph 2656).

## Tradition

The Roman Church claims that oral Tradition is a second channel of divine revelation, inspired by God, and is equally as authoritative as Scripture. It also claims that this was the view held by the Fathers of the early church. It is helpful to repeat the statements of Roman Catholic theologian, John Hardon S.J., who affirms this view as being the official position of the Church:

We find the truths revealed by God in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition....Both Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition are the inspired word of God, and both are forms of divine revelation. Sacred Scripture is divinely inspired writing, whereas Sacred Tradition is the unwritten word of inspired persons....The Bible and Sacred Tradition are of equal authority because they are equally the word of God; both derive from the inspired vision of the ancient prophets, and especially from the infinite wisdom of God incarnate who gave to the apostles what he came down on earth to teach through them, to all of mankind.<sup>8</sup>

This is false. Such a view contradicts Scripture and history. Scripture never teaches that tradition is inspired. Furthermore, it gives numerous warnings against tradition.<sup>9</sup> When the fathers speak of a Tradition handed down from the Apostles, independent of Scripture, they are referring to ecclesiastical customs and practices, *never* to doctrine. The truth is, the Fathers rejected the teaching of an apostolic oral Tradition

---

<sup>8</sup>John Hardon, *The Question and Answer Catholic Catechism* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), Questions 59, 60, 89.

<sup>9</sup>See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ...Thus you have invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition...This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men (Col. 2:8; Matt. 15:6, 8-9; Cf. Mk. 7:3-13; 1 Pet. 1:18; Gal. 1:14; Col 2:22).

independent of Scripture as a gnostic heresy. It was the Gnostics who first claimed that an oral tradition, independent of Scripture, had been passed down from the Apostles. As we have seen, as far as the early Fathers were concerned, the apostolic Tradition was embodied and preserved in Scripture alone. The second century Fathers, Irenaeus and Tertullian, give us the actual doctrinal content of what they called the rule of faith or Apostolic Tradition, and every doctrine is derived from Scripture.<sup>10</sup> There is no appeal in their writings to a Tradition that is oral in nature as a validation of what they considered the Tradition or teaching handed down from the Apostles. Apostolic Tradition is simply the teaching of Scripture and can be validated by Scripture. The teaching of the Fathers is that what the Apostles initially proclaimed orally, they later committed to writing in the Scriptures. As Irenaeus put it:

We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith<sup>11</sup>

How is one to know what the Apostles taught orally? It has been handed down to us in the Scriptures, and according to Irenaeus, these Scrip-

---

<sup>10</sup>For example, Tertullian states: ‘Now, with regard to this rule of faith—that we may from this point acknowledge what it is which we defend—it is, you must know, that which prescribes the belief that there is one only God, and that He is none other than the Creator of the world, who produced all things out of nothing through His own Word, first of all sent forth; that this Word is called His Son, and, under the name of God, was seen ‘in diverse manners’ by the patriarchs, heard at all times in the prophets, at last brought down by the Spirit and Power of the Father into the Virgin Mary, was made flesh in her womb, and, being born of her, went forth as Jesus Christ; thenceforth He preached the new law and the new promise of the kingdom of heaven, worked miracles; having been crucified, He rose again the third day; (then) having ascended into the heavens, He sat at the right hand of the Father; sent instead of Himself the Power of the Holy Ghost to lead such as believe; will come with glory to take the saints to the enjoyment of everlasting life and of the heavenly promises, and to condemn the wicked to everlasting fire, after the resurrection of both these classes shall have happened, together with the restoration of their flesh. This rule, as it will be proved, was taught by Christ, and raises amongst ourselves no other questions than those which heresies introduce, and which make men heretics’ (Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), Volume III, Tertullian, *On Prescription Against Heretics* 13.

<sup>11</sup>Alexander Roberts & W.H. Rambaugh, Translators, *The Writings of Irenaeus* (Edinburgh: T.& T. Clark, 1874), *Against Heresies* III.1.1.

tures are to be the ground and pillar of our faith. The historical situation which prompted Irenaeus' words is important. He was writing against Gnostics who claimed to have access to an oral tradition handed down from the Apostles which was independent of the written Scriptures. Irenaeus, and Tertullian as well, explicitly repudiate this concept. They taught that the bishops of the Church were in the direct line of succession from the Apostles and were faithful to the Apostolic teaching which they proclaimed orally, but that their teaching could be validated Scripturally. Ellen Flessman-Van Leer affirms this: 'For Irenaeus, the church doctrine is never purely traditional; on the contrary, the thought that there could be some truth transmitted exclusively *viva voce* (orally), is a Gnostic line of thought.'<sup>12</sup>

The Church up to as late as the 14th century never viewed Tradition as a channel of revelation. As we have seen from the comments of Thomas Aquinas in footnote #7, the medieval Church of the 13th century believed the rule of faith to be derived from Scripture alone. That the Church of the patristic age held to the principle of *sola Scriptura*—that is, that the bible was the ultimate authority, materially sufficient and the final arbiter in all matters of doctrinal truth—is confirmed by the following Church historians:

Ellen Flessman-Van Leer:

For Tertullian Scripture is the only means for refuting or validating a doctrine as regards its content...If Irenaeus wants to prove the truth of a doctrine materially, he turns to scripture, because therein the teaching of the apostles is objectively accessible. Proof from tradition and scripture serve one and the same end: to identify the teaching of the church as the original apostolic teaching. The first establishes that the teaching of the church is this apostolic teaching, and the second, what this apostolic teaching is.<sup>13</sup>

J.N.D. Kelly:

The clearest token of the prestige enjoyed by (Scripture) is the fact that almost the entire theological effort of the Fathers, whether their aims were

---

<sup>12</sup>Ellen Flessman-van Leer, *Tradition and Scripture in the Early Church* (Assan: Van Gorcum, 1953, p. 133).

<sup>13</sup>Ellen Flessman-van Leer, *Tradition and Scripture in the Early Church* (Assan: Van Gorcum, 1953, pp. 184, 144).

polemical or constructive, was expended upon what amounted to the exposition of the Bible. Further, it was everywhere taken for granted that, for any doctrine to win acceptance, it had first to establish its Scriptural basis.<sup>14</sup>

Heiko Oberman:

Scripture and Tradition were for the early Church in no sense mutually exclusive: kerygma (the message of the gospel), Scripture and Tradition coincided entirely. The Church preached the kerygma which is found *in toto* in written form in the canonical books. The Tradition was not understood as an addition to the kerygma contained in Scripture but as handing down that same kerygma in living form: in other words everything was to be found in Scripture and at the same time everything was in living Tradition.<sup>15</sup>

The Scriptures do refer to the oral teaching of Paul to the believers of Thessalonica which they were to obey (2 Thes. 2:15). But the word tradition here does not mean the same thing as the Tradition of Roman Catholicism, either in concept or in content. The word simply means teaching. Paul has given them oral instructions which they are to obey and it does not necessarily have to do with the major doctrines of the faith. This is clear from the same epistle where Paul exhorts these believers to stand firm in the *tradition* which they had received from him: 'to keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life' (2 Thes. 3:6). Paul's use of the word tradition here does not have the same meaning as that of the Roman Church. The doctrinal content it has given to its Tradition, in fact contradicts the teachings given by Paul and recorded in the Scriptures, and which were never taught in the early Church.<sup>16</sup> The Roman concept of Tradition as a separate source of revelation independent of Scripture contradicts as well the teaching of the magisterium of the early centuries.

It is true that the early Church held to the concept of Tradition in referring to ecclesiastical customs and practices. They often believed

<sup>14</sup>J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), pp. 42, 46).

<sup>15</sup>Heiko Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1963), p. 366).

<sup>16</sup>For example, the Roman Church declares that the Ascension and Immaculate Conception of Mary and Papal Infallibility and its interpretation of Mt. 16:18-19 are truths necessary to be believed for salvation, but these were never taught in the early Church.

that such practices were handed down from the Apostles even though they could not necessarily be validated from the Scriptures. Such was the teaching, for example, of Basil the Great and John Chrysostom in the mid to late fourth century.<sup>17</sup> But these practices did not involve the doctrines of the faith and were often contradictory among different segments of the Church. An example of this is found early in the second century in the controversy over when to celebrate Easter. Certain Eastern churches celebrated it on a certain date while the West celebrated it on another but both claimed their practice was handed down to them directly from the Apostles. It eventually led to conflict with the Bishop of Rome who demanded that the Eastern fathers submit to the Western practice. This they refused to do firmly believing they were adhering to Apostolic Tradition. So who was correct? There is no way to tell which, if either, was truly of Apostolic origin. It is interesting,

---

<sup>17</sup>Basil states: 'Of the beliefs and practices whether generally accepted or publically enjoined which are preserved in the Church some we possess derived from written teaching; others we have received delivered to us 'in a mystery' by the tradition of the apostles; and both of these in relation to true religion have the same force. And these no one will gainsay—no one, at all events, who is even moderately versed in the institutions of the Church. For were we to attempt to reject such customs as have no written authority, on the ground that the importance they possess is small, we should unintentionally injure the Gospel in its very vitals; or, rather, should make our public definition a mere phrase and nothing more. For instance, to take the first and most general example, who is there who has taught us in writing to sign with the sign of the cross those who have trusted in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ? What writing has taught us to turn to the East at the prayer? Which of the saints has left us in writing the words of the invocation at the displaying of the bread of the Eucharist and the cup of blessing? For we are not, as is well known, content with what the apostle or the Gospel has recorded, but both in preface and conclusion we add other words as being of great importance to the validity of the ministry, and these we derive from unwritten teaching. Moreover we bless the water of baptism and the oil of chrism, and besides this the catechumen who is being baptized. On what written authority do we do this? Is not our authority silent and mystical tradition? Nay, by what written word is the anointing of oil itself taught? And whence comes the custom of baptizing thrice? And as to the other customs of baptism from what Scriptures do we derive the renunciation of Satan and his angels? Does not this come from that unpublished and secret teaching which our fathers guarded in a silence out of reach of curious and meddling and inquisitive investigation?...The Apostles and Fathers who laid down laws for the Church from the beginning thus guarded the awful dignity of the mysteries in secrecy and silence, for what is bruited abroad at random among the common folk is no mystery. This is the reason for our tradition of unwritten precepts and practices' (Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995), Second Series, Volume 8, *On the Spirit*, Chapter XXVII.66, pp. 40-42).

John Chrysostom, in commenting on 2 Thes. 2:15, makes these comments: 'Hence it is manifest, that they did not deliver all things by Epistle, but many things also unwritten, and in like manner both the one and the other are worthy of credit. Therefore let us think the tradition of the Church also worthy of credit. Is it a tradition, seek no further' (Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995, *Chrysostom: Homilies on Thessalonians*, Homily IV, 2 Thes. ii.15, p. 390).

however, to note that one of the proponents for the Eastern view was Polycarp, who was a disciple of the apostle John. And there are other examples of this in Church history. Just because a particular Church father claims a particular practice is of Apostolic origin does not make it so. All it means is that he believes it was. There is no way to verify a particular practice as a Tradition from the Apostles. There are numerous practices the early Church engaged in which they believed were of Apostolic origin listed for us by Basil the Great<sup>18</sup> none of which are practiced in the Roman Church today. So, such appeals to oral Apostolic Tradition are meaningless. They are merely claims with no possible means of verification.

Based on Paul's statement in 2 Thessalonians 2:15, the Roman Catholic Church, since the Council of Trent, claims that it possesses an oral Apostolic Tradition which is independent of Scripture and is binding upon men. Rome asserts that, based on Paul's teaching in this passage, the teaching of *sola Scriptura* is false, since he handed on teachings to the Thessalonians in both oral and written form. What is interesting in this appeal is that Roman apologists never document the specific doctrines to which Paul is referring. Not even the Council of Trent, which asserted the existence of this Tradition, gives any documentation of its doctrinal content. In all the writings of Roman apologists from the Reformation to the present day, no one has been able to list the doctrines that make up this supposed Apostolic oral Tradition. From Francis De Sales to the writings of Karl Keating and Robert Sungenis there is this conspicuous absence. Francis De Sales (1567-1622) was Bishop of Geneva and a vigorous apologist for Roman Catholicism against the Reformation. The following is his defense of Tradition:

We confess that the Holy Scripture is a most excellent and profitable doctrine. It is written in order that we may believe; everything contrary that is contrary to it is falsehood and impiety: but to establish these truths it is not necessary to reject this which is also a truth, that Traditions are most profitable, given in order that we may believe; everything that is contrary to them is impiety and falsehood...The Scripture is useful to teach; learn then from the Scripture itself that we must receive with honour and faith holy Traditions. If we are to add nothing to what our Lord has commanded—where has he commanded that we should condemn Apostolic Traditions? Where has our Lord ever taught it?...On the contrary, it is forbidden to take away

---

<sup>18</sup> See footnote #17

from the Scripture; why then would you take away the Traditions which are so expressly authorised therein? Is it not the Holy Scripture of S. Paul which says: 'Therefore, brethren, hold fast the Traditions which you have received, whether by word or by our epistle?' (2 Thess. ii. 15). Hence it is evident that the Apostles did not deliver everything by Epistle, but many things also without letters. They are, however, worthy of the same faith, these as much as those,' are the words of S. Chrysostom in his commentary on this place...Does not the same Apostle praise the Corinthians for the observances of Tradition (1 Cor. 11:2)?...He speaks not of any gospel, for he would not call it my ordinances. What was it then but an unwritten Apostolic doctrine?—this we call Tradition. And when he says to them (Corinthians) at the end: 'The rest I will set in order when I come', he lets us see that he had taught them many very important things, and yet we have no writing about them elsewhere. Will what he said, then, be lost to the Church? certainly not; but it has come down by Tradition. Otherwise the Apostle would not have delivered it to posterity, and would have written it.<sup>19</sup>

Here De Sales makes the case for a revelation from the Apostles which he says is completely oral in nature and not part of Scripture which he claims is part of Roman Catholic Tradition. But he never tells us what this Tradition is. He merely asserts that it exists and that the Roman Church should be followed because it possesses the full Apostolic revelation whereas those who adhere to the teaching of the Reformation only acknowledge a portion of revelation. The conclusion therefore is that in rejecting the Roman Catholic Tradition they have rejected the ultimate authority established by God by rejecting a portion of His revelation—the Church. The arguments have not changed since De Sales wrote his work in the sixteenth century. Robert Sungenis is the editor of a work recently released on a defense of the Roman Catholic teaching of Tradition entitled *Not By Scripture Alone*. It is touted as a definitive refutation of the Protestant teaching of *sola Scriptura*. But not once in the entirety of the book does any author define the doctrinal content of this Apostolic Tradition. All we are told is that it exists, that the Roman Catholic Church possesses it, and that we are bound therefore to submit to this Church which alone possesses the fulness of God's revelation from the Apostles. But they cannot tell us what it is. There is a reason for this. It does not exist. And if they are of such importance why did Cyril of Jerusalem not mention them in his

---

<sup>19</sup>*The Catholic Controversy* (Rockford: Tan, 1989), pp. 146-148

*Catechetical Lectures*, where he states that he is giving the *complete* faith to the catechumens? I challenge anyone to list the doctrines Paul is referring to in 2 Thessalonians 2:15 which he says he committed orally to the Thessalonians unless one wants to make a case for the fact that the oral instruction was actually the gospel message that was later codified in writing.

The very concept of Roman Catholic Tradition—as being a separate channel of divine revelation independent of Scripture which makes Scripture materially insufficient—contradicts both the teaching of Scripture and the teaching of the historic Church for centuries. It is the Roman Catholic Church that has departed from the teaching and practice of the early Church and of the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. The early Church believed in the principle of *sola Scriptura*. But the Roman Catholic Church has repudiated this in order to elevate its Tradition to a position of authority equal to the Scriptures, claiming that it is a separate channel of revelation. In so doing, it has embraced a major tenet of the heresy of Gnosticism condemned by the early Church.

In addition to the *concept* there is also the issue of the *content* of Tradition. These teachings not only contradict Scripture but are contrary to the teachings of the early Church.

#### *Summary of Authority of Scripture Versus Tradition*

- 1) Rome and Protestants both agree that Scripture is inspired.
- 2) Rome and Protestants both agree that with the close of the Apostolic age there is no further revelation from God.
- 3) Protestants assert that Scripture is the only special revelation from God we possess today and that Scripture is materially sufficient. Rome says no, that not all of the revelation imparted to the Apostles was committed to Scripture, but was also partially preserved in oral form and handed down to the Church by way of Tradition. Scripture therefore is not materially sufficient and is not formally sufficient either because it needs an infallible interpreter that also being a part of Tradition. Therefore, Tradition is a necessary part of revelation.
- 4) The Scriptures teach that Scripture is inspired. Nowhere does it teach that Tradition is.
- 5) The Scriptures description of itself indicates that it is sufficient for issues related to faith and morals. It makes no such claim for Tradition.

- 6) Since Scripture *alone* is inspired it is inherently authoritative.
- 7) Scripture gives repeated warnings against Tradition.
- 8) Jesus' example is highly instructive. He appealed to the written word of God alone as the final arbiter of truth. He never appealed to Tradition in any form. The written word of God was sufficient for Jesus. There was further revelation to be given after He ascended to heaven through the Apostles but that is not the issue here. The Scriptures given up to that point in time were sufficient for Jesus in matters related to faith and morals.
- 9) Jesus states that all Tradition is to be judged by Scripture. Since Scripture alone is inspired and is the final judge of Tradition then Scripture is the ultimate authority.
- 10) Rome's claim for oral Apostolic Tradition is invalid because these oral teachings have never been defined.
- 11) That part of Roman Catholicism's Tradition which is drawn from Scripture has proven itself contradictory to Scripture. Therefore it is not inspired and is invalid. It is not Apostolic. It is the teaching of men.
- 12) The oral proclamation of an Apostle is inspired. For example, when Paul proclaimed the gospel to the Thessalonians and he stated that they received his word for what it was: the word of God. What he taught to them he taught orally. But he was an Apostle. How do we know today exactly what he taught them of the gospel. It is found in the written Scriptures. We do not possess any oral teaching of an Apostle today. Therefore Scripture alone records for us the Apostolic teaching and the final revelation of God.
- 13) The claim to possess an oral Apostolic Tradition independent of Scripture is a Gnostic heresy repudiated by the early church Fathers.

## The Canon

The Roman Catholic Church claims that it established the canon of Scripture. That is false. The New Testament books were already recognised in the Church prior to the Roman Councils of Hippo and Carthage in North Africa in the fourth century. These were provincial councils which had no authority for the Church universally. And their decrees on the apocrypha were never accepted in the Church as a whole. The Church adopted the views of Athanasius and Jerome,<sup>20</sup> that these writings were useful for reading in the churches but were not to be counted as part of the canon of Scripture or to be used for the establishing of doctrine.

---

<sup>20</sup>Jerome states that the apocrypha was not included in the Hebrew canon and that the Church did not view these writings as being canonical or authoritative for defining doctrine: 'As, then, the Church reads Judith, Tobit and the books of Maccabees, but does not admit them among the canonical Scriptures, so let it also read these two volumes for the edification of the people, not to give authority to doctrines of the Church...I say this to show how hard it is to master the book of Daniel, which in Hebrew contains neither the history of Susanna, nor the hymn of the three youths, nor the fables of Bel and the Dragon' (Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), Second Series, Volume VI, St. Jerome, *Prefaces to Jerome's Works, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs, Daniel*, pp. 492-493).

Athanasius says: 'Forasmuch as some have taken in hand,' to reduce into order for themselves the books termed apocryphal, and to mix them up with the divinely inspired Scripture, concerning which we have been fully persuaded, as they who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word, delivered to the fathers; it seemed good to me also, having been urged thereto by true brethren, and having learned from the beginning, to set before you the books included in the Canon, and handed down, and accredited as Divine; to the end that any one who has fallen into error may condemn those who have led him astray; and that he who has continued steadfast in purity may again rejoice, having these things brought to his remembrance.

There are, then, of the Old Testament, twenty-two books in number; for, as I have heard, it is handed down that this is the number of the letters among the Hebrews; in their respective order and names being as follows. The first is Genesis, then Exodus, next Leviticus, after that Numbers, and then Deuteronomy. Following these there is Joshua, the son of Nun, then Judges, then Ruth. And again, after these four books of Kings, the first and second being reckoned one book, and so like wise the third and fourth as one book. And again, the first and second of the Chronicles are reckoned as one book. Again Ezra, the first and second are similarly one book. After these there is the book of Psalms, then the Proverbs, next Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. Job follows, then the Prophets, the twelve being

The reason for Jerome's rejection of the Apocrypha is that he learned from the Jews that these books were not part of the Hebrew canon and never had been. The Hebrew canon used by the Jews of Palestine was comprised of the same thirty-nine books accepted by the Protestant Church. Jesus refers to the Old Testament Scriptures as 'the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms,' which was a convenient summation of the traditional books. It did not include the Apocrypha. Jesus and the New Testament authors never quote from the Apocrypha, though they quote extensively from the vast majority of the Old Testament canonical books. The first century Jewish historian, Josephus, tells us that the Hebrew canon consisted of twenty-two books, which corresponds to the thirty-nine books of the Protestant canon. The difference in number is because some of the books which are separated in the Protestant bible are grouped together in the Hebrew canon. For example, the twelve minor prophets were considered to be one book. In addition to Jerome and Athanasius, numerous church Fathers express the position of Josephus, that the Old Testament canon consisted of twenty-two books, omitting the books of the Apocrypha. These include Melito of Sardis in the second century, Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, Epiphanius, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, Hilary of Poitiers, Rufinus, Amphilocius, Anastasius of Antioch, Leontius of Byzantium and John of Damascus in the eighth century. This demonstrates that the general consensus of the early Church was not to include the Apocrypha in the Canon of the Old Testament, though there were some Fathers who did believe they were authoritative. From the time of Jerome, the Church consistently held to the view that the Apocrypha, while useful for the purposes of edification, were not to be

---

reckoned as one book. Then Isaiah, one book, then Jeremiah with Baruch, Lamentations, and the epistle, one book; afterwards, Ezekiel and Daniel, each one book. Thus far constitutes the Old Testament. (Athanasius then gives a list of the 27 New Testament books)

These are the fountains of salvation, that they who thirst may be satisfied with the living words they contain. In these alone is proclaimed the doctrine of godliness. Let no man add to these, neither let him take ought from these...But for greater exactness I add this also, writing of necessity; that there are other books besides these not included in the Canon, but appointed by the Fathers to be read by those who newly join us, and who wish for instruction in the word of godliness. The Wisdom of Solomon, and the Wisdom of Sirach, and Esther, and Judith, and Tobit, and that which is called the Teaching of the Apostles and the Shepherd. But the former, my brethren, are included in the Canon, the latter being merely read' (Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), Volume IV, Athanasius, Letter 39.2-7).

received as canonical.<sup>21</sup> This was the predominant view of the major theologians of the Middle Ages. The Trullan Council of 692 A.D., which is considered historically to be part of the Sixth Ecumenical Council in 680 A.D., gave dogmatic sanction to the canons of Athanasius, Amphiloicius and Basil the Great pertaining to the Canon, all of whom numbered the Old Testament canonical books at twenty-two, excluding much of the Apocrypha. But the statements of the Ordinary Gloss on the Bible, beginning in the twelfth century, is even more telling. The Ordinary Gloss, known as the *Glossa Ordinaria*, became the standard authoritative biblical commentary for the Western Church as a whole. The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* describes its importance:

A designation given during the Middle Ages to certain compilations of “glosses” on the text of a given MS. The earliest glossa ordinaria is that made of the Bible, probably made in the 12th century...Although glosses originally consisted of a few words only, they grew in length as glossators enlarged them with their own comments and quotations from the Fathers. Thus the tiny gloss evolved into a running commentary of an entire book. The best-known commentary of this type is the vast *Glossa ordinaria* of the 12th and 13th centuries...So great was the influence of the *Glossa ordinaria* on Biblical and philosophical studies in the Middle Ages that it was called “the tongue of Scripture” and “the bible of scholasticism”.<sup>22</sup>

The *Glossa ordinaria* states in the Preface that the Church permits the reading of the Apocryphal books only for devotion and instruction in manners, but that they have no authority for concluding controversies in matters of faith. It goes on to state that there are 22 books of the OT. In listing those 22 books it uses the testimonies of Origen, Jerome and Rufinus as support and when commenting on the Apocryphal books it prefixes an introduction to them all saying: ‘Here begins the book of

<sup>21</sup>These facts are affirmed by no less an authority than Pope Gregory the Great (590-604 A.D.) in these comments on the book of 1 Maccabees: ‘With reference to which particular we are not acting irregularly, if from the books, though not Canonical, yet brought out for the edification of the Church, we bring forward testimony. Thus Eleazar in the battle smote and brought down an elephant, but fell under the very beast that he killed’ (1 Macc. 6.46). (*Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church* (Oxford: Parker, 1845), Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job*, Volume II, Parts III and IV, Book XIX.34, p. 424).

<sup>22</sup>*The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Glossa Ordinaria; Glosses, Biblical, pp. 515-516.

Tobit which is not in the canon; here begins the book of Judith which is not in the canon' and so forth for Ecclesiasticus, Wisdom, and Maccabees etc.<sup>23</sup> This historical evidence clearly demonstrates that the Councils of Hippo and Carthage did not establish the canon for the Church, for their decrees on the Old Testament were not accepted. It was the view of Jerome that generally prevailed all the way up to the sixteenth century. While it is true that some theologians, such as Thomas Aquinas, held to a canonical status for the Apocryphal books, their views were very much in the minority. Cardinal Cajetan, the great opponent of Luther, in his commentary on the Old Testament which was dedicated to Pope Clement VII in 1532, reflects the attitude of the Church historically and of the Roman Catholic Church toward the Apocrypha just before the Council of Trent when he states that the books of the Apocrypha are not received as canonical.<sup>24</sup> In addition, Cardinal Ximenes, the Archbishop of Toledo, was responsible for producing an edition of the Bible called the *Biblia Complutensia* in the early sixteenth century and which was officially sanctioned by Pope Leo X. In producing this work he collaborated with the leading theologians of his day. In the Preface of this work there is an admonition given regarding the Apocrypha. It states that the books of Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, the Maccabees, the additions to Esther and Daniel (which were given there in Greek only), were not canonical Scripture. The Preface goes on to say that the Church did not receive

---

<sup>23</sup>Cited by John Cosin, *A Scholastical History of the Canon of the Holy Scripture* (Parker: Oxford, 1849), pp. 218-219.

<sup>24</sup>Cardinal Cajetan states: 'Here we close our commentaries on the historical books of the Old Testament. For the rest (that is, Judith, Tobit, and the books of Maccabees) are counted by St. Jerome out of the canonical books, and are placed among the Apocrypha, along with Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus, as is plain from the *Prologus Galeatus*. Nor be thou disturbed, like a raw scholar, if thou shouldst find anywhere, either in the sacred councils or the sacred doctors, these books reckoned canonical. For the words as well as of councils as of doctors are to be reduced to the correction of Jerome. Now, according to his judgment, in the epistle to the bishops Chromatius and Heliodorus, these books (and any other like books in the canon of the bible) are not canonical, that is, not in the nature of a rule for confirming matters of faith. Yet, they may be called canonical, that is, in the nature of a rule for the edification of the faithful, as being received and authorised in the canon of the bible for that purpose. By the help of this distinction thou mayest see thy way clear through that which Augustine says, and what is written in the provincial council of Carthage' (*Commentary on all the Authentic Historical Books of the Old Testament*. Taken from his comments on the final chapter of Esther. Cited by William Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture* (Cambridge: University Press, 1849), p. 48).

the Apocryphal books for confirming the authority of any fundamental points of doctrine, though the Church allowed them to be read for purposes of edification. This Bible and its Preface was published by the authority and consent of Pope Leo X, to whom the whole work was dedicated.<sup>25</sup> In addition to the views of Cardinal Cajetan and Cardinal Ximenes, Bruce Metzger provides additional evidence for the view of the Western Church in the sixteenth century in these observations:

The earliest Latin version of the Bible in modern times, made from the original languages by the scholarly Dominican, Sanctes Pagnini, and published at Lyons in 1528, with commendatory letters from from Pope Adrian VI and Pope Clement VII, sharply separates the text of the canonical books from the text of the Apocryphal books. Still another Latin Bible, this one an addition of Jerome's Vulgate published at Nuermberg by Johannes Petreius in 1527, presents the order of the books as in the Vulgate but specifies at the beginning of each Apocryphal book that it is not canonical. Furthermore, in his address to the Christian reader the editor lists the disputed books as 'Libri Apocryphi, sive non Canonici, qui nusquam apud Hebraeos extant.'<sup>26</sup>

The first general council of the Western Church to definitively settle the question of the Apocrypha and the canon was the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century, contrary to the Hebrew canon and the near universal practice of the Church up to that time. While the Council of Florence in the mid-fifteenth century passed a decree on the canon similar to that at Trent, the actual practice of the Church as a whole was to exclude the Apocrypha from the canon until the Council of Trent one hundred years later. The Protestant Reformation, by rejecting the decree of Trent, was simply remaining true to the Hebrew canon and to the historic practice of the Church. The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* affirms the fact that the Protestant Church follows the Hebrew canon and that it was not until the Council of Trent that the Old Testament Canon was for the first time definitively and officially determined for the Western Church, and not at Hippo and Carthage in the late fourth century:

---

<sup>25</sup>Cited by John Cosin, *A Scholastical History of the Canon of the Holy Scripture* (Parker: Oxford, 1849), pp. 251-252.

<sup>26</sup>Bruce Metzger, *An Introduction to the Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford, 1957), p. 180.

For the Old Testament, however, Protestants follow the Jewish canon; they have only the Old Testament books that are in the Hebrew Bible...St. Jerome distinguished between canonical books and ecclesiastical books (the apocrypha). The latter he judged were circulated by the Church as good spiritual reading but were not recognized as authoritative Scripture...The situation remained unclear in the ensuing centuries...For example, John of Damascus, Gregory the Great, Walafrid, Nicholas of Lyra and Tostado continued to doubt the canonicity of the deuteronical books. According to Catholic doctrine, the proximate criterion of the biblical canon is the infallible decision of the Church. This decision was not given until rather late in the history of the Church at the Council of Trent...The Council of Trent definitively settled the matter of the Old Testament Canon. That this had not been done previously is apparent from the uncertainty that persisted up to the time of Trent.<sup>27</sup>

That the Council of Carthage did not definitively settle the issue of the canon for the Church is also seen from the fact that Trent excluded the Septuagint version of I Esdras from the canon while Carthage included it. Carthage followed the Septuagint version of the Old Testament. This Greek translation included the books of I Esdras and II Esdras. I Esdras was the apocryphal additions to the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, while II Esdras consisted of the canonical Hebrew books of Ezra-Nehemiah as one book. Jerome, in his Latin translation, which was later known as the Vulgate, excluded the Septuagint version of I Esdras from the canon because it was not received by the Jews. He separated the Jewish canonical books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which had always been one book, into two separate books calling Ezra, I Esdras and Nehemiah, II Esdras. The book of I Esdras from the Septuagint became III Esdras in the Latin Vulgate. This then became standard in the Western Church and was authoritatively sanctioned by the Council of Trent. But while Trent excluded the Septuagint I Esdras from the canon, Carthage did not. When they list 2 books of Esdras as being canonical they are following the Septuagint version of I and II Esdras. Consequently there is a contradiction between the Councils of Carthage and Trent on the exact nature of the canon.

---

<sup>27</sup>*New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University, 1967), Volume II, p. 29; Volume I, p. 390).

In addition to the historical reasons for rejecting a canonical status for the Apocrypha, there are also heresies, inconsistencies and historical inaccuracies in the writings themselves which conclusively prove they are not inspired and therefore are not Scripture. For example, Bruce Metzger gives the following evaluation of the Book of Judith:

One of the first questions that naturally rises regarding this book is whether it is historical. The consensus, at least among Protestant and Jewish scholars, is that the story is sheer fiction...The book teems with chronological, historical, and geographical improbabilities and downright errors. For example, Holofernes moves an immense army about three hundred miles in three days (2:21). The opening words of the book, when taken with 2:1ff. and 4:2f., involve the most astonishing historical nonsense, for the author places Nebuchadnezzar's reign over the Assyrians (in reality he was king of Babylon) at Nineveh (which fell seven years before his accession!) at a time when the Jews had only recently returned from the captivity (actually at this time they were suffering further deportations)! Nebuchadnezzar did not make war on Media (1:7), nor capture Ecbatana (1:14)...The rebuilding of the Temple (4:13) is dated, by a glaring anachronism, about a century too early. Moreover, the Jewish state is represented as being under the government of a high priest and a kind of Sanhedrin (6:6-14; 15:8), which is compatible only with a post-exilic date several hundred years after the book's presumed historical setting.<sup>28</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church has not only decreed the books of the Apocrypha to be canonical in blatant disregard of the historic practice of the Church, but has made this an issue of dogma by placing under anathema all who reject this teaching.<sup>29</sup>

When one examines the issues of Scripture, Tradition and the Canon, the facts reveal that it is not the Roman Catholic but the Protestant teaching which is consistent with both Scripture and the teaching of the truly historic Catholic Church of the East and West.

---

<sup>28</sup>Bruce Metzger, *An Introduction to the Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford, 1957), pp. 50-51.

<sup>29</sup>If anyone does not accept as sacred and canonical the aforesaid books in their entirety and with all their parts, as they have been accustomed to be read in the Catholic Church and as they are contained in the Old Latin Vulgate Edition, and knowingly and deliberately rejects the aforesaid traditions, let him be anathema' (*The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (Rockford: Tan, 1978), Fourth Session, *Decree Concerning the Canonical Scriptures*, p. 18).

## The Papacy

### *Papal Rule*

Historically, the Roman Catholic Church has taught that to be saved an individual must be submitted to the bishop of Rome.<sup>30</sup> It claims that Christ bestowed a personal primacy on the apostle Peter and established him as visible head of the Church. It further states that this primacy was then passed on to the bishops of Rome as the exclusive successors of Peter.<sup>31</sup> It claims that Matthew 16:18 ('on this rock I will build My Church') is the Scriptural mandate for its teaching on papal primacy and insists that its interpretation can be supported by the unanimous teaching of the Fathers. This is false. Matthew 16 does not, in fact, even imply papal primacy. The passage

---

<sup>30</sup>This teaching was stated by pope Boniface VIII in an *ex cathedra* statement in his bull *Unam Sanctam* (1302 A.D.), and was later reaffirmed by subsequent popes and Councils such as Vatican One. His decree states: 'Furthermore we declare, state, define, and pronounce that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman pontiff.' (Cited by Henry Bettenson, Ed., *Documents of the Christian Church* (London: Oxford University, 1963), p. 116). And Vatican One, after affirming the teaching that the bishops of Rome are the rightful rulers over the Church to whom all Christians must be submitted in matters of faith and morals and discipline states: 'This is the teaching of Catholic truth, from which no one can deviate without loss of faith and salvation' (*Dogmatic Decrees of the Vatican Council*, First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ, Chapter III, On the Power and Nature of the Primacy of the Roman Pontiff. Cited by Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper, 1877), Volume II, p.263).

<sup>31</sup>Vatican I states: 'If any one, therefore, shall say that blessed Peter the Apostle was not appointed the Prince of all the Apostles and the visible Head of the whole Church militant; or that the same directly and immediately received from the same our Lord Jesus Christ a primacy of honor only, and not of true and proper jurisdiction: let him be anathema...If, then, any should deny that it is by institution of Christ the Lord, or by divine right, that blessed Peter should have a perpetual line of successors in the Primacy over the universal Church, or that the Roman Pontiff is the successor of blessed Peter in this primacy: let him be anathema' (*Dogmatic Decrees of the Vatican Council*, Dogmatic Constitution of the Catholic Faith, Chapters I and II. Found in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper, 1877).

says absolutely nothing about successors to Peter,<sup>32</sup> and the unanimous consent of the Fathers actually opposes the Roman Catholic interpretation of Mt 16. The Fathers generally interpret the 'rock' in Matthew 16 to be Christ or Peter's confession of faith in Christ.<sup>33</sup> Some of the Fathers do refer to Peter as the rock but only in the sense that he is the first to confess Christ to be the Son of God and is therefore representative of the entire Church. The Church is therefore built, not on Peter

---

<sup>32</sup>Oscar Cullmann states: 'He who proceeds without prejudice, on the basis of exegesis and only on this basis, cannot seriously conclude that Jesus here had in mind successors of Peter...On exegetical grounds we must say that the passage does not contain a single word concerning successors of Peter...The intent of Jesus leaves us no possibility of understanding Matthew 16:17ff. in the sense of a succession determined by an episcopal see' (*Peter: Disciple, Apostle, Martyr* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), pp. 207, 236).

<sup>33</sup>**Augustine** is typical of the fathers as a whole in this interpretation of Mt. 16:18: 'And I tell you...You are Peter, Rocky, and on this rock I shall build my Church, and the gates of the underworld will not conquer her. To you shall I give the keys of the kingdom. Whatever you bind on earth shall also be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall also be loosed in heaven' (Mt 16:15-19). In Peter, Rocky, we see our attention drawn to the rock. Now the apostle Paul says about the former people, 'They drank from the spiritual rock that was following them; but the rock was Christ' (1 Cor 10:4). So this disciple is called Rocky from the rock, like Christian from Christ...Why have I wanted to make this little introduction? In order to suggest to you that in Peter the Church is to be recognized. Christ, you see, built his Church not on a man but on Peter's confession. What is Peter's confession? 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' There's the rock for you, there's the foundation, there's where the Church has been built, which the gates of the underworld cannot conquer (John Rotelle, Ed., *The Works of Saint Augustine* (New Rochelle: New City Press, 1993), Sermons, Vol. 6, Sermon 229P.1, p. 327).

**John Chrysostom** (344-407 A.D.), one of the greatest theologians and exegetes of the Eastern Church has a similar perspective to Augustine in his interpretation of the rock of Matthew 16:18: 'And I say unto thee, Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; that is, on the faith of his confession' (*A Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church* (Oxford: Parker, 1844), *Homilies of S. John Chrysostom on the Gospel of St. Matthew, Homily 54.3*).

**Cyril of Alexandria** (died 444 A.D.) states: 'Now by the word 'rock', Jesus indicated I think the immovable faith of the disciple' (*Commentary on Isaiah IV.2, M.P.G.*, Vol. 70, Col. 940).

The same views are likewise expressed by such major fathers as Ambrose, Cyprian, Origen, Tertullian, Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrosiaster, Jerome, Eusebius, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, Athanasius, Ephraim Syrus, James of Nisbis, Victor of Antioch, Epiphanius, Aphraates, Theodoret, Cassiodorus, Asterius, Basil of Seleucia, Palladius of Helenopolis, Paulinus of Nola, Isidore of Seville, Bede and many others.

For a detailed historical analysis of the patristic interpretation of the rock of Matthew 16:18 please refer to the author's book *The Matthew 16 Controversy: Peter and the Rock* which can be ordered through Christian Resources, 1505 NW 4th Ave., Battle Ground, WA 98604. This is a 382 page book which contains one of the most extensive documentations of the patristic interpretation of this passage in the English language. The book and other resources can also be ordered through Christian Resources' Web Page at [www.christiantruth.com](http://www.christiantruth.com).

(or subsequently on the bishops of Rome), but on his confession of faith in the person of Christ. His confession points to Christ. The Fathers of the early centuries are not supporters of the Roman Catholic interpretation of Mt. 16:18 as proposed by Vatican One. Interestingly, it is the Protestant and Eastern Orthodox interpretation which is endorsed by the Fathers of the early church. This is affirmed by the Roman Catholic theologian and historian, Yves Congar:

Many of the Eastern Fathers who are rightly acknowledged to be the greatest and most representative and are, moreover, so considered by the universal Church, do not offer us any more evidence of the primacy. Their writings show that they recognized the primacy of the Apostle Peter, that they regarded the See of Rome as the *prima sedes* playing a major part in the Catholic communion—we are recalling, for example, the writings of St. John Chrysostom and of St. Basil who addressed himself to Rome in the midst of the difficulties of the schism of Antioch—but they provide us with no theological statement on the universal primacy of Rome by divine right. The same can be said of St. Gregory Nazianzen, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. John Damascene.<sup>34</sup>

It does sometimes happen that some Fathers understood a passage in a way which does not agree with later Church teaching. One example: the interpretation of Peter's confession in Matthew 16:16–19. Except at Rome, this passage was not applied by the Fathers to the papal primacy; they worked out an exegesis at the level of their own ecclesiological thought, more anthropological and spiritual than juridical.<sup>35</sup>

This truth is likewise affirmed by Johann Joseph Ignaz von Döllinger, the most renowned Roman Catholic historian of the 19th century who taught Church history as a Roman Catholic for 47 years.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup>Yves Congar, *After Nine Hundred Years* (New York: Fordham University, 1959), pp. 61–62.

<sup>35</sup>Yves Congar, *Tradition and Traditions* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), p. 398.

<sup>36</sup>Von Dollinger states: 'Of all the Fathers who interpret these passages in the Gospels (Matt 16:18, John 21:17), not a single one applies them to the Roman bishops as Peter's successors. How many Fathers have busied themselves with these texts, yet not one of them whose commentaries we possess—Origen, Chrysostom, Hilary, Augustine, Cyril, Theodoret, and those whose interpretations are collected in *catenas*—has dropped the faintest hint that the primacy of Rome is the consequence of the commission and promise to Peter! Not one of them has explained the rock or foundation on which Christ would build His Church of the office given to Peter to be transmitted to his successors, but they understood by it either Christ Himself,

The Fathers consistently interpreted Matthew 16 in light of other New Testament teachings which speak of Christ as the foundation and rock. They concluded that 'the rock' could not refer to Peter but to Christ. And this is consistent with the teaching of Scripture, in both the Old and New Testaments. Christ is the only source of salvation. He is the rock and foundation of the Church.<sup>37</sup> The apostle Peter himself explicitly states that the rock and foundation of the church is not himself, but Christ.<sup>38</sup> Augustine and Chrysostom (quoted in Footnote #33) the two greatest theologians of the patristic age (from the East and West), give an interpretation of Matthew 16 that is consistent with the overall Scriptures but directly contradictory to the present day Roman Catholic interpretation. How are we to explain this, if, as Vatican One states, there exists a unanimous consensus of patristic interpretation of this passage? Why do these Fathers go against this consensus? The answer, quite simply, is that there is not and never was a patristic consensus on the interpretation of Matthew 16 to support that propounded by the Roman Catholic Church.

The fact is, the overwhelming majority of the Fathers of the early centuries cannot be cited as supporters of the Roman Catholic inter-

---

or else they thought Peter was the foundation equally with all the other Apostles, the twelve being together the foundation—stones of the Church (Apoc. xxi.14). The Fathers could the less recognize in the power of the keys, and the power of binding and loosing, any special prerogative or lordship of the Roman bishop, inasmuch as—what is obvious to any one at first sight—they did not regard a power first given to Peter, and afterwards conferred in precisely the same words on all the Apostles, as anything peculiar to him, or hereditary in the line of Roman bishops, and they held the symbol of the keys as meaning just the same as the figurative expression of binding and loosing' (*The Pope and the Council* (London, Oxford and Cambridge: Rivingtons, 1870), pp. 91-92).

<sup>37</sup>For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ...the rock was Christ...Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious cornerstone, and he who believes in Him shall not be disappointed' (1 Cor. 3:11, 10:4; 1 Pet. 2:6; Cf. Ps. 62:5, 18:1-2, 89:26; Is. 28:16; Eph. 2:20).

<sup>38</sup>This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved....To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, [and] precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed (Acts 4:12; 1 Pet. 2:4-8).

pretation of Mt. 16:18 as proposed by Vatican One. Although many of the Fathers speak of Peter in exalted terms, the common mistake made by Roman Catholic apologists is to equate what the Fathers say about Peter with the bishops of Rome. What they say about Peter is unique to Peter. It does not in any way apply to the Roman bishops. They do not personally make the application in that way. Often, the titles applied to Peter, such as *coryphaeus* and teacher of the world, are also applied to the other apostles, proving they are not unique to Peter. The patristic understanding of the Petrine succession was that every legitimate bishop was a successor of Peter, not just the bishops of Rome. The Roman interpretation is a classic case of reading into the writings of the Church Fathers a preconceived theology.

Roman Catholic apologists consistently charge that the Protestant exegesis of Matthew 16 grew out of the Reformers' need to legitimize their opposition to the papacy and consequently, that they invented a novel interpretation which contradicted the traditional view of the church. But the facts reveal the opposite as Oscar Cullmann confirms: 'We thus see that the exegesis that the Reformers gave....was not first invented for their struggle against the papacy; it rests upon an older patristic tradition.'<sup>39</sup> As has been pointed out by Roman Catholic historians Yves Congar and von Dollinger, it is the Protestant and Orthodox interpretation which is endorsed by the Fathers of the early church and it is the Roman Catholic which contradicts that consensus. The Roman Catholic interpretation is a direct contradiction of the decrees of Trent and Vatican One which state that it is unlawful to interpret Scripture in any way contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers.

This is not to say that there was never a pro-papal interpretation given to Matthew 16:18-19. Beginning in the fourth century we find a papal interpretation promoted by the bishops of Rome. Leo 1, in the fifth century, is the first to combine Matthew 16 with Luke 22 and John 21 to promote the theory of papal rule (but not the teaching of infallibility). From that time the bishops of Rome adopted his interpretation to promote the papal office. But this interpretation was not the accepted exegesis of the Fathers and theologians of the Church for many centuries.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup>Oscar Cullmann, *Peter. Disciple-Apostle-Martyr* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), p. 162.

<sup>40</sup>Patristics and Medieval scholar, Karlfried Froehlich, affirms these facts in his analysis of the history of the exegesis of these passages up through the middle ages: 'The earlier exegetical history of Matt. 16:18-19, Luke 22:32, and John 21:15-17 was largely out of step with the

The Roman Church claims that papal primacy can be validated by the facts of history in that it was the universal practice of the church from the very beginning. This is false. The attitudes and practices of the fathers and councils<sup>41</sup> reveal that the church did not view the bishops of Rome as endowed with supreme authority to rule the church universal. And there has never been a supreme human ruler in the church. This whole concept was repudiated by Pope Gregory the Great (590-604 A.D.) when he rebuked the bishop of Constantinople for attempting to arrogate to himself the title of 'universal bishop'. He insists that such a position and title is unlawful in the Church of Jesus Christ and is to be repudiated.<sup>42</sup>

---

primatial (papal) interpretation of these passages...The mainstream of exegesis followed an agenda set by patristic precedent, especially Augustine, but also other Western fathers...The understanding of these Petrine texts by biblical exegetes in the mainstream of the tradition was universally non-primatial before Innocent III. It was the innovative exegetical argumentation of this imposing pope which began to change the picture' (Karlfried Froehlich, *St. Peter, Papal Primacy and the Exegetical Tradition* 1151-1350. Found in: *The Religious Roles of the Papacy: Ideals and Realities* 1150-1300, Christopher Ryan, Ed., (Toronto: Pontifical Institute, 1989), pp. 42, 4.

<sup>41</sup>The Council of Constance (1414-1418 A.D.) passed the following decree regarding the supreme authority of General Councils over popes: 'This holy Council of Constance...declares, first that it is lawfully assembled in the Holy Spirit, that it constitutes a General Council, representing the Catholic Church, and that therefore it has its authority immediately from Christ; and that all men, of every rank and condition, including the Pope himself, is bound to obey it in matters concerning the Faith, the abolition of the schism, and the reformation of the Church of God in its head and its members. Secondly, it declares that any one, of any rank or condition, who shall contumaciously refuse to obey the orders, decrees, statutes or instructions, made or to be made by this holy Council, or by any other lawfully assembled council...shall, unless he comes to a right frame of mind, be subjected to a fitting penance and punished appropriately; and, if need be, recourse shall be had to the other sanctions of the law' (Henry Bettenson, Ed., *Documents of the Christian Church* (London: Oxford University, 1963), Decree: *Sacrosancta* (1415 A.D.), p. 135). The decrees of this council were officially approved by pope Martin V (1417-1431 A.D.) and by pope Eugenius IV (1431-1447 A.D.).

<sup>42</sup>Gregory writes: 'Now I confidently say that whoever calls himself, or desires to be called, Universal Priest, is in his elation the precursor of Antichrist, because he proudly puts himself above all others. Nor is it by dissimilar pride that he is led into error; for, as that perverse one wishes to appear as God above all men, so whoever this one is who covets being called sole priest, he extols himself above all other priests...Certainly Peter, the first of the apostles, himself a member of the holy and universal Church, Paul, Andrew, John—what were they but heads of particular communities? And yet all were members under one Head. And to bind all together in a short girth of speech) the saints before the law, the saints under the law, the saints under grace, all these making up the Lord's Body, were constituted as members of the Church, and not one of them has wished himself to be called universal. Now let your holiness acknowledge to what extent you swell within yourself in desiring to be called by that name by which no one presumed to be called who was truly holy' (Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), Second Series, Volume XII, Gregory the Great, *Epistles of St. Gregory the Great*, Book VII, Epistle 33, p. 226; Book V, Epistle 18, p. 167).

*Papal Infallibility*

The Roman Catholic Church claims that papal infallibility can be validated from Scripture in Mt 16, Lk 22 and Jn 21. It states that its interpretation of these passages was that which was also given by the unanimous consent of the fathers and anyone who contradicts this teaching is anathematized.<sup>43</sup> These claims are false. No father, doctor, theologian or canonist of the church for the first 14 centuries interpret those passages in agreement with the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>44</sup> They never interpret these verses to even imply the teaching of papal infallibility. The universal teaching and belief of the Church was that the bishops of Rome were fallible—that they could and did err.

In addition, the Roman Church teaches that papal infallibility can be validated by the facts of history and the universal practice of the church. This is false. The facts reveal that popes have erred, have contradicted themselves and one another, have embraced heresy, and have been condemned for heresy by ‘infallible’ ecumenical Councils, as well as by the popes themselves, thereby demonstrating that the Church in its practice, and not even the bishops of Rome, believed that popes

---

<sup>43</sup>Vatican One states: ‘We teach and define that it is a dogma divinely revealed: that the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when in discharge of the office of pastor and doctor of all Christians, by virtue of his supreme Apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine regarding faith and morals to be held by the universal Church, by the divine assistance promised him in blessed Peter, is possessed of that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed that his Church should be endowed for defining doctrine regarding faith or morals; and that therefore such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church. But if any one—which may God avert—presume to contradict this our definition: let him be anathema’ (*Dogmatic Decrees of the Vatican Council*, Concerning the Infallible Teaching of the Roman Pontiff, Chapter IV. Cited by Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877), p. 270-271).

<sup>44</sup>Roman Catholic medieval scholar, Brian Tierney, affirms these facts with these statements regarding the views of the twelfth and thirteenth century canonists who were the authoritative commentators of their day: ‘What can be proved beyond doubt is that no public teaching affirming the infallibility of the pope was transmitted to the canonists of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in whose works, for the first time, abundant texts for the investigation of this whole question becomes available. The commentators on Gratian’s *Decretum* knew all the most important texts—forged and genuine—relating to the authority of the pope and the indefectibility of the Roman Church. They did not associate those texts with any doctrine of papal infallibility. They showed no awareness that any of their predecessors had ever associated them with such a doctrine ... The theologians of the thirteenth century could not possibly have taken the doctrine of papal infallibility from the canonical tradition of the church because the doctrine simply did not exist in the writings of the canonists’ (Brian Tierney, *Origins of Papal Infallibility* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), pp.12-13).

were infallible. For example, pope Honorius was condemned as a heretic by the sixth ecumenical council (III Constantinople, 680-681 A.D.) in his official capacity as pope, and not as a private theologian, on the basis of an *ex cathedra* teaching, for the Council charged Honorius with promulgating heretical teachings which it claimed affected the entire Church. This judgment was confirmed by popes and other ecumenical councils for centuries afterward.<sup>45</sup>

This council was confirmed by pope Leo II who likewise anathematized the heretics mentioned by the Council including pope Honorius. His words of condemnation are interesting for he states that Honorius was one 'who did not illuminate the apostolic see by teaching the apostolic tradition but, by an act of treachery, strove to subvert its immaculate faith.'<sup>46</sup> This pope officially condemns his predecessor for actively subverting the faith by what he taught and this judgment was confirmed by two succeeding ecumenical Councils and by individual popes, who took the oath of papal office, for centuries afterward. Clearly, neither the popes nor the Church at large have historically believed the doctrine of papal infallibility.

---

<sup>45</sup>The precise words of condemnation by the sixth ecumenical council are as follows: 'After we had reconsidered...the doctrinal letters of Sergius...to Honorius some time Pope of Old Rome, as well as the letter of the latter to the same Sergius, we find that these documents are quite foreign to the apostolic dogmas, to the declarations of the holy Councils, and to all the accepted Fathers, and that they follow the false teachings of the heretics; therefore we entirely reject them, and execrate them as hurtful to the soul. But the names of those men whose doctrines we execrate must also be thrust forth from the holy Church of God...We define that there shall be expelled from the holy Church of God and anathematized Honorius who was some time Pope of Old Rome, because of what was written by him to Sergius, that in all respects he followed his view and confirmed his impious doctrines...But as the author of evil...having found suitable instruments for working out his will (we mean Theodorus...Sergius...Honorius who was Pope of elder Rome)...has actively employed them in raising up for the whole Church the stumbling blocks of one will and one operation in Christ our true God, one of the Holy Trinity; thus disseminating, in novel terms, amongst the orthodox people, an heresy similar to the mad and wicked doctrine of the impious Apollinaris...To Honorius, the heretic, anathema' (Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), Second Series, Volume XIV, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, pp. 342- 344).

<sup>46</sup>Brian Tierney, *Origins of Papal Infallibility* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), p. 11. See also Charles Joseph Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1896), Volume V, p. 180.

## The Interpretation of Scripture and Unanimous Consent

The Roman Catholic Church claims that her *magisterium*<sup>47</sup> alone has authority to interpret Scripture and has been granted infallibility in so doing. This is false. First of all, it is disproved by the facts of history. The Roman Church at the Councils of Trent and Vatican I have decreed that it is unlawful to interpret Scripture contrary to the unanimous consent of the fathers,<sup>48</sup> claiming that all of their teachings can be verified by this unanimous consent. These Councils claim that the Roman Catholic Church alone has the right to interpret Scripture and that its interpretation is consistent with the overall interpretation (unanimous consent) of the Fathers. It is making the point that the teaching of the Church has not changed over time—that a consensus

---

<sup>47</sup>The term *magisterium* is defined as follows: ‘The *magisterium* may be defined as the perennial, authentic, and infallible teaching office committed to the Apostles by Christ and now possessed and exercised by their legitimate successors, the college of bishops in union with the pope’ (*The New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University, 1967), Teaching Authority of the Church (*Magisterium*), p. 959).

<sup>48</sup>The Council of Trent states: ‘Furthermore, to check unbridled spirits, it decrees that no one relying on his own judgment shall, in matters of faith and morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine, distorting the Holy Scriptures in accordance with his own conceptions, presume to interpret them contrary to that sense which holy mother Church, to whom it belongs to judge their true sense and interpretation, has held and holds, or even contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers, even though such interpretations should never at any time be published’ (*The Decrees of the Council of Trent* (Rockford: Tan, 1978), Fourth Session, The Canonical Scriptures, pp. 18-19).

This decree was further reaffirmed by Vatican One in these words: And as the things which, in order to curb rebellious spirits, the holy Synod of Trent decreed for the good of souls concerning the interpretation of Divine Scripture have been wrongly explained by some, We, renewing the said decree, declare this to be its meaning: that, in matters of faith and morals, appertaining to the building up of Christian doctrine, that is to be held as the true sense of Holy Scripture which our holy Mother Church hath held and holds, to whom it belongs to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures; and, therefore, that it is permitted to no one to interpret the Sacred Scripture contrary to this sense or likewise contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers’ (*Dogmatic Canons and Decrees of Vatican Council I* (Rockford: Tan, 1977), pp. 222-223).

of interpretation that can be traced back through the Fathers to the apostles and ultimately to Christ himself. It is not suggesting that there are two levels of authority in interpretation, that of the Fathers and that of the Church in a later age, but that the Church of the 16th century is consistent in its interpretation with the Fathers of earlier centuries. This is why it states that any interpretation of Scripture contrary to what the Church *'holds or has held'*, or even contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers' is unlawful. Historically the Church has always claimed patristic consensus for its tradition as an affirmation of the continuity of its teaching. Even Vatican I affirms this when it states that its teachings on papal rule and infallibility have been the *practice* of the Church from the very beginning.<sup>49</sup>

This does not mean that every single Father has interpreted Scripture in precisely the same way but that there is an overall consensus of meaning which the Church upholds. It should be evident then, since this is a formal principle enunciated by Trent and Vatican I, that there cannot be an authoritative interpretation of Scripture that fundamentally contradicts what has been clearly promulgated by the Fathers. This would be especially true of the fundamentals of the faith. Vatican I states that the teachings of papal rule and infallibility must be embraced to obtain salvation. It then uses the Petrine texts (Mt. 16, Lk. 22, Jn 21) as the basis for its teaching and gives these passages a papal interpretation.

Vatican I teaches that the Church has held these particular views from the very beginning. So it is only right to ask the question: Is there a unanimous consent of the Fathers in the interpretation of Mt. 16, Lk. 22 and Jn. 21? Does it conform to that given by Vatican I? Has the Church from the very beginning always believed and practiced the views of Vatican I on papal rule and infallibility? The answer to these questions is a decided No!

It is clear that the Roman Catholic Church of later centuries interprets the rock of Matthew 16 differently from the overall patristic consensus, so how can it claim to be an infallible interpreter of Scripture? The magisterium of a later age contradicts that of the patristic age on an issue of interpretation.

The claims and assertions of unanimous consent are utterly false.

---

<sup>49</sup>*Dogmatic Decrees of the Vatican Council*. Cited by Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper, 1877), Volume II, p. 207.

None of the Church's teachings in its Tradition, based on the interpretation of Scripture, can claim a unanimous consent of the Fathers to support its teachings. In fact, there are a number of major passages which Rome interprets in a peculiarly Roman way, such as the papal passages, which actually contradicts the unanimous interpretation given by those very Fathers.

Secondly, the claim to infallible interpretation is proven false by the fact that there is no official infallible interpretation of the bible. It does not exist. Roman apologists often make the claim that it is in the Roman Church alone that one finds an infallible interpretation of the Scriptures. But as with the claim for an oral apostolic tradition, it is no more than a claim. Where are we to go to find such an infallible interpretation? Apart from a handful of verses such as Matthew 16:18 or Luke 22:32 the bible itself has never been infallibly interpreted.

The fact that there is no such thing as the unanimous consent of the Fathers or an infallible Roman Catholic interpretation of Scripture is affirmed in the following statements of the Roman Catholic theologian, Joseph Fitzmyer S.J., Professor Emeritus of Biblical Studies at The Catholic University of America:

When one hears today the call for a return to a patristic interpretation of Scripture, there is often latent in it a recollection of Church documents that spoke at times of the 'unanimous consent of the Fathers' as a guide for biblical interpretation (thus the Council of Trent in its decree of 1546 on the Latin Vulgate and the mode of interpreting Scripture...and in its profession of faith). But just what this would entail is far from clear. For...there were Church Fathers who did use a form of the historical critical method, suited to their own day, and advocated a literal interpretation of Scripture, not the allegorical. But not all did so. Yet there was no uniform or monolithic patristic interpretation, either in the Greek Church of the East, Alexandrian or Antiochene, or in the Latin Church of the West. No one can ever tell us where such a 'unanimous consent of the Fathers' is to be found, and Pius XII finally thought it pertinent to call attention to the fact that there are but few texts whose sense has been defined by the authority of the Church, 'nor are those more numerous about which the teaching of the Holy Fathers is unanimous.'<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup>Joseph Fitzmyer, S.J., *Scripture, the Soul of Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1994), p. 70.

## Mary

### *Immaculate Conception*

The Roman Catholic Church claims that Mary was immaculately conceived, that is, born free of original sin, and that the Fathers all held to this teaching. This was decreed a dogma of the faith necessary to be believed for salvation by Pius IX in 1854 in the papal decree *Ineffabilis Deus*. This decree states that any who would dispute the teaching are completely fallen from the faith and are condemned.<sup>51</sup>

This claim is not true and the teaching is *not* a dogma of the faith. It originated in the 5th century with the heretics Pelagius and Celestius<sup>52</sup> and was universally rejected by the Fathers and popes of the early Church, as evidenced by its rejection by Augustine, Pope Leo I, Pope Gregory the Great and in later centuries by Anselm, Bede, Bernard of Clairveaux and Thomas Aquinas.<sup>53</sup> And for centuries it was a matter of

---

<sup>51</sup>These are the words of Pope Pius IX: 'Therefore, if some should presume to think in their hearts otherwise than we have defined (which God forbid), they shall know and thoroughly understand that they are by their own judgment condemned, have made shipwreck concerning the faith, and fallen away from the unity of the Church; and, moreover, that they, by this very act, subject themselves to the penalties ordained by law if, by word or writing, or any other external means, they dare to signify what they think in their heart' (*The Decree of Pope Pius IX on the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, From the Bull *Ineffabilis Deus* (1854 A.D.). Taken from Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877), Vol. II, p. 212).

<sup>52</sup>Pelagius and Celestius used Mary, the mother of Jesus, as an example of one born free of original sin. Vincent of Lerins points out the origin of the teaching of the immaculate conception with these words: 'Who ever originated a heresy that did not first dis sever himself from the consentient agreement of the universality and antiquity of the Catholic Church? That this is so is demonstrated in the clearest way by examples. For who ever before the profane Pelagius attributed so much antecedent strength to Free-will, as to deny the necessity of God's grace to aid it towards every good in every single act? Who ever before his monstrous disciple Celestius denied that the whole human race is involved in the guilt of Adam's sin' (Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), Volume XI, Vincent of Lerins, *A Commonitory* 24.62, pp. 149-150).

<sup>53</sup>The Roman Catholic patristic scholar, Walter Burghardt, confirms the patristic and papal rejection of this doctrine historically: 'Post-Augustinian patristic thought on the perfection

violent dispute within the Church between the Dominicans and Franciscans. Most importantly, it contradicts the Scriptural teaching of the universality of original as well as actual sin.<sup>54</sup>

### *The Assumption*

The Roman Catholic Church claims that Mary, the mother of Jesus, at the end of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heaven. In 1950, in the papal decree, *Munificentissimus Deus*, Pope Pius XII declared this teaching to be a dogma of the faith, a truth divinely revealed by God and necessary to be believed for salvation. In this decree Pius XII states that any who would dispute the doctrine have completely fallen from the faith and are condemned.<sup>55</sup>

Again, this claim is untrue. There is no Scriptural proof for it and for centuries in the early Church there is complete silence regarding Mary's end. The first mention of it is by Epiphanius in 377 A.D. and he specifically states that no one actually knows what happened to Mary. He lived near Palestine and if there was, in fact, a tradition in the Church generally believed and taught he would have affirmed it.

---

of Mary reveals two conflicting currents. There is a negative, unfavorable trend rooted in Augustine's anti-Pelagianism; it accentuates the the universality of original sin and articulates the connection between inherited sin and any conception consequent upon sinful concupiscence. The root idea is summed up by Leo the Great: 'Alone therefore among the sons of men the Lord Jesus was born innocent, because alone conceived without pollution of carnal concupiscence.' The same concept is discoverable in St. Fulgentius, Bishop of Ruspe in Africa (d. 533), the most significant theologian of his time; in Pope Gregory the Great (d. 604) at the end of the sixth century; and a century later in Venerable Bede, a scholar renowned throughout England' (Juniper Carol, Ed., *Mariology* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1955), Volume One, p. 146).

<sup>54</sup>For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). There is none righteous, not even one (Rom. 3:10).

<sup>55</sup>Pope Pius XII affirms this in these words: 'We pronounce, declare, and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma: that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory. Hence, if anyone, which God forbid, should dare wilfully to deny or call into doubt that which we have defined, let him know that he has completely fallen from the divine and Catholic faith...It is forbidden to any man to change this, Our declaration, pronouncement, and definition or, by rash attempt, to oppose and counter it. If any man should presume to make such an attempt, let him know that he will incur the wrath of Almighty God and of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul' (*Munificentissimus Deus* (1950 A.D.) 44-45, 47. Taken from *Selected Documents of Pope Pius XII* (Washington: National Catholic Welfare Conference).

But he clearly states that ‘her end no one knows.’<sup>56</sup>

In addition, Jerome, who also lived in Palestine, does not report any tradition of an assumption. Isidore of Seville, in the seventh century, echoes Epiphanius in saying that no one has any information at all about Mary’s death. The patristic testimony is therefore non-existent on this subject. Even Roman Catholic historians readily admit this fact.<sup>57</sup>

The first Church father to affirm explicitly the assumption of Mary in the West was Gregory of Tours in 590 A.D. But the basis for his teaching was not the tradition of the Church but his acceptance of an apocryphal Gospel known as the *Transitus Beatae Mariae* which we first hear of at the end of the fifth century, which was spuriously attributed to the second century church Father Melito of Sardis. Many versions of this literature which developed over time and which were found throughout the East and West, but they all originated from one source. Mariologist, Juniper Carol, gives the following historical summary of the *Transitus* literature:

An intriguing corpus of literature on the final lot of Mary is formed by the apocryphal *Transitus Mariae*. The genesis of these accounts is shrouded in history’s mist. They apparently originated before the close of the fifth century, perhaps in Egypt, perhaps in Syria, in consequence of the stimulus given Marian devotion by the definition of the divine Maternity at Ephesus. The period of proliferation

---

<sup>56</sup>Epiphanius, in the 4th century, comments: ‘But if some think us mistaken, let them search the Scriptures. They will not find Mary’s death; they will not find whether she died or did not die; they will not find whether she was buried or was not buried....Scripture is absolutely silent [on the end of Mary]....For my own part, I do not dare to speak, but I keep my own thoughts and I practice silence....The fact is, Scripture has outstripped the human mind and left [this matter] uncertain....Did she die, we do not know....Either the holy Virgin died and was buried....Or she was killed....Or she remained alive, since nothing is impossible with God and He can do whatever He desires; for her end no-one knows.’ (Epiphanius, *Panarion*, Haer. 78.10-11, 23. Cited by Juniper Carol, O.F.M. ed., *Mariology*, Vol. II (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1957), pp. 139-40).

<sup>57</sup>Roman Catholic historian, Juniper Carol, gives the following quote from Joussard: In these conditions we shall not ask patristic thought—as some theologians still do today under one form or another—to transmit to us, with respect to the Assumption, a truth received as such in the beginning and faithfully communicated to subsequent ages. Such an attitude would not fit the facts...Patristic thought has not, in this instance, played the role of a sheer instrument of transmission’ (Juniper B. Carol, O.F.M., ed., *Mariology*, Vol. I (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1955), p. 154).

is the sixth century. At least a score of *Transitus* accounts are extant, in Coptic, Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, Ethiopic, and Armenian. Not all are prototypes, for many are simply variations on more ancient models.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, the *Transitus* literature is the real source of the teaching of the assumption of Mary, and Roman Catholic authorities admit this.<sup>59</sup> It was partially through these writings that teachers in the East and West began to embrace and promote the teaching. But it still took several centuries for it to become generally accepted. The earliest extant discourse on the feast of the Dormition affirms that the assumption of Mary comes from the East at the end of the seventh and beginning of the eighth century. The *Transitus* literature is highly significant as the origin of the assumption teaching and it is important that we understand the nature of these writings. The Roman Catholic Church would have us believe that this apocryphal work expressed an existing, common belief among the faithful with respect to Mary and that the Holy Spirit used it to bring more generally to the Church's awareness the truth of Mary's assumption. The historical evidence would suggest otherwise. The truth is, that as with the teaching of the immaculate conception, the Roman Church has embraced and is responsible for promoting teachings which originated, not with the faithful, but with heretical writings which were officially condemned by the early Church. History proves that when the *Transitus* teaching originated the Church regarded it as heresy. In 494 to 496 A.D. Pope Gelasius issued a decree entitled *Decretum de Libris Canonicis Ecclesiasticis et Apocryphis*. This decree officially set forth the writings which were considered to be canonical and those which were apocryphal and were to be rejected. He gives a list of apocryphal writings and makes the following statement regarding them:

The remaining writings which have been compiled or been recognised

---

<sup>58</sup>Juniper Carol, O.F.M. ed., *Mariology*, Vol. II (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1957), p. 144.

<sup>59</sup>Roman Catholic theologian, Ludwig Ott, affirms these facts when he says: 'The idea of the bodily assumption of Mary is first expressed in certain transitus-narratives of the fifth and sixth centuries. Even though these are apocryphal they bear witness to the faith of the generation in which they were written despite their legendary clothing. The first Church author to speak of the bodily ascension of Mary, in association with an apocryphal transitus B.M.V., is St. Gregory of Tours' (Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (Rockford: Tan, 1974), pp. 209–210).

by heretics or schismatics the Catholic and Apostolic Roman Church does not in any way receive; of these we have thought it right to cite below some which have been handed down and which are to be avoided by catholics.<sup>60</sup>

In the list of apocryphal writings which are to be rejected Gelasius signifies the following work: *Liber qui appellatur Transitus, id est Assumptio Sanctae Mariae, Apocryphus*.<sup>61</sup> This specifically means the *Transitus* writing of the assumption of Mary. At the end of the decree he states that this and all the other listed literature is heretical and that their authors and teachings and all who adhere to them are condemned and placed under eternal anathema which is indissoluble. And he places the *Transitus* literature in the same category as the heretics and writings of Arius, Simon Magus, Marcion, Apollinaris, Valentinus and Pelagius.<sup>62</sup>

Pope Gelasius explicitly condemns the authors as well as their writings, the teachings which they promote and all who follow them. Significantly, this entire decree and its condemnation was reaffirmed by Pope Hormisdas in the sixth century around A.D. 520.<sup>63</sup> These facts

---

<sup>60</sup>Cited in *New Testament Apocrypha*, Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed. (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1991), p. 38.

<sup>61</sup>Pope Gelasius 1, *Epistle 42*, Migne Series, M.P.L. vol. 59, Col. 162.

<sup>62</sup>Pope Gelasius states: "These and the like, what Simon Magus, Nicolaus, Cerinthus, Marcion, Basilides, Ebion, Paul of Samosata, Photinus and Bonosus, who suffered from similar error, also Montanus with his detestable followers, Apollinaris, Valentinus the Manichaean, Faustus the African, Sabellius, Arius, Macedonius, Eunomius, Novatus, Sabbatius, Calistus, Donatus, Eustasius, Iovianus, Pelagius, Iulianus of Erclanum, Caelestius, Maximian, Priscillian from Spain, Nestorius of Constantinople, Maximus the Cynic, Lampetius, Dioscorus, Eutyches, Peter and the other Peter, of whom one besmirched Alexandria and the other Antioch, Acacius of Constantinople with his associates, and what also all disciples of heresy and of the heretics and schismatics, whose names we have scarcely preserved, have taught or compiled, we acknowledge is to be not merely rejected but excluded from the whole Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church and with its authors and the adherents of its authors to be damned in the inextricable shackles of anathema forever" (Cited in *New Testament Apocrypha*, Wilhelm Schneemelcher, Ed., (Cambridge: James Clark, 1991).

Henry Denzinger gives the following translation of the condemnation of the *Transitus* Assumption by Pope Gelasius: "These and [writings] similar to these, which....all the heresiarchs and their disciples, or the schismatics have taught or written....we confess have not only been rejected but also banished from the whole Roman and Apostolic Church and with their authors and followers of their authors have been condemned forever under the indissoluble bond of anathema" (Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma* (London: Herder, 1954), pp. 69-70).

<sup>63</sup>Migne: MPL Vol. 62. Col. 537-542.

prove that the early Church viewed the assumption teaching, not as a legitimate expression of the pious belief of the faithful, but as a heresy, originating with gnosticism, which was worthy of condemnation. There are those who question the authority of the so-called Gelasian decree on historical grounds saying that it is spuriously attributed to Gelasius. However, the Roman Catholic authorities Denzinger, Karl Joseph von Hefele, W. A. Jurgens and the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*<sup>64</sup> all affirm that the decree derives from Pope Gelasius, and Pope Nicholas I in a letter to the bishops of Gaul (c. 865 A.D.) officially quotes from this decree and attributes its authorship to Gelasius. While the Gelasian decree may be questioned by some, the decree of Pope Hormisdas reaffirming the Gelasian decree in the early sixth century has not been questioned.

R.P.C. Hanson sums up the lack of patristic and Scriptural support for the Assumption teaching, affirming that it originated with Gnosticism:

This dogma has no serious connection with the Bible at all, and its defenders scarcely pretend that it has. It cannot honestly be said to have any solid ground in patristic theology either, because it is first known among Catholic Christians in even its crudest form only at the beginning of the fifth century, and then among Copts in Egypt whose associations with Gnostic heresy are suspiciously strong; indeed it can be shown to be a doctrine which manifestly had its origin among Gnostic heretics. The only argument by which it is defended is that if the Church has at any time believed it and does now believe it, then it must be orthodox, whatever its origins, because the final standard of orthodoxy is what the Church believes. The fact that this belief is presumably supposed to have some basis on historical fact analogous to the belief of all Christians in the resurrection of our Lord makes its registration as a dogma *de fide* more bewilderingly incomprehensible, for it is wholly devoid of any historical evidence to support it. In short, the latest example of the Roman Catholic theory of doctrinal development appears to be a *reductio ad absurdum* expressly designed to discredit the whole structure.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup>See Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma* (London: Herder, 1954), pp. 66-69; W. A. Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, vol. I (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1970), p. 404; *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. VII (Washington D.C.: Catholic University, 1967), p. 434; Charles Joseph Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895), vol. IV, pp. 43-44).

<sup>65</sup>R.P.C. Hanson, *The Bible as a Norm of Faith* (University of Durham, 1963), Inaugural Lecture of the Lightfoot Professor of Divinity delivered in the Appleby Lecture Theatre on 12 March, 1963, p. 14.

*Mediatrix/CoRedemptrix*

The Roman Church teaches that Mary is a co-redemptrix and co-mediatrix with Christ.<sup>66</sup> This means that Mary participates with the Lord Jesus Christ in the work of redemption, in both the work of atonement and in its application to men. By her obedience her supposed merit is actually added to the merit of Christ. According to the Roman Catholic Church no grace is mediated to man apart from the direct cooperation of Mary. She is a mediator between Christ and man. Ludwig Ott sums up the Roman Catholic teaching in these words:

Since her assumption into Heaven, Mary co-operates in the application of the grace of Redemption to man. She participates in the application of the grace of Redemption to man....According to the view of the older, and many of the modern, theologians Mary's intercessory co-operation extends to all graces, which are conferred on mankind, so that no grace accrues to men, without the intercession of Mary....Leo XIII says in the Rosary Encyclical 'Octobri mense' (1891): 'From that great treasure of all graces, which the Lord has brought, nothing, according to the will of God comes to us except through Mary, so that, as nobody can approach the Supreme Father except through the Son, similarly nobody can approach Christ except through the Mother.'<sup>67</sup>

This teaching is false. There is not one word in Scripture of Mary in the role of co-mediatrix or co-redemptrix. This contradicts the Scriptural teaching of the unique and exclusive mediatorial role of Christ,

---

<sup>66</sup>Pope Leo XIII makes these statements: 'When Mary offered herself completely to God together with her Son in the temple, she was already sharing with him the painful atonement on behalf of the human race...(at the foot of the cross) she was a co-worker with Christ in His expiation for mankind and she offered up her Son to the divine justice dying with him in her heart' (*Jucunda semper*). Pope Benedict XV says: 'Thus she (Mary) suffered and all but died along with her Son suffering and dying—thus for the salvation of men she abdicated the rights of a mother toward her son, and insofar as it was hers to do, she immolated the Son to placate God's justice, so that she herself may justly be said to have redeemed together with Christ the human race' (*De Corredemptione*). Cited by Juniper Carol, Ed., *Mariology* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1957), Volume I, pp. 383, 37).

Ludwig Ott states: 'Mary, by her spiritual entering into the sacrifice of her Divine Son for men, made atonement for the sins of men, and (de congruo) merited the application of the redemptive grace of Christ. In this manner she co-operates in the subjective redemption of mankind' (*Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (Rockford: Tan, 1974), p. 213).

<sup>67</sup>Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (Rockford: Tan, 1974), pp. 213-214).

and is a serious perversion of the truth of the gospel.<sup>68</sup> In addition, there is complete silence on this in the writings of the church Fathers. Early Fathers such as Irenaeus refer to Mary as the cause of salvation in that she gave birth to the God–man, who by His incarnation became the the source of salvation. But neither Irenaeus nor any other Father teaches that Mary had a direct role in cooperating with Christ in the work of redemption. It is in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that there is a marked change in the teaching of Mary’s role in salvation. Juniper Carol relates the following historical development of this teaching:

Arnold of Chartres (d. 1160)...may well be acknowledged as the first clear exponent of our Lady’s Coredemption....St. Bonaventure (d. 1274)...(pointed) out that on Calvary Our Lady co–offered the divine Victim, satisfied for our sins, and paid the price for our redemption.<sup>69</sup>

These teachings have been popularized through the writings of Alphonsus de Ligouri in his book *The Glories of Mary*. He is a canonized saint and a doctor of the Church. It is clear from his writings that the person of Mary has been elevated to a place of equality with Jesus Christ in the economy of salvation. She is presented as a true Mediator between God and man with the power to dispense grace to sinners. She is set forth as an Advocate for sinners, an object of faith, the one who gives spiritual birth and is in herself a source of salvation. This is obvious from the many formal titles which are ascribed to Mary which relate to salvation. The following is a representative list that are given as either ascriptions of praise to or descriptive of her:

Mediatrix, Mediatress, Advocate of Sinners, Source of Salvation, Source of Grace, Queen of Mercy, Refuge of Sinners, Medicine of Sinners, Possessor of the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, Mother of Divine Grace, Protector, Guide, Appeaser of God’s Wrath, Intercessor, Reconciler of God with Man, Mother of Grace, Source of Love, Source of Light, Help in Temptation, Strength in Weak-

---

<sup>68</sup>For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5)...And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

<sup>69</sup>Juniper Carol, Ed., *Mariology* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1957), Volume II, pp. 397-398).

ness, Succour of Sinners, Consolation in Sorrows, Defender, Deliverer, Our Joy, Our Happiness, Our Treasure, Omnipotent to Save Sinners, Protector against Satan, Deliverer in Temptation, Peacemaker between God and Man, Trust for Salvation, Mother of Mercy, Propitiatory of all Nations, Deliverer from Condemnation, Purifier of the Soul, Reconciler of God with Man, Gate of Heaven, Ladder to Heaven.<sup>70</sup>

This is completely contradictory to the teaching of Scripture. Who but Jesus Christ deserves the titles of salvation that are so blasphemously ascribed to Mary? There is only one source of salvation, only one refuge for sinners, only one source of strength, protection, deliverance, joy, happiness, mercy and grace. There is only one who is to be our trust, our hope, the purifier of our souls. There is only one who is the appeaser of God's wrath, the advocate for sinners and who is omnipotent to save sinners—and it is *not* Mary—it is the Lord Jesus Christ! But in Roman Catholic theology, the biblical truth of the work of Jesus has been completely undermined by its teachings on Mary, invalidating the word of God. *We do not need a mediator to go to the mediator!*

### *Queen of Heaven*

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that Mary has been given the title, Queen of heaven, and rules over the Church with Jesus Christ, a teaching confirmed by Pius XII. According to Rome, she is now a Sovereign who reigns and rules with her Son over the kingdom of God, the one to whom men are to render submission, devotion, service, worship and obedience.<sup>71</sup> This is false. There is absolutely nothing in Scripture to support such a title or role for Mary. There is no Queen of heaven and earth. There is only one sovereign and Lord of heaven and earth and ruler over the Church. His name is Jesus. Nor is there a single word of support for this teaching in the patristic writings. The early Church never taught such doctrines. Where then did it originate? In the fifth century, from the same writings which originated the doctrines of the Assumption of Mary (condemned by popes Gelasius and Hormisdas) the *Transitus* literature. The Roman Catholic historian and

---

<sup>70</sup>Alphonsus de Ligouri, *The Glories of Mary* (Rockford: Tan, 1977).

<sup>71</sup>And if Jesus is the King of the universe, Mary is also its Queen...for as angels and men, and all things that are in heaven and on earth, are subject to the empire of God, so are they also under the dominion of Mary...To thee belongs dominion and power over all creatures....All power is given to thee in heaven and on earth, and nothing is impossible to

Mariologist, Alfred Rush, confirms this in these statements:

Since explicit testimonies to Mary as Queen date from the fifth century and are linked so closely with her divine Maternity, the richest source of this doctrine is the *Transitus* literature. In proclaiming the glories of the Mother of God and in describing her triumphant entrance into paradise, they hail her as a glorious queen. The testimonies to this doctrine are very effusive in the Syriac and Coptic versions.<sup>72</sup>

By what right does the Roman Catholic Church presume to steal the titles and role which belong to Jesus alone as God and Lord and Sovereign of heaven and assign them to a mere creature? Scripture says that all power in heaven and earth has been given to Jesus and Jesus alone. To attribute this to Mary is to elevate her to a position of equality with Jesus Christ. To teach that Mary is omnipotent, even in a derived sense, is to grant her divine attributes, for there is none omnipotent but God. Not even God's grace can make a creature omnipotent for that would elevate the creature to the status of deity. But this is precisely what Rome has done in its approval of the writings of Alphonsus de Ligouri.

Throughout the history of the development of Marian theology this has been the gradual exalting of the person of Mary to equality with Jesus Christ. Scripture teaches that Jesus was immaculately conceived, is sinless, the redeemer and mediator, assumed body and soul into heaven, the source of life, Lord and King, an object of prayer and trust. Rome teaches this also of Mary, but this is unscriptural and unhistorical. As Paul said in Galatians 5:8: 'this persuasion did not come from him who redeemed you'.

---

thee....God has placed the whole Church....under the dominion of Mary. Since the Mother, then, should have the same power as the Son, rightly has Jesus, who is omnipotent, made Mary also omnipotent; though, of course, it is always true that where the Son is omnipotent by nature, the Mother is only so by grace.....And the three Divine Persons, placing her throne at the right of that of Jesus, declared her Sovereign of heaven and earth; and commanded the angels and all creatures to acknowledge her as their Queen, and as such to serve and obey her' (Alphonsus de Ligouri, *The Glories of Mary* (Rockford: Tan, 1977).

<sup>72</sup>*Mariology*, Juniper Carol, Ed., (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1957), Volume I, p. 177.

## The Necessity of the Roman Church and Its Sacraments for Salvation

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that Christ instituted the Church and its priesthood and sacraments as a means of communicating saving grace to sinful men. Both sacraments and the Church are necessary for salvation.<sup>73</sup> The Church is a mediator between Christ and the individual sinner. *The Question and Answer Catholic Catechism* by John Hardon, officially authorised by the Vatican, enunciates the Roman Catholic position:

401. *Why did Christ establish the Church?*

Christ established the Church as a universal sacrament of salvation.

402. *How is the Church the universal sacrament of salvation?*

The Church is the universal sacrament of salvation as the divinely instituted means of conferring grace on all the members of the human family.

412. *Is the Church necessary for salvation?*

Yes, the Church is necessary for salvation. Christ himself declared that no one can be saved except through faith and baptism. He thereby affirmed the necessity of the Church, to which he entrusted the fulness of revelation and into which a person enters, as through a door, in the sacrament of baptism.

---

<sup>73</sup>The Council of Trent states: 'If anyone saith, that the sacraments of the New Law are not necessary unto salvation, but superfluous; and that, without them, or without the desire thereof, men obtain of God, through faith alone, the grace of justification....let him be anathema' (*The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, Baker Book House (1919 ed.), Session VII, On the Sacraments in General, Canon IV.

461. *What does the Catholic Church believe about the forgiveness of sins?*

She believes it is God's will that no one is forgiven except through the merits of Jesus Christ and that these merits are uniquely channeled through the Church he founded. Consequently, even as the Church is the universal sacrament of salvation, she is also the universal sacrament of reconciliation.

413. *For whom is there no salvation outside the Church?*

There is no salvation for those, who, though incorporated in the Church by baptism, fail to persevere in sanctifying grace and die in a state of mortal sin. Those also are not saved who realize what they are doing but refuse to be baptized and accept the Church's means of salvation.

1115. *Why did Christ institute the sacraments?*

Christ instituted the sacraments because he instituted the New Law. The demands of this law, notably of selfless love of God and one's neighbor, require extraordinary grace that only he can give. He confers this grace on his followers mainly through the sacraments as indispensable means of salvation and sanctification.

462. *How does the Church communicate the merits of Christ's mercy to sinners?*

The Church communicates Christ's mercy to sinners through the Mass and the sacraments and all the prayers and good works of the faithful.

1279. *How are the merits of Calvary dispensed through the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass?*

The merits of Calvary are dispensed through the Mass in that the graces Christ gained for us on the Cross are communicated by the Eucharistic sacrifice.<sup>74</sup>

This teaching is unbiblical. It undermines the sufficiency of the work of Christ and of the exclusivity of his mediatorial role.

---

<sup>74</sup>John Hardon, *The Question and Answer Catholic Catechism* (New York: Doubleday, (1981).

## The Priesthood

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that Christ instituted a new New Testament priesthood to mediate salvation to men through the offering of the sacrifice of the Mass and the forgiveness of sins through confession and penance.<sup>75</sup> This is not true. Scripture teaches that the entire priesthood and the sacrificial system have been abolished by Jesus Christ. There is no more human priesthood and no more sacrifice for sin.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, in the New Testament, there is no mention made of any group of men set apart to minister as priests. The New Testament specifically teaches that Christ has become the fulfillment of the Old Testament priesthood and he is now the only mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5). The human priesthood established under the Mosaic law has been set aside, fulfilled in and by Christ. He has come and has perfectly fulfilled the requirements for salvation. He, himself, is the perfect sacrifice and priest. There is no need for continuing sacrifices or a continuing priesthood because he has been sacrificed once for all (Heb. 7:27; 9:26; 10:9-14) and made a priest forever. The allusion to Melchizedek is to emphasize the eternal and exclusive nature of the priesthood of Christ. As the book of Hebrews puts it:

If another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. For it is witnessed of Him, 'Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek' (Heb. 7:14-17).

---

<sup>75</sup>The Council of Trent states: 'If anyone says that there is not in the New Testament a visible and external priesthood—or, that there is not any power of consecrating and offering the true body and blood of the Lord, and of forgiving and retaining sins, but only an office and bare ministry of preaching the Gospel....let him be anathema (*The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, Baker Book House (1919 ed.).

<sup>76</sup>For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also...For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. (Heb. 7:12, 18-19, 24).

Christ is a priest after the order of Melchizedek not because he comes from a certain tribe of Israel but because he lives in the power of an indestructible life, and therefore, he holds his priesthood eternally. The writer goes on to point out that it is also an exclusive priesthood—its functions cannot be transferred to anyone else: ‘But He, on the other hand, because He abides forever, holds His priesthood permanently’ (Hebrews 7:24). The word permanently is the Greek word which means ‘unchangeable, not liable to pass to a successor’ (Thayer’s *Greek-English Lexicon*). As Philip Hughes has commented:

As a priest who, in accordance with the affirmation of Psalm 110, continues for ever and who therefore holds his priesthood permanently, there is neither need nor place for any kind of priestly succession in his case. Because he does not pass away his own priesthood does not pass away, nor is it passed on to others; there can be no question of his passing on to others an office which is uniquely and uninterruptedly his.<sup>77</sup>

Jesus Christ could not have instituted a new order of human priesthood through the disciples because Scripture teaches that his priesthood has displaced the old order. He now exercises an exclusive and eternal priesthood, the prerogatives of which cannot be transferred. Furthermore, the Scriptures teach that men now have direct access to God through Jesus Christ. They no longer need a human priesthood or sacrifices for he has become our sacrifice and our priest. It is not that men do not need a priest to come to God. We do! But we do not need a human priesthood when we have a Divine priest, Jesus Christ, to whom we can go at any time because he has made the perfect sacrifice and gives us direct access into the presence of God. Heb 10:19 says:

Having therefore brethren, confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.

There is no mention in the New Testament of priests in the early

---

<sup>77</sup>Philip Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 268.

church, and for the first two centuries there is no mention of a priesthood in the writings of the church Fathers. The two major offices mentioned in the New Testament for the oversight of the Church are that of elder and deacon. An overseer is designated as one who is called of God to teach and rule, and a deacon to minister in a practical serving capacity. There are two terms used for overseer in the New Testament—*presbuteros* and *episcopos*—which are translated elder and bishop respectively, but are used interchangeably.<sup>78</sup> Paul and Peter both use the terms ‘elder’ and ‘bishop’ to describe the same office. Therefore, in the New Testament ‘bishop’ and ‘elder’ are interchangeable terms used for the same office (responsible for ruling and teaching). The word *presbuteros* describes the position, while *episcopos* describes the function, as one who rules or oversees. The New Testament does not use the Greek term for priest, *hiereus*, to refer to an office of Christian ministry.

It is clear from the New Testament that there is a concept of ordination for Christian ministers—the public recognition and setting aside of an individual specifically called by God to assume the role of a pastor or elder. It is the public recognition by the Church of a gift sovereignly given by God and independent of any work of man. But such a role has nothing to do with an exclusive priesthood, for the New Testament teaches that all Christians have been set apart as a spiritual priesthood in the kingdom of God. Peter says:

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Pet. 2:5; Cf. Rev. 1:6).

Believers are those who are consecrated to and habitually engage in divine service. Christ would not have instituted a special class of individuals to a new priesthood because that function of mediation has been abrogated since he, himself, made a perfect sacrifice for sin, becoming the only mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5). The idea of a New Testament human mediating priesthood is not biblical. It undermines the biblical teaching of the exclusive nature of the person of Christ as priest and mediator between God and man.

---

<sup>78</sup>See Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Pet. 5:1-2; 1 Tim. 3:1-13, 5:17-19; Titus 1:5-7.39

## Baptism

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that baptism by water is the means of regeneration and forgiveness of sins.<sup>79</sup> Yet another error, the same as that of the Jews under the Old Testament dispensation when they taught that an individual entered into God's spiritual covenant and became a child of God through the rite of physical circumcision. This was a teaching repudiated by the apostle Paul,<sup>80</sup> who taught that though one may be circumcised physically and made part of the visible nation, that did not guarantee a spiritual circumcision or part in God's spiritual kingdom. This is why he says that not all Israel (those who are physically circumcised) are true Israel (those who have been circumcised spiritually in their hearts).<sup>81</sup> He points out that new life is not the result of a physical rite, but of faith. Abraham was justified and regenerated *before* circumcision was instituted. Physical circumcision was meant to signify circumcision of the heart by the Holy Spirit.

Just so, water baptism identifies one with the visible Church, just as

---

<sup>79</sup>*The Question and Answer Catholic Catechism* states: 'What is baptism? Baptism is the sacrament of spiritual rebirth. Through the symbolic action of washing with water and use of the appropriate ritual words, the baptized person is cleansed of all his sins and incorporated into Christ.

What are the effects of baptism? The effects of baptism are the removal of the guilt of sin and all punishment due to sin, conferral of the grace of regeneration and the infused virtues, incorporation into Christ and his Church, receiving the baptismal character and the right to heaven (John Hardon, *The Question and Answer Catholic Catechism* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), Questions 1140, 1151.

<sup>80</sup>For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God' (Rom. 2:28-29).

<sup>81</sup>Romans 9:6-7.

physical circumcision identified the Jews with the visible nation. But one can be physically baptized with water and not be baptized spiritually. It is Spirit baptism of the heart that brings about regeneration and incorporates one into the true, spiritual Church, the body of Christ. And this can never be separated from repentance and faith. The rite of water baptism, without repentance and faith, accomplishes nothing. It does not regenerate and has no special power of itself. Like physical circumcision, water baptism is meant to be a sign and a seal, signifying the uniting of an individual with Christ and identification with his death, burial and resurrection to newness of life in him.

## The Eucharist

### *Transubstantiation*

In its doctrine of the Eucharist, the Roman Catholic Church teaches that the elements of bread and wine are supernaturally and physically changed into the literal body and blood, and soul and divinity, of Christ. This is officially known as the doctrine of *transubstantiation*. To fully understand the implications of this teaching we need to grasp the fact that what this doctrine is stating is that the eucharistic wafer literally becomes God. Rome would have us believe that the elements of bread and wine retain their appearance but their nature is changed. They *appear* to be bread and wine, but Rome asserts that though we cannot see a change, nevertheless we are to believe that such a change has taken place. Rome claims that this has been the universal teaching of the Church from the very beginning and anathematizes all who would disagree with or deny it.<sup>82</sup>

This contradicts Scripture. Christ is physically in heaven and cannot be in more than one place at a time because he is a man with a physical body. Scripture teaches that he will not be physically present on the earth again until his second coming. It is also untrue to say that this was the universal teaching of the church from the very beginning. There are some Fathers who held to a literal view of the sacrament similar to the view of transubstantiation. But there were many Fathers who did not hold this position, but leaned toward a more figurative, spiritual view. Augustine, for example, interpreted John 6 in a figurative manner and held the Lord's

---

<sup>82</sup>The Council of Trent states: 'If any one denieth, that, in the sacrament of the most holy Eucharist, are contained truly, really, and substantially, the body and blood together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and consequently the whole Christ; but saith that He is only therein as in a sign, or in figure, or virtue: let him be anathema' (*The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, The Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist, Canon I. Taken from Philip Scahff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877), Volume II, p. 136).

presence to be spiritual rather than physical.<sup>83</sup> He states that when the Jews responded in faith to the preaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost, they drank the blood of Christ, thereby demonstrating that the terminology of eating and drinking is spiritual and not physical.<sup>84</sup>

And Pope Gelasius I at the end of the fifth century explicitly states that the elements of bread and wine are not changed in the eucharistic celebration. They retain their nature as bread and wine.<sup>85</sup>

### *The Mass: A Propitiatory Sacrifice*

The Roman Church teaches that in the mass—at *transubstantiation*—Christ is physically present on the altar and is offered and immolated as a

---

<sup>83</sup>Augustine states: 'If the sentence...seems to enjoin a crime or vice...it is figurative. "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man," says Christ, "and drink His blood, ye have no life in you." This seems to enjoin a crime or a vice; it is therefore a figure, enjoining that we should have a share in the sufferings of our Lord, and that we should retain a sweet and profitable memory of the fact that His flesh was wounded and crucified for us...The poor ye will always have with you, but Me ye will not always have"...He was speaking of His bodily presence. For, in respect of His majesty, His providence, His ineffable and invisible grace, His own words are fulfilled, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world. But in respect of the flesh He assumed as the Word..."ye will not have Him always." And why? Because He...ascended into heaven and is no longer here. He is there, indeed, sitting at the right hand of the Father; and He is here also, having never withdrawn the presence of His glory. In other words, in respect of His divine presence we always have Christ; in respect of His presence in the flesh it was rightly said to the disciples, "Me ye will not have always." In this respect the Church enjoyed His presence only for a few days: now it possesses Him by faith, without seeing Him with the eyes' (Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), Volume II, St. Augustin, *On Christian Doctrine* III.16.24, p. 563; Volume VII, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John*, Homily 50.13, p. 282-282).

<sup>84</sup>For on the sending down of the Holy Spirit after the Lord's passion, and resurrection, and ascension, when miracles were being done in the name of Him whom, as if dead, the persecuting Jews had despised, they were pricked in their hearts; and they who in their rage slew Him were changed and believed; and they who in their rage shed His blood, now in the spirit of faith drank it; to wit, those three thousand, and those five thousand Jews...(Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Phillip Schaff, Editor(Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995), *The Works of St. Augustin*, On the Gospel of John, Tractate XL.2, p. 225

<sup>85</sup>The sacrament which we receive of the body and blood of Christ is a divine thing. Wherefore also by means of it we are made partakers of the divine nature. Yet the substance or nature of the bread and wine does not cease to be. And certainly the image and likeness of the body and blood of Christ is set out in the celebration of the mysteries...Thus, as the elements pass into this, that is, the divine substance by the Holy Ghost, and none the less remain in their own proper nature, so they show that the principal mystery itself, the efficacy and virtue of which they truly make present (repraesentant) to us, consists in this, that the two natures remain each in its own proper being so that there is one Christ because He is whole and real (Pope Gelasius I, *On the Two Natures of Christ*. Taken from Darwell Stone, *A History of the Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* (London: Longmans, Green, 1909), Vol. I, p. 102).

propitiatory sacrifice for sin in the same way as he was offered and immolated as a sacrifice for sin on the cross.<sup>86</sup> It teaches that the fathers of the church have universally held this particular view of the eucharistic celebration as a propitiatory sacrifice. It likewise anathematizes anyone who would disagree with and deny this to be true<sup>87</sup> John Hardon expresses the official Roman Catholic position in these words:

The Sacrifice of the Cross is continued on earth through the Sacrifice of the Mass...It is the Sacrifice in which Christ is offered under the species of bread and wine in an unbloody manner. The Sacrifice of the altar, then, is no mere empty commemoration of the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ, but a true and proper act of Sacrifice. Christ, the eternal High Priest, in an unbloody way offers himself a most acceptable Victim to the eternal Father, as he did upon the Cross...In the Mass, no less than on Calvary, Jesus really offers his life to his heavenly Father...It is the same victim, Jesus Christ, whose human life (united with the divinity) is sacrificed...The Mass is the same sacrifice as that of the Cross, to continue on earth until the end of time...The Mass, therefore, no less than the Cross, is expiatory for sins.<sup>88</sup>

This teaching is a direct contradiction of Scripture. The bible teaches that Christ's death, his propitiatory sacrifice, and the offering of his body as a sacrifice for sin was done once for all and cannot be repeated or perpetuated through time. As a result, the New Testament teaches there are

---

<sup>86</sup>The Council of Trent states: 'And forasmuch as, in this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the mass, that same Christ is contained and immolated in an unbloody manner who once offered himself in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross; the holy Synod teaches, that this sacrifice is truly propitiatory' (*The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Doctrine on the Sacrifice of the Mass, Chapter II. Cited by Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper & Sons, 1877), Volume II, p. 179).

<sup>87</sup>The Council of Trent states: 'If any one saith, that the sacrifice of the mass is only a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving; or, that it is a bare commemoration of the sacrifice consummated on the cross, but not a propitiatory sacrifice; or, that it profits him only who receives; and that it ought not to be offered for the living and the dead for sins, pains, satisfactions, and other necessities: let him be anathema' (*The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, On the Sacrifice of the Mass, Canon III. Cited by Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877), Volume II, p. 185).

<sup>88</sup>John Hardon, *The Question and Answer Catholic Catechism* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), Questions #1264, 1265, 1269, 1277.

now no more offerings or sacrifices for sin.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, the Roman sacrament cannot be a true propitiatory sacrifice because such a sacrifice requires the death of the victim and in the mass Christ does not die again. The Roman Catholic teaching undermines the sufficiency and exclusive nature of the atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary.

In addition, the early Church did not generally view the Eucharist as a propitiatory sacrifice for sin but as a spiritual sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving and as a memorial and commemoration of the once for all sacrifice of Christ on the cross. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the mass is the fulfillment of the prophecy in Malachi 1:11 predicting a bloodless and pure sacrifice which would be universally offered throughout the world. However, the Fathers of the early Church taught that the sacrifice foretold by Malachi was not the renewed immolation Christ in the mass but the prayers and contrite, broken spirits of true believers throughout the world.<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>89</sup>Knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died He died to sin once for all...Who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself...But now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself...So Christ, also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many...By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all...But He, having offered one sacrifice for sin for all time, sat down at the right hand of God...For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified...Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin (Rom. 6:9-10; Heb. 7:27, 9:26,28, 10:10,12,14,18).

<sup>90</sup>These comments by Eusebius of Caesarea (263-340 A.D.) on the eucharist reflect this point of view: 'Having then received the memory of this sacrifice to celebrate upon the Table by means of the symbols of His body and His saving blood, according to the laws of the new covenant...Plainly then are here signified the mystic Christ and the solemn sacrifices of the Table of Christ, through which in our happy sacrificial rites...we have been taught to offer all life long bloodless and reasonable and acceptable sacrifices to the supreme God through His High priest...All these things then, which when divinely foretold of old, are being celebrated among all the nations at the present time...'From the rising of the sun even unto its setting My name has been glorified among the nations; and in every place incense is offered unto my name, and a pure sacrifice'. We sacrifice then to the supreme God a sacrifice of praise; we sacrifice the divine and solemn and most holy sacrifice; we sacrifice in a new way according to the new covenant the pure sacrifice. 'A contrite heart' has been called 'a sacrifice to God.' 'A contrite and humbled heart God will not despise.' And moreover we burn the incense spoken of by the prophet, in every place bringing to Him the sweet smelling fruit of the excellent theology, offering it by means of our prayers to Him...We then both sacrifice and burn incense, celebrating the memory of the great sacrifice in the mysteries which He has delivered to us and bringing to God our thanksgiving for our salvation...by means of pious hymns and prayers, and also wholly dedicating ourselves to Him and to His High priest, the Word Himself, making our offering...in body and soul' (*Demonstratio Evangelicæ* I.x.28-38. Cited in Darwell Stone, *A History of the Doctrine of the Eucharist* (London: Longmans, Green, 1909), Volume I, pp. 110-111).

## Confession and Penance

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that private confession of sins to a priest (known as auricular confession), his absolution and the performance of the prescribed penance, is necessary for salvation and the forgiveness of sins,<sup>91</sup> and that this has been the universal practice of the Church from its inception. John Hardon states:

Penance...is necessary because we must expiate and make reparation for the punishment which is due our sins....We make satisfaction for our sins by every good act we perform in the state of grace but especially by prayer, penance and the practice of charity.<sup>92</sup>

Again, these teachings are false. Firstly, Christ did not institute a human priesthood. There is no teaching of auricular confession in the entirety of the New Testament. Christ delegated to his apostles the declarative authority to teach and proclaim the gospel and to offer men forgiveness of sins in response to the gospel. He did not grant them judicial authority to forgive sins. That right belongs to him alone. Men are to go directly to Christ for that purpose. Nor do the Scriptures advocate penance in order to gain forgiveness of sins. Such teaching adds works to the gospel and seriously undermines the biblical teaching of the sufficiency of the atonement of Christ.

Historically the early Church did not practice auricular confession.

---

<sup>91</sup>The Council of Trent states: 'If any one denieth, either that sacramental confession was instituted, or is necessary to salvation, of divine right; or saith, that the manner of confessing secretly to the priest alone, which the Church hath ever observed from the beginning, and doth observe, is alien from the institution and command of Christ, and is a human invention: let him be anathema' (*The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, On the Most Holy Sacrament of Penance, Canon VI. Taken from Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877), Volume II, p. 165-166).

<sup>92</sup>John Hardon, *The Question and Answer Catholic Catechism* (Doubleday: New York, 1981), Questions #1320, 1392.

The whole process of confession, known as *exomologesis*, began late in the second century, but was public in nature. It was done for very grave sin only, and could be done only once in a person's lifetime.<sup>93</sup> There was no judicial priestly absolution but simply a declarative authority by the priest stating that the person had fulfilled his penitential duties and could be restored to the Church and partake of the sacrament. J.N.D. Kelly gives the following historical summary of the penitential practice of the early Church:

With the dawn of the third century the rough outlines of a recognized penitential discipline were beginning to take shape. In spite of the ingenious arguments of certain scholars, there are still no signs of a sacrament of private penance (i.e. confession to a priest, followed by absolution and the imposition of a penance) such as Catholic Christendom knows to-day. The system which seems to have existed in the Church at this time, and for centuries afterwards, was wholly public, involving confession, a period of penance and exclusion from communion, and formal absolution and restoration—the whole process being called *exomologesis*....Indeed, for the lesser sins which even good Christians daily commit and can scarcely avoid, no ecclesiastical censure seems to have been thought necessary; individuals were expected to deal with them themselves by prayer, almsgiving and mutual forgiveness. Public penance was for graver sins; it was, as far as we know, universal, and was an extremely solemn affair, capable of being undergone only once in a lifetime.<sup>94</sup>

---

<sup>93</sup>Augustine gives the following summation of how sins were forgiven in the Church in the early fifth century and the fact that penance was done publically and only for very grave sin: 'When ye have been baptized, hold fast a good life in the commandments of God, that ye may guard your Baptism even unto the end. I do not tell you that ye will live here without sin; but they are venial, without which this life is not. For the sake of all sins was Baptism provided; for the sake of light sins, without which we cannot be, was prayer provided. What hath the Prayer? 'Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors.' Once for all we have washing in Baptism, every day we have washing in prayer. Only, do not commit those things for which ye must needs be separated from Christ's body: which be far from you! For those whom ye have seen doing penance, have committed heinous things, either adulteries or some enormous crimes: for these they do penance. Because if theirs had been light sins, to blot out these daily prayer would suffice. In three ways then are sins remitted in the Church; by Baptism, by prayer, by the greater humility of penance' (Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), Volume III, St. Augustin, *On The Creed* 15, 16).

<sup>94</sup>J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), pp. 216-217

Private (auricular) confession to a priest did not become a practice in the Church until the seventh or eighth centuries,<sup>95</sup> and as late as the thirteenth century there was debate in the Church over whether or not confession of sin to a priest was necessary for forgiveness of sins.<sup>96</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup>The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms these facts: 'During the first centuries the reconciliation of Christians who had committed particularly grave sins after their Baptism (for example, idolatry, murder, or adultery) was tied to a very rigorous discipline, according to which penitents had to do public penance for their sins, often for years, before receiving reconciliation. To this "order of penitents" (which concerned only certain grave sins), one was only rarely admitted and in certain regions only once in a lifetime. During the seventh century Irish missionaries, inspired by the Eastern monastic tradition, took to continental Europe the "private" practice of penance, which does not require public and prolonged completion of penitential works before reconciliation with the Church. From that time on, the sacrament has been performed in secret between penitent and priest. This new practice envisioned the possibility of repetition and so opened the way to a regular frequenting of this sacrament. It allowed the forgiveness of grave sins and venial sins to be integrated into one sacramental celebration. In its main lines this is the form of penance that the Church has practiced down to our day' (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Rome: Urbi et Orbi, 1994), #1447).

<sup>96</sup>The Church historian Philip Schaff states: 'At the close of the twelfth century a complete change was made in the doctrine of penance....The first elements added by the medieval system were that confession to the priest and absolution by the priest are necessary conditions for pardon. Peter the Lombard did not make the mediation of the priest a requirement, but declared that confession to God was sufficient. In his time, he says, there was no agreement on three aspects of penance: first, whether contrition for sin was not all that was necessary for its remission; second, whether confession to the priest was essential; and third, whether confession to a layman was insufficient. The opinions handed down from the Fathers, he asserts, were diverse, if not antagonistic' (*History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1907), Volume V, p. 731. Peter the Lombard, *Sentences*, XVII.1).

## Purgatory

The Roman Catholic Church claims that purgatory is an intermediate state between earth and heaven. Departed souls who die in a state of grace but who need to be purged from sin, are consigned to purgatory in order to expiate the temporal punishment still due to their sin.<sup>97</sup> It claims that this teaching was universally held in the early Church as evidenced by the funerary inscriptions from that time and the fact that the early Church prayed for the dead. And this is given explicit authority from 2 Maccabees and implicit authority from a number of New Testament passages.

These assertions are false. For at least the first two centuries there was no mention of purgatory in the Church. In all the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, Irenaeus and Justin Martyr there is not the slightest reference to purgatory. Rome claims that the early Church nevertheless believed in purgatory because believers prayed for the dead. This was becoming a common practice by the beginning of the third century but it does not, in itself, prove that the early Church believed in the existence of a purgatory. The written prayers which have survived, and the evidence from the catacombs and burial inscriptions indicate that the early Church believed deceased Christians to be residing in peace and happiness and the nature of the prayers offered for them were that they might have a greater experience of these. As early as Tertullian, in the late second and beginning of the third century, these prayers often used the Latin term *refrigerium* as a request of God on behalf of departed Christians, a term which means 'refreshment' or 'to refresh' and came to embody the concept of heavenly happiness. So even though the early Church prayed for the dead, it does

---

<sup>97</sup>The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: 'All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven. The Church gives the name *Purgatory* to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Rome: Urbi et Orbi, 1994), #1030, 1031).

not support the concept of a purgatory for the nature of the prayers themselves indicate the Church did not believe the dead to be residing in a place of suffering.

The roots of the teaching on purgatory can be traced to pagan Greek religion and philosophy in such writings as the Roman poet Virgil's *Aeneid* and especially through the influence of Plato, whose views were introduced into the Church primarily through Origen, who is considered a heretic by the Roman Catholic Church. He was an influential promoter of the concept of purgation through suffering after death. These views had a major influence on such Fathers as Ambrose, Jerome and most importantly Augustine, who more fully developed the Roman Catholic teaching on purgatory. He, in turn, greatly influenced Gregory the Great and is the major authority appealed to by all subsequent Roman Catholic theologians. In fact, after Augustine, there is very little that is added by others to his basic teaching on the concept and nature of purgatory.

The Scriptural authority for the doctrine is taken primarily from an Apocryphal book—2 Maccabees—which is not Scripture and therefore not inspired and which for centuries, was rejected as being part of the canon of Scripture by the Roman Catholic Church itself. Historically, as we have seen, neither this book, nor any of the Apocrypha, was regarded by the Church as authoritative for defining issues of doctrine. In addition, 2 Maccabees itself does not teach the concept of purgatory.

Paul warns believers in Colossians 2:8 to beware of being taken captive by hollow and deceptive philosophy which depends upon human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. Purgatory is a pagan Greek and philosophical concept which finds its source in the teachings of men rather than the Word of God. It perverts the biblical teaching of the sacrifice of Christ and the way forgiveness of sins is appropriated. Scripture teaches that a believer is complete in Christ and that the work of Christ is sufficient to deal with the entire penalty for sin. It is a contradiction of Scripture to add the works of man and the idea of expiating sin through suffering as a basis of salvation.<sup>98</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> See footnote #17

## Indulgences

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that in addition to the mass, penance, purgatory and good works, sin can be expiated through indulgences. Many know that the doctrines of purgatory and indulgences were the catalyst for the Reformation but are unaware that they are still part of the official teaching of the Church. While the abuses which led to the Reformation have been repudiated, the actual doctrine of indulgences itself is still in practice. The Church of Rome teaches that through indulgences the temporal punishment for sin can be expiated. Indulgences are applied through the authority of the pope from what is known as the Treasury of Satisfaction or Merit. This treasury consists of the merit of Christ in addition to the merit of all the saints, and especially Mary, and can be applied to individuals as remission for sins thereby mitigating the punishment due them either here or in purgatory. In 1967 Pope Paul VI issued an encyclical on Indulgences entitled *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*. This encyclical reaffirms the medieval teaching:

The doctrine of purgatory clearly demonstrates that even when the guilt of sin has been taken away, punishment for it or the consequences of it may remain to be expiated and cleansed. They often are. In fact, in purgatory the souls of those 'who died in the charity of God and truly repentant, but who had not made satisfaction with adequate penance for their sins and omissions' are cleansed after death with punishments designed to purge away their debt...Following in Christ's steps, those who believe in him have always tried to help one another along the path which leads to the heavenly Father, through prayer, the exchange of spiritual goods and penitential expiation. The more they have been immersed in the fervor of love, the more they have imitated Christ in his sufferings. They have carried their crosses to make expiation **for their** own sins and the sins of others. They were convinced that they could help their brothers to obtain salvation from God who is the Father of mercies. This is the very ancient dogma called the Communion of Saints....The 'treasury of

the Church' is the infinite value, which can never be exhausted, which Christ's merits have before God. They were offered so that the whole of mankind could be set free from sin and attain communion with the Father. In Christ, the Redeemer himself, the satisfactions and merits of his Redemption exist and find their efficacy. This treasury includes as well the prayers and good works of the Blessed Virgin Mary. They are truly immense, unfathomable and even pristine in their value before God. In the treasury, too, are the prayers and good works of all the saints, all those who have followed in the footsteps of Christ the Lord and by his grace have made their lives holy and carried out the mission the Father entrusted to them. In this way they attained their own salvation and at the same time cooperated in saving their brothers in the unity of the Mystical Body....God's only-begotten Son....has won a treasure for the militant Church....he has entrusted it to blessed Peter, the key-bearer of heaven, and to his successors who are Christ's vicars on earth, so that they may distribute it to the faithful for their salvation. They may apply it with mercy for reasonable causes to all who have repented for and have confessed their sins. At times they may remit completely, and at other times only partially, the temporal punishment due to sin in a general as well as in special ways (insofar as they judge it to be fitting in the sight of the Lord). The merits of the Blessed Mother of God and of all the elect....are known to add further to this treasure.<sup>99</sup>

This teaching embraces a concept of vicarious atonement in which individual saints, in addition to the atonement of Christ, are able to make atonement for the sins of other believers. We should understand clearly that the official dogma of the Church does not teach that indulgences forgive sin, they merely remit the temporal punishment due to them. Indulgences are not meant to be a substitute for confession, repentance and absolution.

But this theory of indulgences and of a treasury of merit developed very late in the history of the Church. It was not until the thirteenth century that the whole idea of a treasury first emerged. Ludwig Ott affirms this:

The teaching of the existence of the *thesaurus Ecclesiae* and of the Church's power over it was developed by the Scholastic Theologians at the beginning of the 13th century (Hugo of St. Cher), and was officially proposed by Pope Clement VI in the jubilee Bull '*Unigenitus Dei Filius*' (1343),

---

<sup>99</sup>Paul VI, *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*, January 1, 1967.

and later by Pope Leo X in the Indulgence Decretal '*Cum postquam*' (1518), but was not defined.<sup>100</sup>

Indulgences were first introduced in the eleventh century and initially were granted on the basis of the Roman interpretation of the power of the keys. Later, there developed the theory of the treasury of merit. Popes began to offer them in order to raise money for personal building projects, or for the promotion of personal causes such as the Crusades or the extermination of heresy. The practice became so corrupted that the Church actually taught that by the payment of money one could buy an indulgence and secure the release of souls in purgatory.

The theory and practice of indulgences and the treasury of merit certainly finds no sanction in the Scriptures or writings of the Church Fathers. It is non-existent in these sources and therefore can claim no biblical or historical validation. The indulgence teaching is the logical outcome of a corrupt theology. It is a serious depreciation of the sufficiency and exclusive nature of the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ.

---

<sup>100</sup>Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (Rockford: Tan, 1974), p. 443).

## No Salvation Outside the Roman Catholic Church

**H**istorically, the Roman Catholic Church has taught that she is the one true Church established by Jesus Christ and that she *alone* is the means of salvation, outside of which no one can be saved. This is the clear meaning of the anathemas issued by papal decrees and the Roman Councils such as Trent and Vatican I. These decrees have historically been directed against Orthodox, Protestant and other groups who have separated themselves from communion with Rome due to the teachings of the Church. This is validated from the following Papal and Conciliar decrees:

**POPE BONIFACE VIII (1302 A.D.):** So when the Greeks and others say that they were not committed to the care of Peter and his successors, they must confess that they are not of Christ's sheep, even as the Lord says in John, 'There is one fold and one shepherd'....Furthermore, that every human creature is subject to the Roman pontiff,—this we declare, say, define, and pronounce to be altogether necessary to salvation.<sup>101</sup>

**POPE INNOCENT III (1198-1216 A.D.):** By the heart we believe and by the mouth we confess the one Church, not of heretics but the Holy Roman, Catholic, and Apostolic (Church) outside which we believe that no one is saved.<sup>102</sup>

**POPE CLEMENT VI (1342-1352 A.D.):** No man of the wayfarers outside the faith of this Church, and outside the obedience of the Pope of Rome, can finally be saved.<sup>103</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup>From the Bull *Unam Sanctam*. Found in Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1910), Volume VI, pp. 25-27.

<sup>102</sup>From the letter *Eius exemplo*. Found in Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma* (London: Herder, 1954), p. 166, #423.

<sup>103</sup>From the letter *Super quibusdam*. Found in Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma* (London: Herder, 1954), p. 204, #570b.

THE COUNCIL OF FLORENCE (1438-1445 A.D.): The sacrosanct Roman Church....firmly believes, professes, and proclaims that those not living within the Catholic Church, not only pagans, but also Jews and heretics and schismatics cannot become participants in eternal life, but will depart 'into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels' (Matt. 25:41), unless before the end of life the same have been added to the flock; and that the unity of ecclesiastical body is so strong that only to those remaining in it are the sacraments of the Church of benefit for salvation, and do fastings, and almsgiving, and other functions of piety and exercises of Christian service produce eternal reward, and that no one, whatever almsgiving he has practiced, even if he has shed blood for the name of Christ, can be saved, unless he has remained in the bosom and unity of the Catholic Church.<sup>104</sup>

POPE PIUS IX (1846-1878 A.D.): For, it must be held by faith that outside the Apostolic Roman Church, no one can be saved; that this is the only ark of salvation; that he who shall not have entered therein will perish in the flood; but, on the other hand, it is necessary to hold for certain that they who labor in ignorance of the true religion, if this ignorance is invincible, are not stained by any guilt in this matter in the eyes of God...But the Catholic dogma that no one can be saved outside the Catholic Church is well-known; and also that those who are obstinate toward the authority and definitions of the same Church, and who persistently separate themselves from the unity of the Church, and from the Roman Pontiff, the successor of Peter, to whom 'the guardianship of the vine has been entrusted by the Savior,' cannot obtain eternal salvation.<sup>105</sup>

VATICAN I (1869-1870): Further, all those things are to be believed with divine and Catholic faith which are contained in the Word of God, written or handed down, and which the Church, either by a solemn judgment, or by her ordinary and universal magisterium, proposes for belief as having been divinely revealed. And since, without faith, it is impossible to please God, and to attain to the fellowship of his children, therefore without faith no one has ever attained justification, nor will any one obtain eternal life unless he shall have persevered in faith unto the end...The first condition of salvation is to keep the rule of the true faith.

---

<sup>104</sup>Found in Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma* (London: Herder, 1954), #714.

<sup>105</sup>From the Allocution, *Singulari quaedem*. <sup>2</sup>Found in Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma* (London: Herder, 1954), 1647, 1677.

If any one, therefore, shall say that blessed Peter the Apostle was not appointed the Prince of all the Apostles and the visible Head of the whole Church militant; or that the same directly and immediately received from the same our Lord Jesus Christ a primacy of honor only, and not of true and proper jurisdiction: let him be anathema.

If, then, any should deny that it is by institution of Christ the Lord, or by divine right, that blessed Peter should have a perpetual line of successors in the Primacy over the universal Church, or that the Roman Pontiff is the successor of blessed Peter in this primacy: let him be anathema.

This is the teaching of Catholic truth, from which no one can deviate without loss of faith and salvation.<sup>106</sup>

**POPE PIUS XII:** Actually only those are to be numbered among the members of the Church who have received the laver of regeneration and profess the true faith, and have not, to their misfortune, separated themselves from the structure of the Body, or for very serious sins have not been excluded by lawful authority. 'For in one spirit,' says the Apostle, 'were we all baptized into one Body, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether bond or free' (1 Cor. 12:13). So, just as the true community of the faithful of Christ there is only one Body, one Spirit, one Lord, and one Baptism, so there can only be one faith (cf. Eph. 4:5); and so he who refuses to hear the Church, as the Lord bids 'let him be as the heathen and publican' (cf. Matt. 18:17). Therefore, those who are divided from one another in faith or in government cannot live in the unity of such a body, and in its one divine spirit.<sup>107</sup>

The historic position of the Roman Catholic Church is clearly and unambiguously articulated in these decrees. And yet, at Vatican II the Church of Rome completely reversed its former position. What for centuries it had enunciated with an authoritative anathema it has now repudiated. Where it stated in no uncertain terms that the Protestant teachings were heretical and that the Protestant churches were not truly Christian, it now calls separated brethren and receives as legitimately Christian. Vatican II states:

---

<sup>106</sup>Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper, 1877), Dogmatic Decrees of the Vatican Council, Chp. III, On Faith, pp. 244-245; *First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ*, Chp. I, pp. 259-260; Chp. II, pp. 261-262; Chp. III, p. 263.

<sup>107</sup>*Mystici Corporis*. Found in Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma* (London: Herder, 1954), #2286.

The Church recognizes that in many ways she is linked with those who, being baptized, are honored with the name of Christian, though they do not profess the faith in its entirety or do not preserve unity of communion with the successor of Peter. For there are many who honor sacred Scripture, taking it as a norm of belief and of action, and who show a true religious zeal. They lovingly believe in God the Father Almighty and in Christ, Son of God and Savior. They are consecrated by baptism, through which they are united with Christ. They also recognize and receive other sacraments within their own Churches or ecclesiastical communities. Many of them rejoice in the episcopate, celebrate the Holy Eucharist, and cultivate devotion toward the Virgin Mother of God. They also share with us in prayer and other spiritual benefits.

Likewise, we can say that in some real way they are joined with us in the Holy Spirit, for to them also He gives His gifts and graces, and is thereby operative among them with His sanctifying power. Some indeed He has strengthened to the extent of the shedding of their blood. In all of Christ's disciples the Spirit arouses the desire to be peacefully united in the manner determined by Christ, as one flock under one shepherd, and He prompts them to pursue this goal.<sup>108</sup>

This teaching, while conciliatory, is completely contradictory to the position of the Roman Church historically. The anathemas of Rome against the Protestant Church are doctrinal in nature—they have to do with the sacraments, justification, the meaning of salvation, the papacy and Mary. The anathemas are therefore proven to be meaningless. If these teachings are heretical, then Rome should stand its ground. If not, the Church of Rome was in error to anathematize the teachings in the first place. This is simply another example of the inconsistency of the Church with its own history and why the subtitle of this book is *Claims and Contradictions*.

---

<sup>108</sup>*The Documents of Vatican II* (Chicago: Follett, 1966), pp. 33-34.

## Justification

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that justification is a process originating with infused grace implanted in the soul, which is effected through water baptism.<sup>109</sup> This enables an individual to do personal acts of righteousness which are meritorious before God and merit the reward of heaven.<sup>110</sup> This is a state that can be lost through mortal sin and must be regained and maintained through the sacraments of confession and penance, the eucharist and good works such as fasting, alms-giving and asceticism. The Council of Trent decreed that apart from acceptance of adherence to its teaching on justification that no one could be justified.<sup>111</sup>

This teaching contradicts the Word of God. Scripture teaches that Justification is an eternal declaration of righteousness and acceptance by

---

<sup>109</sup>The Council of Trent states: 'A description of the Justification of the impious is indicated—as being a translation, from that state wherein man is born a child of Adam, to the state of grace, and of the adoption of the sons of God, through the second Adam, Jesus Christ, our Saviour. And this translation, since the promulgation of the the Gospel, can not be effected, without the laver of regeneration, or the desire thereof, as it is written: unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he can not enter into the Kingdom of God....Justification....is not the remission of sins merely, but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man, through the voluntary reception of the grace, and of the gifts, whereby man of unjust becomes just, and of an enemy a friend, so that he may be an heir according to the hope of life everlasting' (*The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Found in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1919 ed.), Decree on Justification, Chapter IV, VII).

<sup>110</sup>Roman Catholic theologian, Ludwig Ott, affirms this teaching in these words: 'The Council of Trent teaches that for the justified eternal life is both a gift or grace promised by God and a reward for his own good works and merits. As God's grace is the presupposition and foundation of good works, by which man merits eternal life, so salutary works are, at the same time gifts of God and meritorious acts of man...Blessedness in heaven is the reward for good works performed on this earth, and rewards and merit are correlative concepts...A just man merits for himself through each good work...eternal life (if he dies in a state of grace). (*Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (Rockford: Tan, 1974), pp. 264, 267).

<sup>111</sup>This Catholic doctrine on justification, which whosoever does not faithfully and firmly accept cannot be justified (*The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Found in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1919 ed.), Decree on Justification.

God. It is based on the imputed righteousness of Christ, his own perfect obedience in fulfilling all the requirements of the law—his sinless life and perfect and complete atonement on the cross. On that cross, Christ paid the entire penalty of the judgment and condemnation due to sin.<sup>112</sup> And on the basis of the perfect atonement of Christ, God offers to men complete and eternal forgiveness and favor, eternal deliverance from all condemnation and judgment, adoption into the family of God and the gift of eternal life.<sup>113</sup> This salvation is applied to the individual through repentance and faith in Christ alone. Scripture teaches that the righteousness which is the basis of justification is not the personal righteousness of the believer under the influence of grace, but the very righteousness of Christ himself which is received as a gift.<sup>114</sup> Christ has perfectly fulfilled the Law of God as man's substitute. When an individual is united spiritually to Christ, his righteousness is imputed to the believer just as the believer's sin was imputed to Christ.

---

<sup>110</sup>He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree...Surely our griefs He Himself bore and our sorrows He carried...He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to His own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him...He Himself is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only but also for those of the whole world' (1 Pet. 2:24; Is. 53:4-6; 1 Jn. 2:2).

<sup>111</sup>Having forgiven us all our transgressions, having cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross..Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life...My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand' (Col. 2:13-14; Jn. 5:24; Jn. 10:27-29).

<sup>114</sup>But to the one who does not work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness *apart from works*...But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ...And may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith...Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith...Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him...Much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the *gift of righteousness*, will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the *obedience of the One* the many will be made righteous (Rom. 4:5-6; Rom. 3:21-22; Phil. 3:9; Rom. 3:24-25; Rom. 5:9; Rom. 5:17-19).

As Paul states in Romans 4:5-6: 'But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned (imputed) as (unto) righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing upon the man to whom God reckons (imputes) righteousness apart from works.' God demands perfection because he is holy. Christ has achieved a perfect righteousness for us and God graciously gives us that righteousness as a gift which eternally justifies us before him. Therefore, justification is not based upon the works of personal obedience to the law of God but by faith in Christ alone. To make personal works a part of justification is to pervert the biblical meaning of grace.<sup>115</sup> But the Roman Catholic Church has officially condemned the teaching that an individual is formally justified by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ himself and insists that justification is based on the personal works of the individual.<sup>116</sup>

The Roman Catholic teaching contradicts Scripture because it shifts the foundation of justification from the imputed righteousness of Christ to an imparted grace which enables a person to establish his own righteousness as a basis for justification. This undermines the teaching of Scripture on the sufficiency of the atonement of Christ and the nature of justification. It perverts the message of the gospel by teaching that human works are meritorious before God in gaining heaven.

The Roman Catholic Church confuses sanctification with justification. It teaches that the two are equivalent terms. However, Scripture separates them into two distinct aspects of the salvation that is found in Christ. Both justification and sanctification flow from a person's union with Christ.<sup>117</sup> It is impossible for a person to be truly united to Christ

---

<sup>115</sup>But if it is by grace, it is *no longer on the basis of works*, otherwise grace is no longer grace...He saved us, *not on the basis of deeds* which we have done *in righteousness*, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life...The righteous man shall live by faith...Therefore having been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...By the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin...For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God; *not as a result of works*, that no one should boast...For we maintain that a man is justified by faith *apart from the works of the Law*' (Rom. 11:6; Titus 3:5-7; Rom. 1:17; Rom. 3:20; Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 3:28).

<sup>116</sup>The Council of Trent states: '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' (The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, Found in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1919 ed.), Decree on Justification, Canon X).

and be justified and not also be sanctified. The Reformers were unanimous in affirming the necessity for the works of sanctification.<sup>118</sup> But the works of sanctification are not the basis for our justification. The basis for our justification is the perfect life and work of Christ. The work of sanctification is a process by which a person, united to Christ, becomes progressively conformed to his character by the power of the Holy Spirit. Such a life is the fruit of true faith. Saving faith proves itself in the works or fruits of a transformed life.

So, on the one hand, Paul says that justification is by faith apart from works (Rom. 3:28). But James warns us that true faith is a faith that works and that a man cannot be justified by a faith that does not produce works (Js. 2:14-26). He is not contradicting Paul but explaining that although a man is justified by faith alone, the faith that justifies him is a certain kind of faith. It is a faith that manifests its reality in good works. As the Reformer's used to put it: 'A man is saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.' Because a true Christian is united to Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, he will manifest that union in a life of holiness and obedience. If an individual claims he is justified and yet does not live a holy life, he is deceived. His faith is vain and empty.<sup>119</sup>

---

<sup>117</sup>But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30).

<sup>118</sup>The Reformers are constantly misrepresented on this point. They never taught that a person could be justified and then live a life devoid of good works. Luther states: 'From all this it is easy to perceive on what principle good works are to be cast aside or embraced, and by what rule all teachings put forth concerning works are to be understood. For if works are brought forward as grounds of justification, and are done under the false persuasion that we can pretend to be justified by them, they lay on us the yoke of necessity, and extinguish liberty along with faith, and by this very addition to their use they become no longer good, but really worthy of condemnation...We do not then reject good works; nay, we embrace them and teach them in the highest degree. It is not on their own account that we condemn them, but on account of this impious addition to them and the perverse notion of seeking justification by them....It is not from works that we are set free by the faith of Christ, but from the belief in works, that is from foolishly presuming to seek justification through works...Justification does not depend on our works, although good works neither can nor ought to be absent' (Henry Wace and C.A. Buchheim, Ed., *Luther's Primary Works* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1896), *Concerning Christian Liberty*, pp. 277, 288. See also John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III, Chap. 16.1, 17.12).

<sup>119</sup>Faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself...Faith without works is useless...And by this we know we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him....No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin because he is born of God' (Js. 2:17,20; 1 Jn. 2:3-4, 3:9).

## Repentance and Faith

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that repentance actually means penance, human works which earn forgiveness, and expiate and atone for personal sins.<sup>120</sup> This teaching is false. The word repentance means a turning from and forsaking of sin, self and the world,<sup>121</sup> not works to atone for one's own sin. Such a teaching is contradictory to Scripture, a perversion of the gospel and undermines the sufficiency of the atonement of Jesus Christ.

The Roman Church teaches that faith is intellectual assent to divine revelation and the teachings of the Church. According to Rome, an individual must adhere to every dogma decreed by the Church to possess

---

<sup>120</sup>This Roman Catholic teaching is affirmed by these official statements from Roman Catholic theologian John Hardon, S.J.: 'Penance means repentance or satisfaction for sin...The virtue of penance is necessary for a sinner to be reconciled with God. If we expect His forgiveness, we must repent. Penance is also necessary because we must expiate and make reparation for the punishment which is due for our sins....We make satisfaction for our sins by every good act we perform in the state of grace, but especially by prayer, penance, and the practice of charity...All prayer merits satisfaction for sin...Penance for sin is not only bodily, like fast and abstinence, but also spiritual, like restraining curiosity or conversation and avoiding otherwise legitimate recreation. Moreover, the patient acceptance of trials or humiliations sent by God is expiatory. Finally, the practice of charity toward others is a powerful satisfaction for our lack of charity toward God...Extra-sacramental satisfaction is every form of expiation offered to God outside the sacrament of penance. Our works of satisfaction are meritorious if they are done while in a state of grace and in a spirit of penance' (The Question and Answer Catholic Catechism (Garden City: Image, 1981), Questions 1318, 1320, 1392, 1395).

<sup>121</sup>Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct,' declares the Lord God. 'Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,' declares the Lord God. 'Therefore, repent and live.'...If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple...No one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions (Ezek. 18:30-32; Lk. 14:26,27,33).

saving faith.<sup>122</sup> But the biblical meaning of faith is that of an exclusive trust and commitment to the person of Christ *alone* for salvation. It means more than believing certain things to be true about Christ. It actually means receiving him into one's life through repentance, trust and commitment;<sup>123</sup> trusting him *alone* as personal Saviour and committing one's life unreservedly to him as Lord to be his follower and to love him supremely. The Church of Rome has perverted the meaning of faith by shifting its focus from trust in and commitment to Christ alone to the Church, its sacraments and one's own works. Faith is then emptied of the essential and biblical elements of true repentance, and trust and commitment to the person of Christ in a direct and personal sense.

---

<sup>122</sup>Dogma in its strict signification is the object of both Divine Faith (Fides Divina) and Catholic Faith (Fides Catholica); it is the object of the Divine Faith...by reason of its Divine Revelation; it is the object of Catholic Faith...on account of its infallible doctrinal definition by the Church. If a baptised person deliberately denies or doubts a dogma properly so-called, he is guilty of the sin of heresy (*Codex Iuris Canonici* 1325, Par. 2), and automatically becomes subject to the punishment of excommunication (*Codex Iuris Canonici* 2314, Par. 1).

As far as the content of justifying faith is concerned, the so-called fiducial faith does not suffice. What is demanded is theological or dogmatic faith (confessional faith) which consists in the firm acceptance of the Divine truths of Revelation, on the authority of God Revealing...According to the testimony of Holy Writ, faith and indeed dogmatic faith, is the indispensable prerequisite for the achieving of eternal salvation (Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (Rockford: Tan, 1974), p. 253.

<sup>123</sup>But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God, even to those who believe in His name...As you therefore have received Christ Jesus as Lord, so walk in Him' (Jn. 1:12; Col. 2:6).

## Summary and Conclusion

The claims of the Roman Catholic Church of authority and its teachings on salvation cannot be supported by history or Scripture. The *facts* reveal that the Roman Catholic Church has actually departed from the teaching of the historic Church and can only be rightly described as Roman. History reveals that the Roman Church is *not* an infallible interpreter of Scripture, its popes are *not* infallible, it did *not* establish the canon for the Church, and much of the teaching of its tradition was either completely unknown or repudiated by the *magisterium* of the early Church.

The Roman Catholic teaching of authority in its exaltation of Tradition, the Papacy and the Church, is a depreciation of the authority of Scripture and the supreme authority of Jesus Christ. Its teachings on salvation have undermined the unique and exclusive work of Christ in salvation by supplementing his work with human works and additional mediators. The Church has displaced divine authority with human authority and Christ's work with the work of man.

There is only one revelation of God and it is the final authority for all truths related to faith and morals—the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. There is only one head over the universal Church—the Lord Jesus Christ. There is only one vicar of Christ on earth—the Holy Spirit of God. And there is only one Mediator and means of salvation, the person of Christ and his once for all atonement for sin.

What happened with the Jews under the Old Testament dispensation has happened with the Roman Church under the New. Christ condemned the Tradition of Judaism because her religious leaders had allowed this Tradition (the teaching of men), to be elevated to a position of authority equal to the Scriptures even though its teachings invalidated the Word of God. Precisely the same thing has happened with Roman Catholicism.

The Roman Catholic Church claims that it alone is the one true Church, established by Jesus Christ. But the true Church is not primarily a visible organization, but an invisible organism comprised of all those

who have been spiritually united to Jesus Christ. It is a union which transcends denominational and visible organizational structures.

The truth of the gospel is the cornerstone and foundation of true, biblical unity and defines the nature of the true Church. We cannot separate the true Church from the truth of the gospel for Paul places under anathema *anyone* who would pervert the gospel of Christ.<sup>124</sup> Our God is a God of truth, who requires that we worship Him 'in spirit and in truth', who sent His Son as Incarnate Truth to bear witness to the truth, who left us his infallible written truth and a message of truth, the gospel, to proclaim to the world. One of the ultimate purposes of the Church is to be 'a pillar and support of the truth' (1 Tim. 3:15). The authority of the Church does not supercede the truth. It must bow before the Word of God and the gospel of grace.

Those Evangelicals responsible for promoting the ECT Accords and unity with Roman Catholicism have stated that they believe we share a common heritage of truth, since both communions affirm the historic Creeds of the Church. But the Creeds are not the gospel. And Rome is guilty of distorting the gospel of Christ and invalidating the authority and truth of God's word.

Being part of the true Church is not a matter of being Roman Catholic or Protestant in the strictest sense. It is a matter of hearing, understanding and responding to the biblical gospel in faith, and being united spiritually to Jesus Christ by the Spirit of God. Paul makes this very clear in his letter to the Ephesians as he described the process by which they became united to Christ and part of the Church: 'In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise (Eph. 1:13). Note the process. They heard the message of the gospel, they listened, and then they responded in faith and they were supernaturally united to Christ by the Holy Spirit. It is of the utmost importance that the gospel message be maintained in purity for it is by that message that men are saved. To distort the message is to prevent men and women from entering the kingdom of God.

---

<sup>124</sup>I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:6-9).

The Roman Catholic teaching on authority and salvation perverts the message of the gospel and leads men and women astray. Individuals blindly accept the authority and teaching of the Church, sincerely believing it to be infallible. The tragic result is that multitudes of people exercise an implicit faith in the Church, but do not know Jesus Christ. Because they have been misinformed or are ignorant of the true facts of history they are innoculated against the truth of the gospel. They are much like the Jews in Paul's day who thought they knew God but were lost. Paul describes them as having 'a zeal for God but not according to knowledge.'<sup>125</sup> These people did not understand God's way of salvation. Just as there is only one *source* of salvation for the whole world, the Lord Jesus Christ, so there is only one *way* of appropriating Christ in order to experience salvation, i.e. by the hearing of the gospel and a response of repentance and faith in Christ alone. The truth of the gospel is the defining issue.

### True Salvation

Scripture teaches that the Lord Jesus Christ has completed a work of salvation. It is finished. That is, he has made a complete atonement for sin. And he offers salvation to all who come to him, directly and personally, in true repentance and faith. This means a complete forsaking of trust in a Church, sacraments and all works, to trust in Christ *alone* for salvation. Scripture tells us repeatedly that salvation is not by works but by faith in Christ. It also means a total forsaking of sin, self-will and living for this world and a turning to Christ in total submission and commitment of life to be his servant and follower. Apart from the total commitment of one's life to Christ as Lord there can be no salvation.

For one who comes to Christ in this way, he offers eternal forgiveness, salvation and deliverance from sin. Such a person will be born again and will receive a new life. He will be adopted into God's family, declared eternally righteous, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, delivered from all condemnation and judgment, and will receive the gift of eternal life. As John 17:3 states: 'This is life eternal that they may know Thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.'

---

<sup>125</sup> 'Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes' (Rom. 10:1-4).



