

WHY I'M CATHOLIC

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INDEX

I.	PREFACE	3
II.	INTRODUCTION	3
III.	AUTHORITY	6
	a. SOLA SCRIPTURA: THE BIBLE ALONE	6
	b. THE BIBLE AND THE CHURCH: BOTH OR NEITHER	9
	c. WHY IS THE BIBLE THE BIBLE?	18
	d. OLD TESTAMENT FOUNDATION FOR CHURCH	22
	e. SACRED TRADITION AND TRADITIONALISM	24
	f. THE CHURCH AND CHURCH HISTORY	26
IV.	THE EUCHARIST	38
	a. SCRIPTURAL RECONCILIATION OF TRANSUBSTANTIATION	40
	b. UNITY AND COMMUNION	44
	c. THE OLD TESTAMENT LAMB AND THE SACRIFICE OF THE MASS	45
	d. THE EUCHARIST AND CHURCH HISTORY	47
	e. PROTESTANT OBJECTIONS	53
	1. IDOLATRY	54
	2. THE SACRIFICE OF THE MASS	55
	3. SYMBOLISM	55
	4. HUMAN SACRIFICE	56
V.	SALVATION	56
	a. SOLA GRATIA: MAN IS SAVED BY GRACE ALONE	57
	b. THE NEW COMMANDMENT: LOVE	60
	c. WHAT ABOUT SOLA FIDE: FAITH ALONE	62
	d. THE GOSPEL OF NICENESS	71
	e. ONCE SAVED ALWAYS SAVED	73
VI.	MY TESTIMONY - CONFESSIONS OF A SECRET AGENT	76
VII.	CONCLUSION	85
	EXHIBIT "A" A LISTING OF EARLY CHURCH HERESIES	86
	EXHIBIT "B" A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE HISTORY OF THE PAPACY, by Warren H. Carroll	88
	EXHIBIT "C" NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING	93

I. PREFACE.

I left Evangelical Protestantism and embraced the Catholic Church due to a profound conversion experience, as well as for Biblical and historical reasons. I owe Evangelical Protestantism very much. Its inventiveness, devotion and forceful presentation of Christianity is unmatched by many Catholic parishes in this country. In fact, the Protestant Church was the catalyst that rekindled my faith in Jesus Christ. It is not my goal to condemn Protestantism, for I am in love with the people and their sincerity. I only want to explain why I love the Catholic Church, and in doing so I will use Protestantism as a point of reference.

This project was initially completed in response to a Presbyterian minister's assertion that my Catholic faith was not authentically Christian. Years have now passed since I first completed this paper ¹, and I realize that God is so much bigger than my petty arguments and explanations. My faith is not in a doctrine, but in a person, the person of Jesus Christ. It is this person that I find in the Eucharist, and there lies the short answer to why I am Catholic. It

¹ **This is not intended to be an original work, but merely a compilation of numerous other Catholic writers and thinkers. A special thanks goes to Scott Hahn, and for his vibrant presentation of the faith. Scott is a theology professor at Franciscan University at Steubenville, a wonderful Catholic university. Thank you to David Wylder of the Pope John Paul II Faith and Family Center, for giving me the book Madrid, "Surprised by Truth," which provided the foundation for this letter. Contributing authors to "Surprised by Truth" include James Akin, Dave Armstrong, Rick Canason, Marcus Grodi, T. L. Frazier, Al Kresta, Tim Staples, Bob Sungenis, Julie Swenson, Paul Thigpen, and Steve Wood. A special thanks to Mark Shea, and his insight into The Gospel of Niceness and the Blessed Sacrament, and for his book "This Is My Body, An Evangelical Discovers the Real Presence." I also appreciate the contribution of Curtis Martin, president of FOCUS (Fellowship of Catholic University Students), an unbelievably blessed Catholic para-Church organization; Dr. Thomas Howard and his insight on grace; Thomas Nash and his insight on Restoring the House of David; George Martin and his insight into the Eucharist; Fr. Alfred McBride and his insight on the Catechism; and Fr. Richard McBrien, though we generally disagree, for his insight on tradition. I also thank Catholics United for the Faith, and their educational and inspirational publication, Lay Witness; The Faith and Life Series by Ignatius Press and Catholics United for the Faith; New Covenant Magazine; New Oxford Review Magazine; Inside the Vatican Magazine; St. Joseph Communications, Inc.; First Things Magazine; The Faith of the Early Fathers by William A. Jurgens, The Liturgical Press; Why Am I Catholic by J. Michael Miller, C.S.B.; The Church or The Bible by Arnold Damen, S.J., and many others I have forgotten to name.**

is Jesus Christ that leads me to Catholicism, not well reasoned arguments. Nevertheless, there are other lesser reasons to be Catholic, first and foremost being that the Catholic Church was founded by Jesus Christ. Still, if my faith were limited to the enclosed apologetics, I would be little more than a pharisee. What lacks from this work is the relational aspect of my faith. While I wholly believe what is written within, I worry about the tone of this document. Do my polemics accomplish the very thing I want to avoid, further polarizing Catholics and Protestants? As Catholics, we have a lot to learn from our Evangelical brothers, but they can learn from us too.

II. INTRODUCTION.

Before delving into why I am Catholic, it is important to realize that “Catholicism” encompasses more than the Roman Catholic Church (i.e., the Latin Rite) - Let me explain. The term Catholic means “universal”, and for 2000 years has referred to those Christian believers who associate themselves with the Church founded by Jesus Christ on the Rock of Peter. This Church steadily grew from Pentecost to gain a foothold in the Mediterranean regions of the ancient world. After Christianity had existed for almost 300 years, the Roman Empire legalized Christianity in A.D. 312. It was at this time that the Catholic Church elevated five Bishops (also referred to as Patriarchs) to govern the quickly-expanding ranks of believers. These five Patriarchs were located in the ancient centers of Catholicism, which had been founded by one or more of the apostles. The Patriarchs became the principal Bishops of the Catholic Church, and they had authority over subordinate Bishops who held lesser sees within their patriarchate. In order of importance, the five patriarchies were Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. One of the official titles of the Pope is "Patriarch of Rome."

The Churches encompassed by these five Patriarchies exist to this day. Though such believers may differ in region and organization, they are unified in faith.² It often comes as news to the average Catholic, but Catholicism encompasses more than the Latin or Roman Rite. The above referenced Eastern Churches are also truly Catholic (“Eastern Catholic Churches”), but are not Roman Catholic. These Eastern Catholic Churches are in union with Peter and Peter’s successor’s, the Popes, and rank “in equal dignity” with the Roman Catholic Latin rite – all of which results in the Church being truly “Catholic” (i.e., universal). These Eastern Catholic Churches have their own distinct liturgical and organizational systems while maintaining their communion with the Papacy. Many trace their roots to the Apostles. For them, their apostolic identity is based on more than age, their legitimacy is also found in

² Today there are 17 canonical rites of Eastern Catholic Churches, representing five ritual groups: The Byzantine, Antiochene, Alexandrian, Chaldean and Armenian. These Eastern Catholic Churches are truly Catholic, though not Roman Catholic.

The Byzantine Church is the most common of Eastern Catholic Churches, which includes nine canonical rites: the Bulgarian, Greek, Georgian, Italo-Albanian, Melkite, Romanian, Russian, Serbian and Ukrainian (or Ruthenian) rites. The Byzantine Catholic Churches (or Uniates as referred to by the Orthodox) are very similar to the Eastern Orthodox in their worship and practice, but in their way of Church order and governance they are members of the Roman Catholic Church. In many ways the Byzantine Catholics are simply Orthodox Churches that have refused to sever communion with Peter.

From the patriarchate of Antioch, in Asia Minor, where the term “Christians” was first used, are three Catholic rites: The Syro-Malankar rite, with dioceses in India; the Maronite rite, with dioceses in Lebanon, Syria, the United States, Cyprus, Egypt, Argentina, Brazil, Australia, Canada and Mexico, with exarchates in Jordan and Jerusalem; and the Syrian rite, with dioceses in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt, North America, with exarchates in Turkey, Iraq and Kuwait.

From the patriarchate of Alexandria, in ancient Egypt (i.e. Africa), the Eastern Catholic Church includes the Coptic Catholic Church in Egypt and the Ethiopian Catholic Church in Ethiopia and Eritrea. From the East Syrian Church comes the Chaldean rite, with dioceses in Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Turkey and the United States. Finally, the Eastern Catholic Church includes the Armenian rite, with dioceses in Armenia, Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Turkey, Ukraine, France and Argentina.

“Peter”. I must emphasize, as stated in the Second Vatican Council, that these Eastern Catholic Churches are equal to the Latin rite, and are not just a division of a larger Church.³

The Protestant Reformation occurred within Roman Catholicism, not within the Eastern Catholic Churches. In his Encyclical *UT UNUM SINT! (THAT THEY MAY BE ONE!)* (hereinafter referred to as "One"), Pope John Paul II reiterates the Catholic Church's commitment to ecumenism, with the Eastern Orthodox as well as our Protestant brothers and sisters. His encyclical explains better than I could ever hope to why I, as a Catholic Christian, am duty bound to work for unity with my Protestant friends. The encyclical explains, in part:

³ Existing side by side with Eastern Catholics are the Eastern Orthodox Churches. Eastern Orthodoxy initially split from the Catholic Church in 1054, and today remains in a painful state of separation. One of the most tragic and frustrating divisions that exists within Christianity is the one between the Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches. However, much ecumenical progress has been made. Both have a valid Priesthood and apostolic succession, the episcopacy of both celebrate the same seven sacraments, both recognize the real presence of Christ in Communion, both give honor and devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, both recognize the communion of saints and have very similar theology, and both proclaim the same faith in Jesus Christ.

At the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church committed Herself irrevocably to following the path of ecumenical venture. One, 3. [The reason for unity is simple,] [o]n the eve of His sacrifice on the Cross, Jesus himself prayed to the Father for His disciples and for all those who believe in Him, that they Might be one [as the Father and Son are one], a living communion. One, 6 (citing Jn. 17:11, 21-23). This unity, which the Lord has bestowed on His Church and in which He wishes to embrace all people, is not something added on, nor is it some secondary attribute of the community of His disciples. One, 8. Rather, unity belongs to the very essence of this community. Id. God wills the Church, because He wills unity, and unity is an expression of the whole depth of his agape [love]. Id.

How is it possible to remain divided, if we have been "buried" through Baptism in the Lord's death, in the very act by which God through the death of His Son, has broken down the walls of division? One, 6. Division "openly contradicts the will of Christ, provides a stumbling block to the world, and inflicts damage on the most holy cause of proclaiming the Good News to every creature." One, 6.

[Catholics view] all those justified by faith through Baptism [as being] incorporated into Christ. One, 13. They therefore have a right to be honored by the title of Christian, and are properly regarded as brothers and sisters in the Lord by the sons and daughters of the Catholic Church. One, 13. It follows that these separated Churches and Communities, though we believe that they suffer from defects, have by no means been deprived of the significance and value in the mystery of salvation. One, 10. For the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church. One, 10.

[Therefore,] it is necessary to pass from antagonism and conflict to a situation where each party recognizes the other as a partner. One, 29. When undertaking dialogue, each side must presuppose in the other a desire for reconciliation, for unity in truth. One, 29. [However, unity in truth] is not a question of altering the deposit of faith, changing the meaning of dogmas, eliminating essential words from them, accommodating truth to the preferences of a particular age, or suppressing certain articles of the Creed under the false pretext that they are not longer understood today. One, 18. The unity willed by God can be attained only by the adherence of all to the content of revealed faith in its entirety. Id. *In matters of faith, compromise is in contradiction with God who is Truth.* In the Body of Christ, "the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6), who could consider legitimate a reconciliation brought about at the expense of truth. Id.

[Finally,] [t]he Catholic Church acknowledges and confesses the weaknesses of Her members, conscious that their sins are so many betrayals of and obstacles to the accomplishment of the Savior's plan. One, 3. Thus, the commitment to ecumenism must be based upon the conversion of hearts and upon prayer, which will also lead to the necessary purification of past memories. One, 2.

Nearly a century ago, Pope St. Pius X identified modernism as the "synthesis of all heresies." Both Protestants and Catholics are faced with the crisis of modernism, which in essence is Darwinian evolution applied to Church teachings. You don't have to pay attention to what the Church has taught for 2000 years, we have evolved. Consequently, truth is continually changed and updated to current thought and values, and continually contradicted by new truth. With modernism, Jesus Christ is no longer the same yesterday and today and forever, Heb. 13:8, He's just a great man that wants us to be nice to each other. The resulting crisis of faith has left America paralyzed and confused.

It would be wonderful if Catholics and Protestants could address modernism together; join forces if you will to save our culture. But it seems we cannot. We spend our energy maintaining our individual creeds and identities while society crumbles. Coming from both a Catholic and Evangelical Protestant background, I have attempted to give a Catholic perspective to three predominant issues that divide us: (1) Authority and "Sola Scriptura", (2) Salvation and "Sola Fide", and (3) the Eucharist. Perhaps this dialogue can be of some benefit.

III. AUTHORITY.

Ecumenical etiquette generally requires that we not ask people why they believe what they do. However, jarring direct questions, such as why are you Catholic, are entirely appropriate. For when all is stripped away, the great question always remains: "Is the Catholic Church the true Church of Christ?" The issue comes down to Pilot's question, "What is truth?" Jn. 18:38. Evangelicals point to the Bible; so do Catholics.

a. Sola Scriptura - The Bible Alone.

"Sola Scriptura" or "Scripture alone" is one of the foundational teachings of the reformation. It stands for the proposition that the Bible is the *sole* infallible authority for Christians. This doctrine has at its heart a sincere devotion to Christ, and I in no way wish to make light of that fact. When I view Protestantism, I feel a close kinship with those denominations that place God's Word in such high regard. However, Sola Scriptura is so ingrained in Evangelical Protestant thinking that most take it for granted, without attempting to substantiate the belief.

Before delving into this topic, two things must be addressed. First of all, I will not defend the doctrine of Sola Scriptura, but merely to point out how Catholic doctrine differs from it. Nevertheless, I would be the first to admit that Sola Scriptura, on its face, is very persuasive. Second, the Catholic view of Scripture must be established. Catholics, like Protestants, agree that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. Let me say it again, Catholics believe that all Scripture is God breathed.

The basis for the Church's teaching on the Scripture is "inspiration". The Catholic faith teaches that the Bible is different from any other book because it has a unique author: God Himself. (Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, 11). Inspiration literally means "God-breathed." The human writers were inspired by the Holy Spirit so that the words of Scripture are written *exactly the way God Himself intended*. Since the words of Scripture are inspired by God Himself, the Church teaches that every part of the Bible is without error. This makes sense since any supposed error in the Bible would have to be attributed to God. For example, Pope Leo XIII in the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* explained:

[S]o far is it from being possible that any error can coexist with inspiration, that inspiration not only is essentially incompatible with error, but also excludes and rejects it as absolutely and necessarily as it is impossible that God Himself, the supreme Truth, can utter that which is not true. *This is the ancient and unchanging faith of the Church.* (PD, II, D, 2a).

Pope Pius XII re-affirmed the complete inerrancy of the Bible in his introduction to the encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, and compared the Bible's inerrancy to Christ's sinlessness:

For as the substantial Word of God became like to men in all things, 'except sin,' so the words of God, expressed in human language, are made like to human speech in every respect, except error. (DAS, 37).

Vatican II and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* further support the Church's teaching:

Since therefore all that the inspired authors or sacred writers affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and *without error* teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures. (DV, 11 cited in CCC, 107).

I provide this explanation because in many cases if we Catholics are guilty of anything, it is taking Scripture too literally. Don't laugh!

However, Catholics do not believe in the proposition that Scripture *alone* is the Christian's sole authority. I want to emphasize the fact that just because Catholics do not believe in Sola Scriptura does not mean that we deny the sanctity of Scripture. Protestantism's emphasis on Scripture is good and should be applauded. The next time one

says that the Bible's teaching on morality is outdated, look to see what Christ said of the law:

Do not think I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of the pen will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks the least of these commandments will be the least in the Kingdom of God. Mt. 5:17-19.

The disciple Timothy wrote that:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Tim. 3:15.

Catholic laymen should aspire to our Protestant brothers' and sisters' devotion to Scripture. And let us beware of the danger of neglecting the study of our faith and sacred Scripture, for as the Old Testament says:

My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying, murder, stealing, adultery ... Hosea 4:6.

While Catholics believe Scripture is the source of spiritual life, Catholic doctrine objects to *Sola Scriptura* because the Bible does not teach *Sola Scriptura*, either explicitly or implicitly. Let me repeat, *Sola Scriptura* is not taught by Scripture, the doctrine is not Biblical.⁴ There are verses that speak of the veracity and inerrancy of the Bible, there are verses that show reliance on Scripture, and there are verses that show that Christ preached Scripture. However, the Bible does not say that Scripture is our sole, formally sufficient authority. Do not misunderstand, Catholics believe that the Bible contains God breathed divinely inspired information. However, the Bible was not designed to be the final "authority," because it is dependent on people to interpret what it means. And when fallible people begin to interpret Scripture, "*Sola Scriptura*" becomes "*Sola Ego*." Every denomination believes their interpretation is superior to everyone else's; each believes that they alone are closest to God's revelation. Because *Sola Scriptura* is not taught in the Bible, it is a self-refuting proposition.

While devotion to Scripture is wonderful, *Sola Scriptura leaves us without an inerrant authority to interpret an inerrant Bible*. The problem is this, when a particular Protestant denomination states that the Bible is its sole authority for doctrine and practice, they also imply that they have been specially blessed by the Holy Spirit to interpret the Bible's meaning. The result is thousands of denominations, each claiming Biblical orthodoxy and divine guidance, and each differing on matters of doctrine and practice. Each denomination is free to interpret literally those passages that fit their particular doctrine, and interpret symbolically those passages they do not want to take at face value.

⁴ What is wrong with this assertion, "All generalizations are false"? Well, the answer is simple, it is a self-refuting proposition. Such is the case with *Sola Scriptura*, for if scripture alone is not taught by Scripture the proposition is also self-refuting.

Sincere people can legitimately interpret the Bible in many different ways. For example, the Presbyterian Church baptizes infants, whereas Baptists feel the practice is sheer foolishness. While it is true that the Bible says nothing of infant baptism, it is also true that the Bible does not say that "Thou shalt baptize only adults." Many Protestant denominations recognize that there are quite good reasons for infant baptism. Still, resolution of the issue is not evident from the Bible. The reason is simple, the Bible is not designed to be a comprehensive textbook on systematic theology with a section entitled "Baptism".⁵ In addition, while such doctrines as the Trinity are clearly based on Scripture, the full form of the doctrine was not derived solely from Scripture, but is the result of centuries of deep reflection and numerous Church counsels.

All differences between Catholicism and Protestantism, in fact all the differences within Protestantism itself, comes down to one issue, *authority*. Who has it? Every doctrine one believes is based on the authority one accepts. All of this wrangling over the correct interpretation of Scripture gets one nowhere if there is no way to know with infallible certitude that one's interpretation is the right one.

This fact is painfully true when one analyzes the great "Protestant Saints" Martin Luther and John Calvin. During the immediate post-reformation period, the principles of Sola Scriptura and private revelation had already resulted in inevitable fragmentation. By 1525, Martin Luther, the father of the reformation, wrote: "There are nowadays almost as many sects and creeds as there are heads." (Janssen, IV, 119). In response to John Calvin's particular brand of Protestantism, Luther stated: "Calvin ... and the other heretics, they have in-deviled, through-deviled, over-deviled, corrupt hearts and lying mouths." (Werke (Walch), XX, 223, in Cath. En. IX, 456d). Luther even despaired of the future of Protestantism: "Godly servants of the most high become rarer and rarer," (T.T. 633), "sects and factions grow in number and bitterness."

Are a Protestant minister's interpretations of Scripture infallible? If a single passage of Scripture can be interpreted numerous ways by various denominations, how can one know for certain if their interpretation is correct? And if not, how can such interpretations be binding on the consciences of the members of his congregation? If

⁵ God ordained baptism as the normative means through which we are incorporated into the New Covenant, as circumcision was for entering the Old Covenant. Col.2:11-12. If one keeps in mind that under the Old Covenant a male child was to be circumcised while an infant (Gen. 17:12-14), then the issue of infant baptism takes on a whole different complexion. If the Church changed the Old Covenant practice and began to exclude children below some theoretical "age of reason," it would have created a controversy as large as circumcising Gentile converts. And yet the New Testament gives no hint the subject was ever brought up, much less debated. When the gospel was first preached to the gentiles, entire households were baptized, which included women, servants, children, and yes, babies. See Acts 16:15, 31-34; 1 Cor. 1:16.

There was never any controversy in the early Church over infant baptism until the third century, when the Council of Carthage (A.D. 252) condemned the novel proposition of postponing baptism until *the eighth day after birth*. St. Cyprian of Carthage and his colleagues at this council wrote:

As to what pertains to the case of infants: you said that they ought not to be baptized within the second or third day after their birth, ... In our council it seemed to us far otherwise. No one agreed to the course which you thought should be taken. Rather, we all judged that the mercy and grace of God ought to be denied to no man born.

So the council retained the established practice of infant baptism, reaffirming what Origen (A.D. 185-253) said:

The Church received from the Apostles the tradition of giving baptism even to infants. (Commentaries on Romans 5:9).

interpretations are merely human in origin, aren't they the mere traditions of men, which Jesus condemned?

Francis Schaffer used to say that the reformation showed us the importance of the man of God alone (cf. 2 Tim. 3:17), with the Bible alone, guided by the Spirit alone. But as one studies Scripture that's not what one sees. The man of God is never depicted as using the Bible alone. Never, period. He is called by Christ to function with authority in his teaching ministry, but only within the larger context of the doctrinal unity of the teaching Church. See Mt. 18:15-17; Phil. 1:27-28, 2:2; 1 Tim. 3:15, 4:11-16, 6:2-3; 2 Tim. 4:1-5; Titus 1:7-11, 13-14, 2:15, 3:8-10. Christians are never depicted in Scripture as being "lone rangers," left to decide for themselves what they think Scripture means. See 2 Pet. 3:15.

Most Protestant's disagree with the idea that Christ created a visible Church. Unlike the Catholic Church, Protestantism views the Church as a voluntary association of spiritually like-minded Christians. For many, the Bible, expounded in the original languages, is the only authority. Christ, His divinity, atonement, resurrection, ascension, the Holy Spirit, and our need as sinners to personally appropriate by faith in Christ's work on the cross, compose the core of the "creed" - everything else is secondary. Such doctrinal minimalism makes evangelism easy - the less you believe the less you have to defend (a variant of C.S. Lewis's "Mere Christianity").⁶

The doctrines of "mere Christianity" can only take you so far and then they must be applied (i.e. church government, sacraments, church discipline, style of worship, divorce and remarriage, dispensationalism, abortion, Armenianism, Calvinism, contraception, embryo freezing, invitro fertilization, assurance of salvation, etc). Who decides and by what authority? Once you begin answering these questions you are no longer just a Christian, you are a Baptist, Pentecostal, Nazarene, Methodist, Lutheran, or Presbyterian. To those outside of Christ, Protestants stress that these secondary identities (i.e. traditions) are not really important. What is important is going to a Bible believing church and "mere Christianity." But to those inside the circle of faith, it is exactly these secondary distinctives that divide Christianity. For a church to retain its identity, it must articulate its reason for existence.

Once the Church is denied, division and separation are unavoidable. Reformation Protestantism claimed the Bible alone as the only infallible rule of faith and practice. But, ironically, it was the emphasis on the Bible alone that caused all the confusion and division within Protestantism. The issue is this: would Jesus command unity, and leave His Church without the necessary infallible means of settling doctrinal disputes in order to maintain that unity? One cannot have the Word of God for his faith who will not have the Church for his teacher. It is the infallible teaching authority of the Church, as promised by Christ, which alone preserves God's Word from erroneous interpretation. That is why Catholics believe in a more Biblical doctrine concerning authority, not Scripture alone, but *the Bible and the Church, both or neither*.

b. The Bible and the Church: Both or Neither.

Catholics do not believe in Sola Scriptura because the Bible does not teach Sola Scriptura. Catholics believe in the "Word of God alone," which in a very elementary way can be explained as deriving from two sources: (1) sacred Scripture, and (2) the authority of Christ's Church through the guidance of the Holy Spirit to interpret Scripture (i.e. Sacred Tradition).

The Bible teaches that the Church is the Body of Christ, tangible and real.

⁶ Most Protestants, like Catholics, recite the Nicene Creed, developed by the Counsel of Nicene in the fourth century. Such Protestants take the entire creed at literal face value, except when they pronounce belief in "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church." Suddenly the creed is viewed differently, and is no longer interpreted literally. This one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church is interpreted to be some amorphous, invisible, "mysterious" collection of believers. Catholicism teaches that Christ's Church is indeed "mysterious", and does not deny the symbolic implications of church. But when the Early Church Fathers wrote the Nicene Creed, they were also speaking of one visible and recognizable Church, a city on a hill. Mt. 5:14.

He hath subjected all things under His feet and hath made Him head over all the Church which is His body. Eph. 1:22.

He [Christ] is the head of the body, the Church. 1 Cor. 12:27.

The Holy Spirit is the Church's soul, for no body can exist without a soul. The Holy Spirit will guide the Church in all truth, which includes Scriptural interpretation.

When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth. Jn. 16:13.

While the Bible is the inspired Word of God, the Bible also teaches that it is not a wholly self-interpreting document. In fact, the Bible clearly states that Scripture is hard to understand and that it must be interpreted:

His [Paul's] letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scripture, to their own destruction. 2 Pet. 3:15.

We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you elemental truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not food. Heb. 5:11-14.

'How can I,' he said [the Ethiopian eunuch], 'understand unless someone explains it to me?' Acts 8:31.

In addition, everything Christ did was not written down in Scripture.

Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written. Jn. 21:25.

Because not all issues are thoroughly explained by the New Testament (i.e. the Trinity, infant baptism, predestination, sex change operations, capital punishment, contraception, invitro fertilization, etc.), Christ gave us the Holy Spirit to guide us in *all* truth. This includes those areas not mentioned in the Bible, those areas open to interpretation. The Holy Spirit will remind us of *everything* Christ taught, even those things not written down.

The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you *all things*, and will remind you of *everything* I have said to you. Jn. 14:26.

And how will the Holy Spirit guide us? Certainly God intended that the gospel message should be spread throughout the world, but how? Does Scripture instruct us to pass out Bibles and just let people decide? No! If the faith of the apostles is to remain, the Bible must be interpreted correctly, or all we are left with is the "traditions of man" and the faith of our fathers will not survive. In fact, Scripture states that the gospel message is spread not by passing out Bibles, but through His Church:

His intent was that now, through the Church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, ... Eph. 3:10.

Holy Spirit guidance is simply not limited to the private interpretation of Scripture. It can't be. The Church is commanded to be unified in the truth. To understand the importance of doctrinal unity, one must again turn to Scripture; specifically, Christ's high priestly prayer:

I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, so that they may be one, as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they may also be in Us, ... so that they may be one, as We are one, I in them and You in Me, that they may be brought to perfection as one. ... John 17:23-26.

On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus prayed for a visible supernatural unity in his Church; "so that they may be one." The Bible also teaches that:

The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects. James 5:16.

Jesus is "the righteous man." Was His prayer for unity not realized? Paul admonished the early Christians to always hold fast to unity of doctrine:

I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. 1 Cor. 1:10.

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. Phil. 1:27.

Then make my joy complete by being like minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Phil. 2:2.

We are commanded to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Paul hammers this point home with a series of exclamations:

One Body! One Spirit! One Hope! One Lord! One Faith! One Baptism! One God and Father of All!
Eph. 4:7-13.

Paul chides the Corinthians for naming themselves after their favorite preachers:

One of you says 'I am of Paul,' another says 'I am of Apollos,' another, 'I am of Cephas.' Isn't that evidence that you are of the flesh and not the spirit? 1 Cor. 3:3-7.⁷

The New Testament records conflict between believers; sharp disputes over circumcision, dining on meat sacrificed to idols, the person of Christ. And yes, the New Testament describes the sin and corruption of various Church members (as has happened throughout Church history). But nowhere are the believers given the option of separating into independent splinter groups. There is simply no Biblical mandate for divine mutiny. In fact, one of the few offenses that gives us reason to expel a brother is the offense of causing disunity:

I urge you brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions. Keep away from them. Rom. 16:17.

The very word Catholic means "universal", a testimony to unity. St. Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, is one of the Apostolic Fathers, having also been a hearer of the Apostle John. He is the same Polycarp to whom one of the seven Ignatian letters is addressed. He died a martyr's death at the age of eighty-six, in the year 155 or 156 A.D. *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* is the oldest authentic account of a martyrdom, written by the Catholic Church in Smyrna to the community in Philomelium. As you can see, the term "Catholic" (i.e., universal) was recognized by the earliest of Christian writers:

When finally [Polycarp] had finished his prayer, in which he remembered everyone with whom he had ever been acquainted, the small and the great, the renowned and the unknown, and the whole *CATHOLIC CHURCH* throughout the world, ... *Martyrdom of St. Polycarp* [A.D. 155/157] (Faith of the Early Fathers,

⁷ For Catholics, this is remarkably similar to saying, I am of Martin Luther (Lutheran, 1524), or I am of Henry VII (Episcopalian, 1534), or I am of John Knox (Presbyterian, 1560), or I am of John Smyth (Baptist, 1600), or I am of John and Charles Wesley (Methodist Episcopal, 1739), etc.

vol. I, 79).

And of the elect, he was one indeed, the wonderful martyr Polycarp, who in our days was an apostolic and prophetic teacher, bishop of the *CATHOLIC CHURCH* in Smyrna. *Martyrdom of St. Polycarp* [A.D. 155/157] (Faith of the Early Fathers, vol. I, 80a).

Church unity was not an invention of the Dark Ages. St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, is certainly the most important theologian of the second century; and the most prominent of his writings is the *Detection and Overthrow of the Gnosis Falsely So-called*, or simply *Against Haereses*, written around 180 A.D. In it he defends the Church against the heresy of his time, gnosticism. Here, Irenaeus speaks of the unity and tradition of the Catholic Church:

As I said before, the Church, having received this preaching and this faith, although She is disseminated throughout the whole world, yet guarded it, as if She occupied but one house. She likewise believes these things just as if She had but one soul and one and the same heart; and harmoniously She proclaims them and teaches them and hands them down, as if She possessed by one mouth. For, while the languages of the world are diverse, nevertheless, the authority of the Tradition is one and the same.

Neither do the Churches among the Germans believe otherwise or have another Tradition, not in Libya, nor those which have been established in the central regions of the world. But just as the sun, the creature of God, is one and the same throughout the whole world, so also the preaching of the truth shines everywhere and enlightens all men who desire to come to a knowledge of truth.

Nor will any other rulers in the Churches, whatever his power of eloquence, teach otherwise, for no one is above the teacher; nor will he who is weak in speaking detract from the tradition. For the faith is one and the same, and cannot be amplified by one who is able to say much about it, nor can it be diminished by one who can say but little. *Against Heresies* [AD 180](Faith Early Fathers, vol. I, 192).

When speaking of the authority of the one true Church, Irenaeus adds:

When, therefore, we have such proofs it is not necessary to seek among others the truth which is easily obtained from the Church. For the apostles, like a rich man in a bank, deposited with Her most copiously everything which pertains to the truth; and everyone whosoever wishes draws from Her the drink of life. For She is the entrance to life, while all the rest are thieves and robbers. That is why it is surely necessary to avoid them, while cherishing with the utmost diligence the things pertaining to the Church, and to lay hold of the Traditions of truth. What then? If there should be a dispute over some kind of question, ought we not have recourse to the most ancient churches in which the apostles were familiar, and draw from them what is clear and certain in regard to that question? What if the apostles had not in fact left writings to us? Would it not be necessary to follow the order of Tradition, which was handed down to those to whom they entrusted the Churches? (Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3, 4, 1 [ca A.D. 180]) (Faith of the Early Fathers, vol. I, 213).

Our Lord commands us to be unified, on that we all agree – but unified to what? Some say that we should be unified to Scripture, which is true. But “Sola Scriptura” is not the ultimate answer because this infallible Bible must be interpreted by fallible people. When mere men are the final arbiters of Biblical truth, the result is thousands of denominations all claiming Scripture Alone, and all disagreeing, to varying degrees, on just what the truth is. So let us look to Sacred Scripture for the source of this divine unity.

In Ephesians 2:19 God invites us to be members of His household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone. Because God’s household is built on the foundation of the apostles, His household is 2000 years old. Again, we agree. So what else to we know about God’s household?

First Timothy 3:14-15 further identifies God’s household as the “*Church of the Living God, the Pillar and Foundation of Truth.*” What an unbelievable statement! Sacred Scripture states that the “Pillar and Foundation of Truth” is the Church, not the Bible. This theme is echoed in Matthew 18:18, where Christ tells His Church:

“Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” The apostles and their successors were promised by Christ, “He who hears you hears me.” Luke 10:16. Such a statement is inexplicable unless what is heard is the “Pillar and Foundation of Truth” (Tim. 3:15). God must therefore protect His Church, through the Holy Spirit, from speaking untruths, so that the faith of the apostles can be accurately passed on from generation to generation.

Where is this Church that is the “Pillar and Foundation of Truth”, this Church that can “Bind and Loose Heaven.” We know that God’s Household is 2000 years old, founded on the apostles, and is the pillar and foundation of truth, but how can we identify Christ’s Church? There are still several Churches (Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Assyrian, etc.) that claim apostolic origin.

The very words of Christ explain this mystery. In Matthew chapter 16, Christ blesses his Church, and specifically Peter, with the ability to speak authoritatively, as the “Pillar of Truth”. Hence the faithful can be sure of what truth is. However, I must be careful to point out that this binding and loosing authority is a charism of the Holy Spirit, it is not based on the holiness or intellect of men. The Catholic Church has had sinful members for 2000 years. “Papal Intrigue” began with Peter, the first Pope. The Church was at its lowest point on Holy Thursday – and we are still here today. Thank God the gates of hell won’t prevail against it! If it were left up to Catholics, the Church would have fragmented and died centuries ago.

In Matthew chapter 16, Jesus created His Church, gave this Church His very authority, and established Peter as its visible head. The Bible provides the very basis for the Catholic Church's understanding of what it is. To evaluate the passage, begin by looking at the plain text of the Scripture. First, Peter recognizes that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God." Mt. 16:17. In response to Peter's assertion Jesus blesses Peter three times:

- (1) Blessed are thou Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. Mt. 16:17.
- (2) And I also say unto thee [singular], that thou art Peter [Greek: petros], and on this rock [Greek: petra] I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. Mt. 16:18.
- (3) I will give unto thee [singular] the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Mt. 16:17-19.

The first statement is clearly a blessing, because Jesus actually blesses Peter. The third statement is also a blessing: alone from the other disciples, Christ our Lord gave Peter "the Keys of the kingdom of heaven." Mt. 16:19.⁸ The keys represent Christ's (not Peter's) authority, an obvious blessing.⁹ See Rev. 1:18, 3:7. It is interesting to note that no other apostle received such a grant. Because of this grant of Christ's authority, Scripture explains that whatever Peter binds on earth is bound in heaven, and whatever Peter loosens on earth shall be loosened in heaven. Mt. 16:19. *Here Christ gives His Church, through its visible head Peter, His infallible teaching authority.* Since Christ's first and third statements are blessings, the second statement, if taken in its proper context, must also be a blessing. Christ blesses Peter by making him the Rock upon which Christ will build His Church. Mt. 16:18.¹⁰

⁸ Peter received from Christ the rabbinical function of binding and loosing, the halakah (rabbinical pronouncements, including exorcism, legislation, discipline, and excommunication) separately from and before the other disciples. Compare Mt. 16:18 with Mt. 18:18.

⁹ Revelation 3:7 mirrors Matthew chapter 16 and provides that:

These are the words of Him [Jesus] who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens not one can shut, and what he shuts not one can open.

¹⁰ In Luke 22:32, Christ said that He had prayed especially for Peter and that, after Peter's own conversion, Peter was commissioned to strengthen his brethren in their faith. The primacy of Peter

was confirmed when Christ, after his Resurrection, gave Peter alone this mandate:

Feed my lambs! ... Feed my lambs! ... Feed my Sheep! Jn. 21:15-17.

From the very beginning, Peter takes a leading position in the early Church. He conducts the election of Matthias (Acts 1:15, et seq.); he is the first to proclaim on the Feast of Pentecost the message of salvation (Acts 2:14 et seq.); he preaches the gospel before the High Counsel (Acts 4:8 et seq.); he accepts the first pagan, the captain Cornelius, into the Church (Acts 10:1 et seq.); he is the first to speak at the Counsel of Jerusalem (Acts 15:7).

It is also clear that the Early Church Fathers interpreted Matthew 16 as the Catholic Church does today. Let me provide an example: St. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, a great Eastern theologian, was born at Carthage of wealthy pagan parents between the 200 and 210 A.D. He was converted to Christianity about the year 246 A.D. , and was raised to the priesthood soon afterward. In 248 or 249 A.D. he was made bishop of Carthage. His treatise on *The Unity of the Catholic Church* is the most important of Cyprian's treatises, whereby he directly addresses Matthew 16 and the Primacy of Peter as first Pope:

The Lord says to Peter: "I say to you," He says, "that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it. And to you I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatever things you bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth, they shall be loosed also in heaven."

And again He says to him after His resurrection: "Feed my sheep." On him He builds the Church, and to him He gives the command to feed the sheep; and although He assigns a like power to all Apostles. Yet He founded a *single chair*, and He established by His own authority a source and an intrinsic reason for that unity. Indeed, the others were that also which Peter was; *but a primacy is given to Peter, whereby it is made clear that there is but one Church and one chair*. So too, all are shepherds, and the flock is shown to be one, fed by all Apostles in single-minded accord. If someone does not hold fast to this unity of Peter, can he imagine that he still holds the faith: If he desert the chair of Peter upon whom the Church was built, can he still be confident that he is in the Church? *The Unity of the Catholic Church* (Faith of the Early Fathers, vol. I, 555-556).

In order to avoid the consequences of a literal interpretation of the text, dissenting theologians assert various objections. Most appeal to differences in the Greek text - the word for Peter (petros) is different than the word for rock (petra). According to standard anti-Catholic interpretation, Petros means "a small stone" while petra means "a large mass of rock." Thus, many view Christ's discourse with Peter as follows. Christ asks, "Who do People say the Son of Man is;" and Peter responds, "The Christ, the Son of the living God." Mt. 16:13-17. And in response to Peter's assertion Jesus says:

- (1) Blessed are thou Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. Mt. 16:17.
- (2) And I also say unto thee, that thou art a small insignificant stone, and on this great mass of rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. Mt. 16:18.
- (3) I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Mt. 16:19.

Many non-Catholics assert that Jesus' second statement to Peter is not a blessing to Peter at all, but that Christ's statement somehow refers back two sentences to Peter's acknowledgment that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God." Mt. 16:17. Thus, from the petros/petra distinction, some claim Jesus meant that He will build His Church not on Peter, but on Peter's statement that Christ is God.

First, even if the dissenter's position on the petros/petra distinction were correct, the interpretation would not fit the context of the passage. Jesus did not say "Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jonah! You are an insignificant little pebble. Here are the Keys to the kingdom of heaven!" Such an inconsistent group of statements is inexplicable. Jesus is referring to "thee" and to "thou," to Peter and not some statement made by Peter two phrases back. The better position for Protestants is not to deny the obvious sense of the passage, but conclude that Peter was in fact the first Pope. Whether Christ intended there to be any other Popes is the better anti-Catholic position.

Second, such an interpretation is not even accepted by much of Protestantism. Nearly every major Protestant commentary on Matthew written within the last half-century concurs that Simon Peter is the rock upon which Christ promised He would build His Church.¹¹ D.A. Carson states in the theologically conservative Expositor's Bible Commentary, Grand Rapids Zondervan, 1984, that:

If it were not for Protestant reactions against extremes of Roman Catholic interpretation, it is doubtful whether many would have taken 'rock' to be anything or anyone other than Peter. p. 364.

And finally, concerning the petros/petra distinction, while Petros and Petra did have the non-Catholic meanings in some ancient Greek poetry, the distinction was gone by the first century, when Matthew's Gospel was written. At that time the two words meant the same thing: a rock. By the time the Gospel of Matthew was written, for the Protestant interpretation to be true, the proper Greek word to be used is "lithos", which is the more common Greek word for stone or small rock.

Another problem is that when Jesus addressed Peter, Jesus was not speaking Greek, but Aramaic, the common language of Palestine at the time of Jesus' life. In John 1:42 Jesus stated:

Then [Andrew] brought [Simon Peter] to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, 'You are Simon the son of Jona; you will be called Kephas' [or Cephass,¹² the Aramaic term for rock]. Jn. 1:42.

Simon son of Bar-Jona wasn't renamed petros at all, but Cephass. That's why Paul continued to refer to Peter as Cephass throughout his epistles. Cf. 1 Cor. 1:12; 3:22; 9:5; 15:5, Gal. 2:9. In Aramaic, there is no difference between the two Greek words petros and petra. The word is simply "Cephass." If the Protestant interpretation were true, then Jesus and Paul would have referred to Peter as "little" Cephass, or little rock, not simply Cephass, or Rock. What Jesus spoke to Peter was you are Cephass, and on this Cephass I will build my Church.

What about petros and petra, why were those words used? The explanation is simple, Greek words were used in Matthew chapter 16 in the original manuscript; and as with many European languages, Greek nouns are not gender neutral. Spanish provides us with a good example. In Spanish "la nina" refers to the little girl, while "el nino" refers to little boy. The "a" ending refers to the feminine gender of the noun "nina," or little girl. The "o" ending refers to the masculine gender of the noun "nino," or little boy. If we are referring to a gender neutral noun, for instance "the rock," in Spanish the feminine gender is used, "la piedra." However, what if we are not only referring to a man as rock, but are actually naming him rock? In such a case we would not give him the feminine

¹¹ E.g., D.A. Carson, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Frank Gaebelin, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, first edition); Craig L. Blomberg, New American Commentary; R.T. France, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries; W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann, The Anchor Bible; David Hill, The New Century Bible Commentary; Howard Clark Kee, Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible; and H.N. Ridderbos, Bible Students' Commentary.

¹² Cephass is the Greek transliteration of the Aramaic "Kephas." The Gospels contain a number of Hebrew and Aramaic words and phrases which were transliterated into Greek for the benefit of non-Jewish readers.

form of the word rock (piedra), but we would give him the masculine form of rock (piedro).

The Greek word for rock was the feminine noun "petra." During the time of Christ, the Greek word for rock was not used as a name. However, if one wished to actually name a man "rock" in Greek, he would not use the feminine form of the word. Thus, when Simon son of Bar-Jona was actually named rock, the feminine form of the word "petra" was not used, it is translated into the its masculine form and an 'os' is added, creating "petros." *Consequently, the distinction between "petra" and "petros" is merely a question of gender, not of meaning.*

Peter, as first Pope, possessed the keys to the kingdom of heaven, with binding and loosing authority here on earth. The Pope possesses this particular charism so that the faithful can be assured of what the truth is. This is not to say that the Pope is sinless, or that the Pope can invent doctrine out of thin air, or that everything the Pope says is right. Again, Catholics acknowledge past Papal Intrigue. Nevertheless, when the Pope speaks on matters of faith and morals, and states that He is speaking from the Chair of Peter (i.e. ex cathedra), or when the Pope speaks in union with the bishops at an Ecumenical counsel, the Holy Spirit will guide (not "inspire") the Pope in recognizing "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints". Jude 3. The Pope does not have the authority to propagate or create truth, but only to recognize it.

The purpose of Peter's primacy is to preserve the unity and solidarity of the Church. Christ promised not even the gates of hell would prevail against His Church (Matt. 16:28), that He would remain with the Church to the end of time (Matt. 28:20), and that the Holy Spirit would lead the Church into all truth (Jn. 16:13). Christ's promises have been fulfilled, the Holy Spirit was not somehow overcome by dark age paganism.

The essential question is did Christ leave behind numerous fallible churches, capable of teaching error? And if so, what is the meaning of Christ's promise:

He that heareth *you* heareth me ... Luke 10:16.

Who is the "you" in this passage? The "you" can only be a unified and infallible Church. After Christ founded His Church, the Bible is not silent on the subject. In fact, Scripture is quite explicit as to the authority of His Church and the role this Church will play. It is helpful to focus on the entire passage contained in Matthew chapter 18. In this text, Jesus explains how to deal with a Christian who falls into error. If he will not listen to an individual's admonishment, two or more witnesses should confront him:

[S]o that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. Mt. 18:16.

If he refuses to listen to them, they are to refer the issue to the Church. And:

[I]f he refuses to listen even to the Church, treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector. Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Mt. 18:16-18.

In other words, the Bible teaches that the Church has the final say, with the accompanying authority to excommunicate. In Acts chapter 15, we see Matthew chapter 18 in action. Here the Church is faced with the decision about admitting Gentiles:

And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. Acts 15:1-2.

The Church called its first council, the Council of Jerusalem, to decide the issue. And the Church decided this issue just as Christ commanded in Matthew chapter 18. The Holy Spirit speaks through the Church, so that when the Church teaches official doctrine on matters of faith and morals, it is not mere human teaching but the Holy

Spirit guidance:

It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us not to place on you any burden beyond these necessities. Acts 15:28.

The apostles then sent Paul and Silas:

[W]ho handed on to the people for observance the decisions reached by the apostles and presbyters in Jerusalem. Acts 16:4.

Observance of the Church's ruling was not optional. Those who wished to have gentiles circumcised were not granted authority to start their own church. The Church's decree was binding on the consciences of all Christians.

But what happens if those within the Church disagree? What happens when denominations disagree, who has the final say then? If Christ's Church has the authority to excommunicate for sin or heresy, it must have the authority to authoritatively determine sin and heresy. [*For a detailed listing of Early Church heresies, see Exhibit "A".*] How can the Church fulfill the Lord's command to decide issues authoritatively if the Church is not unified on what the truth is? Case in point, what about invitro fertilization? Here numerous eggs are fertilized in a test tube, upwards of six to eight embryos, and subsequently inserted within the mother's womb knowing that most, if not all, will perish. What about embryo freezing? The reproductive health department at many religiously affiliated hospitals now specializes in such procedures. How can Protestantism respond to the practical ramifications of twentieth century issues – we now have so many new ways to kill people.

Given all the conflicting opinions among Protestantism on such important issues, which denomination has the aforementioned authority to bind and loose on earth as in heaven? Who's opinion do we go by? For a Catholic, the answer to these verses is easy, but to a Protestant the Catholic explanation is unthinkable. Could the Catholic Church be the missing link? I beg that you read with an open mind, for as Bishop Fulton Sheen once said: "There are not a hundred people in the world who hate the Catholic Church, but there are thousands who hate what they mistakenly believe the Catholic Church to be."

One should not be a Catholic because one feels good about the Catholic Church. Sometimes I do not think everything about Her is so great. Her doctrine is hard to understand, Her moral teachings are hard to live by, Her members are stained by sin and scandal. Being Catholic requires not only feelings, but reason. What deserves attention is not whether one is comfortable with what the Church teaches, for Jesus made many of His listeners very uncomfortable. The issue is whether the Catholic Church is true.

If you do not believe that the Catholic Church bears authentic witness to Christ, then you ought not to recognize Her authority. For if the Catholic Church is mistaken about who She is, then Her whole ecclesiastical enterprise is fraudulent. The gates of hell would have prevailed against Her. Mt. 16:18. No matter how cozy the community or pleasing the liturgy, if you think the Catholic Church is not the true Church that She presents Herself to be, jump ship. For if the Catholic Church is wrong, She's not just a little bit wrong.

Many oppose the Church's claim that what She teaches is true, and not simply Her heartfelt or long-standing opinion. They are incensed at the very idea that the Church teaches with the authority of Christ, that by listening to Her word, one is hearkening to Christ's voice. To teach gospel truths with certainty and to separate religious truth from error runs counter to the spirit of this modernist age. Catholic author Peter Kreeft catches the twentieth century mood: "I'm feeling rather religious today; do you have anything for me to believe in?" Familiar with the free market, this indulged generation selects its religious beliefs and practices according to taste.¹³ Due to

¹³ A heretic is one who picks and chooses. That is what the Greek root word means: to select.

this consumer choice spirituality, religious denominations have multiplied, the overwhelming majority having been created in this country.

Modernism has even beset the Catholic Church, for the right to choose what to believe - and still call yourself Catholic - is now taken for granted.¹⁴ American Catholics are falling prey to religious individualism, for America teaches that the individual is sovereign. I agree with most of what the Church teaches, but ... How can one agree with the Church unless they disagree? You see for Catholics, the faith does not belong to a few isolated individuals, but to the whole Church. The Church offers Her faith in its entirety to each generation. She can do no other if She is to remain faithful to the Gospel She has received. To be members of Christ's Church is to accept His gift of truth, given by Jesus to His apostles, and given by His apostles to His Church, and given by His Church to us. By definition, a believer's act of faith must be total; conditional faith, faith with reservations, is self-contradictory. If the Catholic Church is the true bride of Christ, believing in "nearly everything" the Church teaches is not a logical statement for a Catholic to make.

c. Why Is The Bible The Bible?

It is hard for a Catholic to understand how a Protestant can even believe in the Bible outside of the Catholic Church. Let me explain. Protestants believe the Bible is the inspired word of God because the Bible says it is the inspired word of God. While Protestants are correct, such reasoning is circular and inadequate. The Moslem Qur'an, the Hindu Vedas, and the Book of Mormon also claim to be the inspired word of God, but they are not.

Protestants also argue that Scripture "confirms itself" as inspired in the hearts of those who sincerely read it. Such reasoning is identical to Mormonism's "burning in the bosom" method of proving the Book of Mormon's divine origin. Several Mormons challenged me to read the Book of Mormon with a sincere heart, for if I did I would know it was true. Sorry! Does Scripture "confirm itself" as to a Calvinist's view of predestination, while a Presbyterian says "yes" the majority of Protestantism says "no."

While Protestants are correct, the Bible is the inspired Word of God, Catholicism gives us the answer as to why the Bible is what it is.

Jesus Christ lived, died, and was resurrected from the dead. We know this not only through God's gift of faith, but it is a historical fact. Because Jesus rose from the dead, He is divine; and because Jesus is divine, we can believe in what He says. And one of the things He said he would do is found a Church. Mt. 16:18. And to this Church He gave his very authority, the keys to His kingdom. Mt. 16:19. Through Christ's authority, this Church passed on His teachings orally for centuries, until it was time to canonize Christ's teachings in the Bible.¹⁵

When the Holy Spirit led the Church to give us the Bible, the Holy Spirit also lead the Church to decide which teachings were authentic, and which were not. Certain books of the New Testament, such as the synoptic gospels, can be shown to be reliable historical accounts of Jesus' life. But there were a number of New Testament books (e.g., Hebrews, James, 2 Peter and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation) whose authorship and divine origin were debated in the early Church. Eventually, the Catholic Church decided in their favor and included them in the canon

¹⁴ During his 1987 visit to the United States, Pope John Paul II addressed the spread of cafeteria Catholicism. Selective adherence to the Church's moral teaching, said the Holy Father, is a situation that Catholics must face courageously. "It is sometimes claimed that dissent from the magisterium is totally compatible with being 'a good Catholic' and poses no obstacle to the reception of the sacraments," said the Pope. "This is a grave error that challenges the bishops of the United States and elsewhere."

¹⁵ Have you ever thought about to whom the New Testament was written? The epistles were written to the existing Churches in Rome, Corinth, Galatians, Ephesus, Phillipi, Thessalonica, Colossae, etc.

of Scripture. However, their divine origin was not established and recognized for over 300 years. There were also many false gospels that were accepted as divine by many, but they were eventually excluded by the Church from the canon of Scripture. There was the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Simon, the Gospel of Nicodemus, the Gospel of Mary, the Gospel of Barnabas, and the Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus; accepted as divinely inspired by many, and all excluded from the Bible by the Catholic Church.

How can a Protestant, two thousand years removed from their writing, have any possibility of proving which books of the Bible are genuinely apostolic. Protestantism must simply take the Catholic Church's word on it. And for this reason the doctrine of Sola Scriptura is a nullity; there is no way to show from within Scripture what books of the Bible are authentic. By looking to the Catholic Church as the formulator of the New Testament, Protestants actually violate Sola Scriptura. The "Bible only" theory is self-refuting because the Bible cannot tell us which books belong in it and which books do not.

The canon of the Bible was not finally settled until the Council of Hippo (393 A.D.) and the Council of Carthage (397 A.D.), over three hundred years after the last apostle died. If the Bible is correct, then the Church made an infallible decision three hundred years after the apostolic age. If the Church can make an infallible decisions then, why not today?

Father Arnold Damen, S.J., spoke this sermon over a hundred years ago. It seems most applicable in presenting the Catholic view of Scripture.

You hear it said nowadays in this Nineteenth Century of little faith that it matters not what religion a man professes, providing he be a good man. That is heresy. ...

"But what is the true Faith?" "The true Faith," say Protestant friends, "is to believe in the Lord Jesus." Agreed, Catholics believe in that. But tell me what you mean by believing in the Lord Jesus? "Why," says my Protestant friend, "you must believe that He is the Son of the Living God." Agreed again. Thanks be to God, we can agree on something else. We believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Living God, and that He is God. ...

If Christ be God, then we must believe all He teaches, isn't that so my dearly beloved Protestant brethren and sisters? ... "Well, yes," says my Protestant friend, "I guess that is the right Faith. To believe that Jesus is the Son of the Living God we must believe all that Christ has taught." We Catholics say the same, and here we agree again. ...

But if Christ, my dearly beloved people, commands me under pain of eternal damnation to believe all that He has taught, He must give me the means to know what He has taught. ... *And the means Christ gives us of knowing this must have been at all times available to all people.* ... [In addition], the means that God gives us to know what he has taught must be an infallible means. For if it be a means that can lead us astray, it can be no means at all. It must be an infallible means, so that if a man makes use of that means, he will infallibly, without fear of mistake or error, be brought to a knowledge of all the truths that God has taught.

Has God given us such means? "Yes," say my Protestant friends, "He has." And so says the Catholic, God has given us such means. What is the means God has given us whereby we shall learn the truth that God has revealed? "The Bible," says my Protestant friends, "the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible." But we Catholics say, [No, not the Bible alone and its private revelation, but the Bible and the Church of the Living God.] ... [Catholics believe that] it is not the private interpretation of the Bible that has been appointed by God to be the teacher of man, but the [interpretation of Scripture] by the Church of the Living God. ...

Christ sent His Apostles throughout the whole universe and said: "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to

observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Christ did not say, "Sit down and write Bibles and scatter them over the earth, and let every man read his Bible and judge for himself." If Christ had said that, there would never have been a Christianity on the earth at all, but a Babylon and confusion instead, and never one Church, the union of the one body. Hence, [Christ said go and preach and teach], not "go and write Bibles and distribute them, and let everyone judge for himself." That injunction was reserved for the Sixteenth Century, and we have seen the result of it. Ever since the Sixteenth Century there have been springing up religion upon religion, and churches upon churches, all fighting and quarreling with one another. And all because of the private interpretation of the Bible.

Christ sent His Apostles [His Church] with authority to teach all nations. ... [Later Christ's Church, when the time was proper, canonized the books of the Bible.]

If Christ commands me, under pain of eternal damnation, to believe all that He has taught, He must give me the means to know what He has taught. ... And His teachings must have been at all times available to all people. [However], Saint John wrote the last portion of the Bible - the Book of Revelation - about sixty-five years after Christ had left this earth and the Church He had established. The Catholic Church existed sixty-five years before the Bible was even completed. ... Were the people that lived during this period really Christians, good Christians, enlightened Christians. How did they know what they had to do to save their souls? Was it from the Bible that they learned it? ...

Not only sixty-five years did Christ leave the Church He had established without a Bible, but over three hundred years. The Church was established and went on spreading itself over the whole globe without the Bible for more than three hundred years. In all that time, the people did not know what constituted the Bible. In the days of the Apostles there were many false gospels. There was the Gospel of Simon, the Gospel of Nicodemus, the Gospel of Mary, the Gospel of Barnabas, and the Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus. All of these gospels were spread among the people, and the people had no way of knowing which of these were inspired and which were false and spurious. [T]he people were at a loss for over three hundred years to know which was false or spurious, and which was inspired. ... They did not know what constituted the books of the Bible.

It was not until the Fourth Century that the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, the Head of the Church, the successor of Saint Peter, assembled together the Bishops of the world in a council. And there in that council it was decided that the Bible, as we Catholics have it now, is the Word of God, and that the Gospels of Simon, Nicodemus, Mary, etc. are spurious or, or at least, unauthentic. Would our Divine Savior, if He intended that [the Bible should be our sole guide for truth], have left the Christian world for three hundred years without that book? Most assuredly not.

Not only for three hundred years was the world left without the Bible, but for one thousand four hundred years the Christian world was left without the Sacred Book. Before the art of printing was invented, Bibles were rare things; Bibles were costly things. ... Historians tell us that in the Eleventh Century - eight hundred years ago - Bibles were so rare and costly that it took a fortune to buy oneself a copy of the Bible. ... Would our Divine Lord have left the world without that book if [it was the sole guide for truth.] Most assuredly not. ...

Let us suppose for a moment that all [people throughout history] should have a Bible. Should all read it, and have a faithful translation, even then it cannot be the [sole] guide of man, because the private interpretation of the Bible is not infallible, but, on the contrary, most fallible. ...

There are now throughout the world three hundred and fifty different denominations [in the twentieth century, thousands], and all of them say the Bible is their guide and teacher. And I suppose they are all sincere. Are all of them true churches? This is an impossibility. Truth is one as God is one, and there can be no contradiction. Every man in his senses sees that every one of them cannot be true, for they

differ and contradict one another. ...

Let us suppose that here is an Episcopal minister. He is a sincere, an honest, a well-meaning and prayerful man. He reads his Bible in a prayerful spirit, and from the Bible he says it is clear that there must be bishops and priests. For without priests there can be no Sacraments, and without Sacraments there is no Church. The Presbyterian reads the Bible also, and deduces that there should be no bishops or priests, but only presbyters. ... Then the Baptist comes in. "Well," says the Baptist, "have you ever been baptized?" "I was when I was a baby," says the Episcopalian and the Presbyterian. "But," says the Baptist, "[that Baptism is not adequate]." Next comes the Unitarian, well-meaning and sincere. "Well," says the Unitarian, "allow me to tell you that you are a pack of idolaters. You worship a man for a God who is no God at all." And he quotes several texts from Scripture to prove his point, while the other three are stopping their ears that they may not hear the blasphemies. ... Next comes the Quaker. He urges them not to quarrel, and advises that they do not baptize at all. He is the sincerest of men, and gives the Bible for his faith. ...

Who then is true? He that has the true meaning of the Bible, you say. But the Bible does not tell us who that is - the Bible never settles the quarrel. The Bible is the text-book, not the teacher. We Catholics allow that the Bible is the [inspired, God-breathed] Word of God. But good as it is, the Bible does not explain itself, [it is not wholly self-interpreting. While the Bible is inspired, your private interpretation] is not the language of inspiration. Human opinion and judgments is only human faith, not divine faith.

Yet with each breakaway denomination, Protestantism inexorably retraced the missteps of Catholic tradition to one degree or another. You see, whatever problems the Church has, they are not exclusively Roman; they are universally human.¹⁶ I in no way wish to discount the problems that have existed within the Catholic Church. In every age, the Church has had to endure the blight of worldly, sinful, and heretical members. However, one must realize that aberrations among its members does not negate the Catholic Church's authenticity as Christ's true Church. One must distinguish between what is done in the name of Catholicism from what is officially taught by the Catholic Church. Rebellious members should not surprise us. The Bible warns that many in the Church will sin and become corrupt, although maintaining the appearance of spirituality. As Jesus said, the wheat will grow up with the tares until He comes back to judge the world.

d. Old Testament Foundation For Church.

Again consider Paul's pastoral advice to the young bishop Timothy:

If I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of truth. 1 Tim. 3:15.

Paul describes the Church as the "household" of God, the pillar and foundation of truth. The Church is

¹⁶ For instance, John Calvin, as sincere a man as he was, immediately traced the missteps of Catholicism as soon as he broke from Rome. Calvin determined that his church should regulate all details of faith, worship, and morals; and the state, as the physical arm of the church, should enforce these regulations. Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, vol. VI, *The Reformation*, p. 465; citing Allen, *Political Thought*, 61; Hearnshaw, *Thinkers of the Renaissance and Reformation*, 211. The secular authorities should see to it that idolatry (i.e. Catholicism) and "other scandals to religion be not publicly set forth and broadcast among the people." Institutes, IV, XIX, 3. Everyone was required to attend Sunday and weekday service, no one was excused from Protestant religious service for having a different creed, and anyone who did not accept Calvin's creed was banished from Geneva. Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, vol. VI, *The Reformation*, p. 473. Between 1542 and 1564, fifty-eight (58) persons were executed in Geneva for heresy, while seventy-six (76) were banished for violating the new code. Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, vol. VI, *The Reformation*, p. 465; citing La Tour, IV, 178.

God's household. In the Old Testament, God's household was limited to at first a certain family, then expanded to a certain nation, then expanded to a certain kingdom. But God made clear in the Old Testament that it was His plan to expand His household to all mankind. The Catholic Church is foreshadowed in the Old Testament as this one universal family of God. A brief review of salvation history may provide a better understanding of this point.

Seeking to rectify lost humanity, God made a covenant with Abraham. Genesis 12:1-3 is called the "acorn of salvation history." Here God swore a covenantal oath that He would make a great nation of Abram's descendants, and that these descendants would ultimately be a blessing to all nations. God fleshes out His plan in Gen. 15, promising Abram that his descendants would be a great nation, fulfilled in the formation of the nation Israel. In Gen. 17, God covenants that this nation will form a great kingdom, fulfilled in the formation of the Davidic kingdom of Israel. Then in Gen. 22:15-18, God covenants that this kingdom will finally be a universal or "catholic" blessing to all nations. The ultimate result of God's covenant will be that salvation will no longer be limited to the Jews, but all people will have the opportunity of being elevated to the status of sons and daughters of God. See Rom. 5:14-17; 8:4-17 and 11:25-27. This covenant was fulfilled in Christ's Church. From the very beginning God used a visible structure, a people, to effect His salvific plan.

God reestablished this universal blessing with King David, promising that all nations will be blessed through the restoration of the Davidic kingdom of Israel. Cf. Amos 9:11-12; Is. 11:1-10; 2 Sam. 7:12-19; Gal. 6:14-16. In 2 Sam. 7:12-19, God tells David, a descendant of Abraham, that after David dies God will establish his throne forever. See also Is. 55:3. The prophet Amos strengthens the case that the restored house of David will be the means through which all the nations will be blessed. In Amos 9:11-12, Amos speaks of David's house being restored and, upon restoration, the Gentiles will enter. See also Rom. 11:25-27. In Acts 15:15-17, at the Council of Jerusalem, James claims that Christ has fulfilled Amos' prophecy. In Luke 1:31, the angel Gabriel tells Mary that God will give her Son the throne of His ancestral father, David. Jesus calls the restored house of David the "Church." Mt. 16:18. The Greek word for Church is "ekklesia," which means "religious assembly" or "house." Christ's Church is prefigured and prophesied in the Old Testament, it is not a first-century invention unconnected to Abraham and David.

God will restore David's house through His Church, and thereby expand His covenant to all nations. But how will the restored house of David look, how will it be structured? Again let us turn to Matthew chapter 16, whereby Christ founded His Church. Christ gives Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and tells Peter that whatever he binds on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever he looses on earth will be loosed in heaven. Mt. 16:19. Here Christ is referencing Isaiah 22:15-25, which not so coincidentally is an explanation of the house of David.

In Isaiah 22, Eliakim replaces the corrupt Shebna as master of the palace, or prime minister (Hebrew: asher al habbayith). See also 1 Kings 4:6.¹⁷ The prime minister is not the king, he is merely granted authority by the king. The prophet Isaiah explains that the prime minister receives the king's authority by receiving the *key* of David. Christ mirrors this language when he gives Peter the keys and establishes him as the prime minister of His church:

The *key* of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder; so he shall open, and no one shall shut; and he shall shut, and no one shall open. Isaiah 22:22.¹⁸

Eliakim is given the "key of the house of David" to be prime minister over Israel, and just as the Eliakim was a father to Israel;

[A] father to those who live in Jerusalem ... Isaiah 22:21;

¹⁷ Many have compared this office to the office of vizier held by Joseph in Egypt. Gen. 41:40; cf. 2Kgs 15:5, 18:18.

¹⁸ This verse is echoed in Matthew 16:19 and Revelation 3:7.

So Peter would be a "pope" or father to the new Israel, the Church.¹⁹

In addition, *the office was continuing (i.e. there were successors)*, because Iliakim replaced the corrupt Shebna. Verse 21 explicitly says this is a transfer of authority between the two. Since Peter's office was the fulfillment of this Old Testament type, then Peter's office also had successors.

¹⁹ Note also that Peter's name change from Simon parallels that of Abram's to Abraham (father of a multitude of nations). Just as the old Israel was hewn out of the rock of Abraham (Is. 51:1), so the new Israel will come forth from the foundation of the new rock, Peter, also known as Cephas (cf. Jn. 1:42, 1 Cor. 1:12, etc.). As in the Old, so in the New: the leader of God's people being called a rock does not preempt God's role as the ultimate rock or cornerstone (cf. Eph. 2:20, Acts 4:11).

One might expect the restored house of David to have a similar structure to the original house of David. Scripture bears this out in the founding of the Catholic Church and the papacy. As Mt. 16:13-20 records, Peter received the keys to the kingdom of heaven as well as the king's binding and loosing authority. The early Church understood that Christ was reestablishing the house of David, and that Peter would be the prime minister for the new King, Jesus Christ.²⁰

God has kept his word. He fulfilled His covenant sworn to Abraham (Gen. 22:15-18), and has made salvation available to all humanity. The Christ of God has come to earth, born of David's lineage (Lk. 1:69), thereby restoring the House of David to all mankind. The Household of God, the pillar and foundation of truth (1Tim. 3:15), exists today through Christ's Church (Mt. 16:18). Christ promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against His Church (Mt. 16:18), and they have not. Christ continues to guide His Church through the gift of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:13), which leads the Church through all kinds of trials, internal and external. In the tradition of St. Peter, Catholics should confidently share Christ's salvific plan with all we encounter:

Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and respect. 1 Pet. 3:15.

e. Sacred Tradition and Traditionalism.

Many Protestants believe the word "tradition" carries with it a negative connotation. They connect "tradition" with Jesus' stern condemnation of "traditions of men" which nullify the Word of God. Mt. 15:9. However, the Bible has several positive declarations concerning tradition. Paul commands the Thessalonians to:

[S]tand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught, either by an *oral statement* or by a *letter* of ours. 2 Thes. 2:15.

Paul acknowledged that divine Revelation, or the Word of God, comes to us in both written and oral form, and both are equally binding. In fact, this text clearly indicates that the written word, the Bible, is a subset of the overarching category of "Tradition." Paul also praised the Church in Corinth stating:

I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold fast to the *traditions* just as I handed them on to you. 1 Cor. 11:2; see also Luke 10:16; 1 Thess. 2:15; 2 Tim 2:1-2.

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

Holy Tradition transmits in its *entirety* the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. It transmits it to the successors of the apostles so that, enlightened by the Spirit of Truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound, and spread it abroad by their preaching.

As a result the Church, to whom the transmission and *interpretation* of Revelation is entrusted, does not derive Her certainty about all revealed truths from Holy Scripture alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.

God's revelation is not partly contained in Scripture and partly contained in Sacred Tradition. There is only one source of divine revelation, God. God's revelation is handed on to us through Sacred Tradition, which includes Sacred Scripture as its normative element. Thus, the Bible is always the wholly sufficient foundation for what we as Catholics believe. After Jesus, the gospel was first proclaimed and witnessed to by the apostles and other disciples,

²⁰ There was no dispute in the early Church about Peter's authority. Keep reading and I'll show you.

and by the whole Church ever since. The process by which that proclamation and witness occurs is called Sacred Tradition, or literally the "handing on" of revelation.

As the apostles, the other disciples, and the first-century Christian communities reflected on their experience in the faith, they set down their reflections in a series of diverse writings later recognized or canonized by the Church as the inspired Word of God, or the Bible. Scripture is itself a product of the "handing on" process, known as Sacred Tradition.

However, Scripture is not simply one of Tradition's many products, the Bible is the normative element within Tradition. Sacred Scripture is the authoritative expression of the Word of God and, as such, is the standard against which all else in Tradition is to be measured. (Constitution on Divine Revelation, n. 10). The Church is always in conformity to sacred Scripture. Given the normative status of Scripture, there will never be something essential to the faith that is contrary to the Bible. *The chief function of Sacred Tradition is the "handing on" authentic orthodox Biblical interpretation (i.e., handing on the faith of the apostles) from one generation to the next.*

St. Paul told the Corinthians that he was handing on to them the faith he himself had received. 1 Cor. 15:3. All of us are beneficiaries of the Church's great "handing on" of Sacred Tradition. Without the Catholic Church's Sacred Tradition, we would have no Scriptures, no sacraments, and no guidance to live a Christian life. The Church has been given to us, Her word proceeds and enfolds us. Our Catholic roots reach out across time and culture. The martyrs of yesterday, together with the early saints, they are our own. The courage of St. Ignatius of Antioch, the intellect of St. Augustine, the prayers of St. Anthony, the generosity of St. Nicholas, the heroism of St. Patrick, the simplicity of St. Francis of Assisi, the zeal of St. Ignatius of Loyolla, and the tough sweetness of St. Therese of Lisieux, the "Little Flower," they belong to us. These are our people. Each represents a thread of the great tapestry of Catholic Tradition.

I do not want to confuse Sacred Tradition with "traditionalism." Honoring Tradition is not a fondness for archaic language, quaint dress, and Latin hymns. But at the same time, Catholics rightfully cherish small "t" traditions. Not to be equated with Sacred Tradition, customs - such as the Advent wreath and the stations of the cross - keep us in touch with the Church and Christianity through the ages. They link us with our ancestors in the faith.

Our Catholic roots reach out across time and culture. The martyrs of yesteryear, they are our own. These are our people. In studying the Early Church Fathers, it is noteworthy to realize that while they did not hesitate to invoke Biblical authority, they never tried to prove their case on the Bible alone. They also appealed to an authoritative Church tradition handed down through a succession of bishops that could be traced all the way back to the apostles themselves.

Claiming Himself to be "the truth" (Jn. 14:6), Jesus wanted those who would believe in Him to know that truth. When He chose the apostles, He intended that they preach the truth of the Gospel to the ends of the earth. With the Spirit of Truth who enlightened them at Pentecost, the Risen Lord equipped His messengers to teach the saving truth necessary for our salvation. Were their message not guaranteed by the Spirit of Truth, then we who come afterward would have only opinions open to distortion. The Catholic Church presents Herself as containing this Spirit of Truth; as being founded by Jesus Christ (Mt. 16:18), as being enfolded by the true faith that comes to us from the apostles (Mt. 18:18), as the one kingdom that is not divided against itself (see Mt. 12:25), the one flock that has one shepherd (see Jn. 10:16), the one bride whose spouse is Christ (see Eph. 5:22-33), the one body of which Christ is the head (see Eph. 1:22). Quite simply, there is only one Church, and the Catholic Church so designates Herself, calmly and respectfully. It is also noteworthy that Catholic doctrine was espoused by virtually every early Christian, (referred to by Catholics as Early Church Fathers). By studying Church history it becomes evident that certain aspects of Protestantism were invented by the reformers during, or on the eve of, the reformation.

The Catholic Church offers 2000 years of Holy Spirit guidance, of Scripture practically applied, of consistent theology. Holy Mother Church was founded by Jesus upon the rock of Peter, and He promised that the gates of hell would never prevail against Her. And they haven't - in spite of heresies, betrayals, and yes, schisms.

She's the oldest institution in the western world, perhaps the entire world. The historian Thomas Macaulay noted:

The proudest royal houses are but of yesterday when compared to the line of Supreme Pontiffs. The republic of Venice was modern when compared with the Papacy; and the republic of Venice is gone, and the Papacy remains. The Papacy remains, not in decay, not a mere antique, but full of life and youthful vigor.

Denigrated as the Church of "rum, Romanism, and rebellion," the Catholic Church has outlived puritans, gestapos, and commissars. She will surely survive doubters, dissenters, and fallen priests in Her midst. The moral issues of today were dealt with centuries ago by the Church. There is no need to continually reevaluate our beliefs, they have been consistently taught since the time of Christ. Please don't loose hope in finding the Church Christ promised would never be overcome (Matt. 16:18), the Church Jesus promised would be with us until "the end of the world (Matt. 28:20).

f. The Church and Church History.

John Henry Newman, a famous nineteenth century Protestant theologian and Catholic convert, once stated that "knowledge of Church history is the death of Protestantism." Due to his study of Church history, John Henry Newman recognized that without tradition, Christians were free to reinvent Christianity every generation. Martin Luther reckoned that "Sola Scriptura" meant to scrape the accumulated Catholic barnacles from the original lean and clean Christian "ship." Newman, in contrast, exploded the notion of a barnacle-free ship. Ships always have barnacles - the real question is whether the ship will arrive at its destination. Tradition, for Newman, is the rudder that guides and directs the Church through its journey.

The Catholic Church is a maturing organism whose life span stretches across the centuries - not an archaeological expedition always searching for fossils to help it reconstruct a primitive campsite. Protestants prefer the embryo over the mature organism. Newman brilliantly demonstrated the characteristics of true maturing of the Church (i.e. the divinity of Christ, the Trinity, salvation by grace alone, etc.) as opposed to the corruptions of men within the Church (i.e. abuses pertaining to indulgences and relics, etc.). Without Tradition, Protestantism is destined to continually fragment, continually repeat the mistakes of men, and continually rediscover truths that are centuries old.²¹

It is the mission of the Church to teach with infallible certitude. The apostles and their successors were promised by Christ:

He who listens to you listens to me. And he who rejects you rejects me and rejects the one who sent me." (Luke 10:16).

Perhaps Saint Augustine, speaking around 400 A.D., can provide a glimpse of what I am trying to say. Faced with numerous schisms during his day²², Saint Augustine never pointed to the Bible alone to defend Christian Orthodoxy. Augustine referred to Scripture interpreted within the teaching authority of the Church. Augustine addressed those who followed the Manichean heresy, who attempted to reinterpret Scripture according to their own design:

For my part, I should not believe the gospel except as moved by the authority of the Catholic Church.

²¹ The Southern Baptist Convention condemned abortion in 1980, the Catholic Church did so in the first century. See The Didache.

²² Augustine was a one Church man, and spoke out against separation and schism: "Thus He made sure that a faithful hope, founded not on man, but on the Lord, should never be scattered by the storm of schism." A Speechless Child is the Word of God, p. 65.

Against the letter of Mani, p. 73.

Augustine explained that he was Catholic because:

Starting with the apostolic chair down through the successions of bishops, even unto the open confession of mankind, it [the Catholic Church] has possessed the crown of authority. Advantage of Believing, 17, 35; A Sleepless Child is the Word of God, p. 76.

And that in Christ, your Son, Our Lord, and in you Holy Scripture, *which the authority of the Catholic Church guarantees*, you have established the way of human salvation into that life which will come after death. Advantage of Believing, 7, 7-11; A Sleepless Child is the Word of God, p. 76.

Honor, love and praise the holy Church, your Mother, the heavenly Jerusalem, the holy city of God. It is She who, in this faith which you have received, bears fruit and spreads throughout the world. ... The Church has received the keys to the kingdom of heaven, so that in Her there may be remission of sins through the blood of Christ and the operation of the Holy Spirit. ... This the Christian faith; this the *Catholic faith*; this the apostolic faith. Sermon 214.

Augustine responded to Faustus the Manichean, and his false belief that every individual believer has authority to interpret Scripture as he or she chooses.

Your design is clearly to deprive Scripture of all authority, and to make every one's mind the judge of what passage one approves or disapproves of. Thus, the reader would make Scripture subject to him or herself. From "A Sleepless Child is the Word of God", (400)(32,19)(n).

Saint Augustine provided the basis for the Church's objection to Sola Scriptura. Scripture does not change with every individual's interpretation, or every denomination's interpretation. Augustine's response was simple:

Why not rather submit to the authority of the gospel, which is well founded, so confirmed and so generally acknowledged and admired, and which has an unbroken series of testimonies from the apostles down to our day. Reply to Faustus the Manichean p. 73.

Most Protestants teach that the apostolic church was not Catholic, that Catholic teachings began with Constantine, sometime after the first 300 plus years of the church. [*For a Critical Evaluation of the Papacy, see Exhibit "B"*]. Jimmy Swaggart challenged: "We would like to challenge the Catholic Church to demonstrate that the saints and martyrs of the first three hundred years accepted the beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church as it exists today. ... All of them were Evangelical and Pentecostal and had no association with what is now recognized as the Roman Catholic Church." I have taken Mr. Swaggart's challenge, and have found that the Early Church Fathers were profoundly Catholic.

Dr. William Carrol, of Christendom College, points out that it is not necessary to refer to Catholic doctrine in order to uphold the Papacy – historical facts would compel a truly objective secular or non-Catholic historian to assent to it as well. First of all, there is the immense antiquity of the papacy. If the first Easter is dated in 30 A.D. (which seems most likely) and St. Peter's assumption of primacy in the Church from Pentecost Sunday of that year, the papacy. We may search the world today in vain for any institution, any unbroken chain of succession, which dates back anywhere near that far.

The Early Church Fathers recognized that Jesus made Peter the rock on which he would build his Church, that this gave Peter a special primacy, that Peter went to Rome, and that he left successors there. The following is **not** an exhaustive list of quotes, but enough to provide substantial evidence that the Fathers of the East and West understood that Peter's successors shared in his jurisdictional authority or primacy.

Most significant are the passages below in which the Popes, by their statements or their actions, reveal their understanding of their own authority in the Church, such as when Pope Clement I commanded the church of Corinth to reinstate its leadership or when Pope Victor excommunicated the churches of Asia Minor as a group, after which the other bishops who wished to change Victor's mind did not challenge his authority to do this.

Many argue that the papacy is a medieval Roman invention, and that the early Church knew nothing of a "supreme pontiff." Others argue that the early bishops didn't regard the bishop of Rome as having special authority to operate the way modern Popes do.

Archbishop Fulton Sheen also stated: "It is easy to find truth; it is hard to face it, and harder still to follow it." This is certainly true when it comes to facing the historical evidence for the papacy in the early Church. The hard-core purveyors of Pope fiction refuse to believe that the papacy was established by Christ. But if the equivalent of the modern papacy was merely a Roman invention of the eighth or ninth century, how do we explain the fact that for the preceding 700 years, the bishops of Rome were regarded (and regarded themselves) as having a special, unique authority and responsibility for the whole Church?

The earliest account we have of a bishop of Rome exercising authority in another diocese comes from St. Clement's Epistle to the Corinthians. It was written by Clement, Pope of the Catholic Church, around the year A.D. 80. In it he responds to the Corinthians' plea for his intervention. The entire letter is written in a fatherly, kind way, but it is also clear that Clement was quite aware he had a special authority. Two key phrases stand out as testimony of this:

But if any disobey the words spoken by Him [Christ] through us, let them know that they will involve themselves in sin and no small danger; ... For you will give us joy and gladness if, obedient to what we have written through the Holy Spirit, you root out the lawless anger of your jealousy" (59, 63).

Clearly, this early bishop of Rome wrote as one who expected his words to be obeyed.

Pope Victor I (reigned 189-199) worked to settle a dispute among the bishops of the East and West over when to celebrate Easter — known as the Quartodeciman controversy. The other bishops recognized his unique authority when they followed his directive to convene local and regional synods to deliberate on the issue. Most of the bishops decided to adopt his proposal that the whole Church celebrate Easter on the first Sunday after Passover. Those who didn't, he threatened with excommunication. The fact that no bishop in the world — not a single one — disputed his authority as bishop of Rome to carry out such an excommunication is a powerful piece of evidence that the early Church recognized the unique authority of the bishop of Rome.

Shortly before his death in A.D. 200, St. Irenaeus of Lyons wrote to Pope Victor asking him to relent and allow the Eastern bishops to maintain their celebration of Easter according to the Hebrew lunar calendar, evidence that he recognized the Pope's authority to threaten excommunication. Pope Victor did not in fact relent, but it's important to note that St. Irenaeus, like most of the bishops, submitted to the Pope's ruling. After all, it was Irenaeus who wrote of the Church at Rome:

For with this church, because of its superior origin, all the churches must agree; that is, all the faithful in the whole world, for in her the apostolic tradition has always been preserved for the benefit of the faithful everywhere. (Against Heresies 3:3).

Around the year 220, Pope Callistus wrote,

Callistus, archbishop of the Church Catholic in the city of Rome, to Benedictus, our brother and bishop, greetings in the Lord. By the love of the brotherhood we are bound, and by our apostolic rule we are constrained, to give answer to the inquiries of the brethren, according to what the Lord has given us, and to furnish them with the authority of the seal of the apostles. (First Epistle 1).

Clearly he was well aware of his special role and authority in settling problems in the Church, even in other dioceses. Later, the same Pope wrote a letter to all the bishops of Gaul, saying,

Callistus to our most dearly beloved brethren, all the bishops settled throughout Gaul . . . We beg you not to permit anything to be done in those parts contrary to the apostolic statutes; but, supported by our authority, you should stop what is injurious, and prohibit what is unlawful . . . Observe this law, which has been laid down by the apostles and fathers, and our predecessors, and has been ratified by us . . . We have replied to your interrogations shortly, because your letter found us burdened overmuch, and preoccupied with other judgments. (Second Epistle, To All the Bishops of Gaul 2, 6).

In the year 382, Pope Damasus wrote about his authority as bishop of Rome, anchoring it to the fact that he was the successor of St. Peter. He said the Church at Rome

has been placed at the forefront, not by the conciliar decision of other churches, but has received the primacy by the evangelistic voice of our Lord and Savior Who says, 'You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it; and I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you shall have bound on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall have loosed on earth shall be loosed in heaven' . . . The first See, therefore, is that of Peter the Apostle, that of the Roman Church, which has neither stain nor blemish. (Decree of Pope Damasus 2-3).

From the earliest years, the bishop of Rome maintained special authority in the Church. Those who say the papacy is a "medieval Roman invention," are either ignorant of history or dishonest. Here I will recount a few of the hundreds of examples that could be given.

Pope Clement I.

"Owing to the sudden and repeated calamities and misfortunes which have befallen us, we must acknowledge that we have been somewhat tardy in turning our attention to the matters in dispute among you, beloved, and especially that abominable and unholy sedition, alien and foreign to the elect of God, which a few rash and self-willed persons have inflamed." "Accept our counsel and you will have nothing to regret. . . . If anyone disobey the things which have been said by him [God] through us [i.e., that you must reinstate your leaders], let them know that they will involve themselves in transgression and in no small danger." "You will afford us joy and gladness if being obedient to the things which we have written through the Holy Spirit, you will root out the wicked passion of jealousy" (*Letter to the Corinthians* 1:1, 58:2-59:1, 63:2 [A.D. 80]).

The Shepard of Hermas.

"Therefore shall you [Hermas] write two little books and send one to Clement [Bishop of Rome] and one to Grapte. Clement shall then send it to the cities abroad, because that is his duty" (*The Shepherd* 2:4:3 [A.D. 80]).

Ignatius of Antioch.

St. Ignatius was the third bishop of Antioch and was sentenced to the beasts in the arena by the Emperor Trajan about the year 110 A.D. St. Ignatius is considered an Apostolic Father by reason of having been a friend of THE apostle John. On his journey from Antioch to Rome and martyrdom he wrote seven letters, that reflect a hierarchial Church, based in Rome, known as the Catholic Church (his writings on the Holy Eucharist will be addressed later):

Let no one do anything of concern to the Church without the bishop. Let that be considered a valid Eucharist which is celebrated by the bishop, or by one whom he appoints. Wherever the bishop appears, let the people be there; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the *CATHOLIC CHURCH*. *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* [ca. A.D. 110] (Faith of the Early Fathers, vol. I, 65).

"Ignatius . . . to the church also which holds the presidency, in the location of the country of the Romans, worthy of God, worthy of honor, worthy of blessing, worthy of praise, worthy of success, worthy of sanctification, and, because you hold the presidency in love, named after Christ and named after the

Father" (*Letter to the Romans* 1:1 [A.D. 110]).

"You have envied no one, but others you have taught. I desire only that what you have enjoined in your instructions may remain in force" (*ibid.*, 3:1).

St. Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna.

Polycarp is one of the Apostolic Fathers, having also been a hearer of the Apostle John; he is the same Polycarp to whom one of the seven Ignatian letters is addressed. He died a martyr's death at the age of eighty-six, in the year 155 or 156 A.D. *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* is the oldest authentic account of a martyrdom, written by the Catholic Church in Smyrna to the community in Philomelium. Again, it is wonderful to see that the second century Church in Smyrna was Catholic:

When finally [Polycarp] had finished his prayer, in which he remembered everyone with whom he had ever been acquainted, the small and the great, the renowned and the unknown, and the whole *CATHOLIC CHURCH* throughout the world, ... *Martyrdom of St. Polycarp* [A.D. 155/157] (*Faith of the Early Fathers*, vol. I, 79).

And of the elect, he was one indeed, the wonderful martyr Polycarp, who in our days was an apostolic and prophetic teacher, bishop of the *CATHOLIC CHURCH* in Smyrna. *Martyrdom of St. Polycarp* [A.D. 155/157] (*Faith of the Early Fathers*, vol. I, 80a).

St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons.

St. Irenaeus is certainly the most important theologian of the second century; and the most prominent of his writings is the *Detection and Overthrow of the Gnosis Falsely So-called*, or simply *Against Haereses*, written around 180 A.D. In it he defends the Church against the heresy of his time, gnosticism. Here, Irenaeus speaks of the unity and tradition of the Catholic Church:

As I said before, the Church, having received this preaching and this faith, although She is disseminated throughout the whole world, yet guarded it, as if She occupied but one house. She likewise believes these things just as if She had but one soul and one and the same heart; and harmoniously She proclaims them and teaches them and hands them down, as if She possessed by one mouth. For, while the languages of the world are diverse, nevertheless, the authority of the Tradition is one and the same.

Neither do the Churches among the Germans believe otherwise or have another Tradition, not in Libya, nor those which have been established in the central regions of the world. But just as the sun, the creature of God, is one and the same throughout the whole world, so also the preaching of the truth shines everywhere and enlightens all men who desire to come to a knowledge of truth.

Nor will any other rulers in the Churches, whatever his power of eloquence, teach otherwise, for no one is above the teacher; nor will he who is weak in speaking detract from the tradition. For the faith is one and the same, and cannot be amplified by one who is able to say much about it, nor can it be diminished by one who can say but little. *Against Heresies* [AD 180] (*Faith Early Fathers*, vol. I, 192).

When speaking of the authority of the one true Church, Irenaeus adds:

When, therefore, we have such proofs it is not necessary to seek among others the truth which is easily obtained from the Church. For the apostles, like a rich man in a bank, deposited with Her most copiously everything which pertains to the truth; and everyone whosoever wishes draws from Her the drink of life. For She is the entrance to life, while all the rest are thieves and robbers. That is why it is surely necessary to avoid them, while cherishing with the utmost diligence the things pertaining to the Church, and to lay hold of the Traditions of truth. What then? If there should be a dispute over some kind of question, ought we not have recourse to the most ancient churches in which the apostles were familiar, and draw from them what is clear and certain in regard to that question? What if the apostles had not in fact left writings to us? Would it not be necessary to follow the order of Tradition, which was handed down to those to whom they entrusted the Churches? (Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3, 4, 1 [ca A.D. 180]) (*Faith of the Early Fathers*, vol. I, 213).

When addressing the authority of the Church, and succession from the apostles, Irenaeus states around A.D. 182-188 that the church at Rome is the standard of orthodoxy:

Since, however, it would be very tedious, in a volume such as this, to reckon up the successions of all the churches, we do put to confusion all those who, in whatever manner, ... assemble in unauthorized meetings; [we do this, I say] by indicating that tradition derived from the apostles, of the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul; as also [by pointing out] the faith preached to men, which comes down to our time by means of the succession of bishops. For it is a matter of necessity that every church should agree with this Church, on account of its preeminent authority, that is, the faithful everywhere, inasmuch as the apostolic Tradition has been preserved, continuously by those faithful men who exist everywhere. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, 3:3:2 .

Irenaeus then proceeds to list the succession of the Bishops of Rome (the POPES) to his own day, adding:

The blessed Apostles [Peter and Paul], having founded and built up the Church [of Rome], handed over the office of the episcopate to Linus. Paul makes mention of this Linus in the Epistle to Timothy (2 Tim. 4:2). To him succeeded Anencietus; and after him, in the third place from the Apostles, Clement was chosen for the episcopate. He had seen the blessed Apostles and was acquainted with them. It might be said that He still heard the echoes of the preaching of the Apostles, and had their Traditions before his eyes. And not only he, for there were many still remaining who had been instructed by the Apostles.

In the time of Clement, no small dissension having arisen among the brethren in Corinth, the Church in Rome sent a very strong letter to the Corinthians, exhorting them to peace and renewing their faith. ... To this Clement, Evaristus succeeded; and Alexander succeeded Evaristus. Then, sixth after the Apostles, Sixtus was appointed; after him, Telesphorus, who also was gloriously martyred. Then Hyginus; after him, Pius; and after him, Anicetus. Soter succeeded Anicetus, and now, in the twelfth place after the Apostles, the lot of the episcopate has fallen to Eleutherus. In this order, and by the teaching of the Apostles handed down in the Church, the preaching of the truth has come down to us. *Against Heresies* (Faith of Early Fathers, vol. I, 211).

In addition, Irenaeus finds in the uninterrupted succession of the bishops from the Apostles down, the most certain guarantee of Christian teaching:

In this order, and by this succession, the ecclesiastical Tradition from the apostles, and the preaching of truth have come down to us. This is a most complete proof of the unity and identity of the life-giving faith, which has been preserved in the Church from the apostles until now and handed down in truth. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, 3:3:3.

The true gnosis is the doctrine of the Apostles, and the ancient organization of the Church throughout the whole world, and the manifestation of the body of Christ according to the successions of bishops, by which successions the bishops have handed down the Church which is found everywhere; *and the very complete Tradition of the Scriptures*, which have come down to us by being guarded against falsification, and which are received without addition or deletion ... *Against Heresies [242 AD]* (Faith of Early Fathers, vol. I, 211), around A.D. 242:

Origen.

Origen, a brilliant church scholar and priest in Alexandria, is a very well known Early Church Father. Between the years 220 A.D. and 230 A.D. Origen wrote *The Fundamental Doctrines*, whereby he addressed the fundamental doctrine of apostolic succession:

Although there are many who believe that they themselves hold to the teachings of Christ, there are yet some among them who think differently from their predecessors. The teaching of the Church has indeed been handed down through an order of succession from the Apostles, and remains in the Churches even to the present time. *The Fundamental Doctrines* (Faith of the Early Fathers, vol. I, 443).

In his *Commentaries on John*, Origen wrote on Peter and Matthew chapter 16:

Peter, upon whom is built the Church of Christ, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail ... *Commentaries on John* (Faith of the Early Fathers, vol. I, 479a).

Tertullian.

Tertullian, a converted lawyer of his period, used his legal prowess to defend early Christianity. In

approximately 200 A.D., Tertullian wrote *The Demurrer Against the Heretics* to address heresies that had arisen outside the Church. See Faith of the Early Fathers, vol. I, 293-296. In it he addressed the authority of the apostolic Church and succession:

Moreover, if there be any [heresies] bold enough to plant themselves in the midst of the apostolic age, so that they might seem to have been handed down by the Apostles because they were from the time of the Apostles, we can say to them: let them show the origins of their Churches, let them unroll the order of their Bishops, running down in succession from the beginning, so that their first bishop shall have for author and predecessor some one of the Apostles or of the apostolic men who continued steadfast with the Apostles ... But even if they should contrive it, they will accomplish nothing; for their doctrine itself, when compared with that of the Apostles, will show by its own diversity and contrariety that it has for its author neither an Apostle nor an apostolic man. The Apostles would not have differed among themselves in teaching, ... *The Demurrer Against the Heretics*, (Faith of the Early Fathers, vol. I, 293-296).

When speaking of the Church in Rome, Tertullian states:

But if you are in Italy, you have Rome, whence also our authority derives. How happy is that Church, on which Apostles poured out their whole doctrine along with their whole blood, where Peter²³ endured a passion like that of the Lord, where Paul was crowned in a death like John's, where the apostle John, after being immersed in boiling oil and suffering no hurt, was exiled to an island. *The Demurrer Against the Heretics*, (Faith of the Early Fathers, vol. I, 297).

In 220 A.D., Tertullian wrote one of his final works on *Modesty*. Here Tertullian addresses Matthew 16 and the Primacy of Peter (Faith of the Early Fathers, vol.I, 387).

I now inquire into your opinion, to see whence you usurp this right for the Church. Do you presume, because the Lord said to Peter, 'on this rock I will build my Church, I have given you the keys of the kingdom of heaven,' or 'whatever you shall have bound or loosed on earth will be bound or loosed in heaven,' that the power of binding and loosing has thereby been handed on to you, that is, to every Church akin to Peter? What kind of man are you, subverting and changing what was the manifest intent of the Lord when He conferred his authority personally upon Peter? On you, He says, I will build my Church; and I will give you the keys, not to the Church; and whatever you shall have bound or you shall have loosed, not what they shall have bound or they shall have loosed. *Modesty* (Faith of the Early Fathers, vol.I, 387).

"I hear that there has even been an edict set forth, and a peremptory one too. The sovereign pontiff, that is the bishop of bishops, pronounces, "I [Pope Callistus I], remit the crimes of adultery and fornication to those who have done penance" . . . And to produce the aforesaid effect in a person, you [Pope Callistus I] make fine speeches with every possible allurements of pity [to those who have fallen] in the role of kind shepherd and blessed Pope" (*Modesty* 1 and 13 [A.D. 220]).

St. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage.

St. Cyprian, a great African theologian, was born at Carthage of wealthy pagan parents between the 200 and 210 A.D. He was converted to Christianity about the year 246 A.D. , and was raised to the priesthood soon afterward. In 248 or 249 A.D. he was made bishop of Carthage. His treatise on *The Unity of the Catholic Church* is the most important of Cyprian's treatises, whereby he directly addresses Matthew 16 and the Primacy of Peter as first

²³ The Roman activity of the Apostle Peter is expressly attested to by Clement of Rome (Cor. 6:1); Ignatius of Antioch (Rom. 4:3); Bishop Dionysius of Corinth (about 170 A.D.); St. Irenaeus of Lyons (Adv. haer. III 1:1; 3:2 et seq.); the Roman writer Gaius under Pope St. Zephyrin (Eusebius, H.e. II 25:6 et seq.); Tertullian (De praesc. 36; Adv. Marc. IV 5; Scorp. 15); St. Clement of Alexandria (Eusebius, H.e. VI 14:6).

Pope:

The Lord says to Peter: "I say to you," He says, "that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it. And to you I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatever things you bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth, they shall be loosed also in heaven."

And again He says to him after His resurrection: "Feed my sheep." On him He builds the Church, and to him He gives the command to feed the sheep; and although He assigns a like power to all Apostles. Yet He founded *a single chair*, and He established by His own authority a source and an intrinsic reason for that unity. Indeed, the others were that also which Peter was; *but a primacy is given to Peter, whereby it is made clear that there is but one Church and one chair*. So too, all are shepherds, and the flock is shown to be one, fed by all Apostles in single-minded accord. If someone does not hold fast to this unity of Peter, can he imagine that he still holds the faith: If he desert the chair of Peter upon whom the Church was built, can he still be confident that he is in the Church? *The Unity of the Catholic Church* (Faith of the Early Fathers, vol. I, 555-556).

In the *Letter of Cyprian to All His People* (A.D. 251), St. Cyprian further comments on the One Church, founded on Peter, and also on early schism:

They who have not peace themselves now offer peace to others. They who have withdrawn from the Church promise to lead back and to recall the lapsed of the Church. There is one God and one Christ, and one Church, and one Chair Founded on Peter by the word of the Lord. It is not possible to set up another altar or for there to be another priesthood besides that one altar and that one priesthood. Whoever has gathered elsewhere is scattering. *Letter of Cyprian to All His People* (Faith of the Early Fathers, vol. I, 573).

Early Church Fathers expressed the thought that Peter lives on and works on in his successors. The Papal Legate Philippus, at the Council of Ephesus (A.D. 431), declared:

This [Peter] lives and passes judgment up the present day, and forever, in his successors. d 112, 1824.

Dionysius of Corinth

"For from the beginning it has been your custom to do good to all the brethren in various ways and to send contributions to all the churches in every city . . . This custom your blessed Bishop Soter has not only preserved, but is augmenting, by furnishing an abundance of supplies to the saints and by urging with consoling words, as a loving father his children, the brethren who are journeying" (*Letter to Pope Soter* in Eusebius *Church History* 4:23:9 [A.D. 170]).

"Today we have observed the Lord's holy day, in which we have read your letter [Pope Soter]. Whenever we do read it [in church], we shall be able to profit thereby, as also we do when we read the earlier letter written to us by Clement" (ibid., 4:23:11).

The Martyrs of Lyons

"And when a dissension arose about these said people [the Montanists], the brethren in Gaul once more . . . [sent letters] to the brethren in Asia and Phrygia and, moreover to Eleutherus, who was then [A.D. 175] bishop of the Romans, negotiating for the peace of the churches" (Eusebius, *Church History* 5:3:4 [A.D. 312])

"And the same martyrs too commended Irenaeus, already at that time [A.D. 175] a presbyter of the community of Lyons, to the said bishop of Rome, rendering abundant testimony to the man, as the following expressions show: 'Once more and always we pray that you may rejoice in God, Pope Eleutherus. This letter we have charged our brother and companion Irenaeus to convey to you, and we beg you to receive him as zealous for the covenant of Christ'" (ibid., 5:4:1-2).

Eusebius of Caesarea

"A question of no small importance arose at that time [A.D. 190]. For the parishes of all Asia [Minor], as from an older tradition held that the fourteenth day of the moon, on which the Jews were commanded to sacrifice the lamb, should be observed as the feast of the Savior's Passover. . . . But it was not the custom of the churches in the rest of the world . . . as they observed the practice which, from apostolic tradition, has prevailed to the present time,

of terminating the fast [of Lent] on no other day than on that of the resurrection of the Savior [Sunday]. Synods and assemblies of bishops were held on this account, and all, with one consent, through mutual correspondence drew up an ecclesiastical decree that the mystery of the resurrection of the Lord should be celebrated on no other but the Lord's day and that we should observe the close of the paschal fast on this day only. . . . Thereupon [Pope] Victor, who presided over the church at Rome, immediately attempted to cut off from the community the parishes of all Asia [Minor], with the churches that agreed with them, as heterodox. And he wrote letters and declared all the brethren there wholly excommunicate. But this did not please all the bishops, and they besought him to consider the things of peace and of neighborly unity and love. . . . [Irenaeus] fittingly admonishes Victor that he should not cut off whole churches of God which observed the tradition of an ancient custom" (*Church History* 5:23:1-24:11).

"Thus then did Irenaeus entreat and negotiate [with Pope Victor] on behalf of the peace of the churches-- [Irenaeus being] a man well-named, for he was a peace-maker both in name and character. And he corresponded by letter not only with Victor, but also with very many and various rulers of churches" (ibid., 24:18).

Firmilian

"[Pope] Stephen . . . boasts of the place of his episcopate, and contends that he holds the succession from Peter, on whom the foundations of the Church were laid [Matt. 16:18] . . . Stephen . . . announces that he holds by succession the throne of Peter" (collected in Cyprian's *Letters* 74[75]:17 [A.D. 253]).

Pope Julius I

"[The] judgment [concerning Athanasius] ought to have been made, not as it was, but according to the ecclesiastical canon. It behooved all of you to write us so that the justice of it might be seen as emanating from all. . . . Are you ignorant that the custom has been to write first to us and then for a just decision to be passed from this place [Rome]? If, then, any such suspicion rested upon the bishop there [Athanasius of Alexandria], notice of it ought to have been written to the church here. But now, after having done as they pleased, they want to obtain our concurrence, although we never condemned him. Not thus are the constitutions of Paul, not thus the traditions of the Fathers. This is another form of procedure, and a novel practice. . . . What I write about this is for the common good. For what we have heard from the blessed Apostle Peter, these things I signify to you" (*Letter on Behalf of Athanasius* [A.D. 341], in Athanasius, *Apology Against the Arians* 20-35).

Council of Sardica

"[I]f any bishop loses the judgment in some case [decided by his fellow bishops] and still believes that he has not a bad but a good case, in order that the case may be judged anew . . . let us honor the memory of the Apostle Peter by having those who have given the judgment write to Julius, Bishop of Rome, so that if it seem proper he may himself send arbiters and the judgment may be made again by the bishops of a neighboring province" (canon 3 [A.D. 342]).

"[I]f some bishop be deposed by the judgment of the bishops sitting in the neighborhood, and if he declare that he will seek further redress, another should not be appointed to his see until the Bishop of Rome can be acquainted with the case and render a judgment" (canon 4)

Optatus

"In the city of Rome the episcopal chair was given first to Peter, the chair in which Peter sat, the same who was head--that is why he is also called Cephas ["Rock"]--of all the apostles, the one chair in which unity is maintained by all. Neither do the apostles proceed individually on their own, and anyone who would [presume to] set up another chair in opposition to that single chair would, by that very fact, be a schismatic and a sinner. . . . Recall, then, the origins of your chair, those of you who wish to claim for yourselves the title of holy Church" (*The Schism of the Donatists* 2:2 [A.D. 367]).

Council of Constantinople I

"The bishop of Constantinople shall have the primacy of honor after the bishop of Rome, because his city is New Rome" (canon 3 [A.D. 381]).

Pope Damasus I

"Likewise it is decreed . . . that it ought to be announced that . . . the holy Roman Church has been placed at the forefront not by the conciliar decisions of other churches, but has received the primacy by the evangelic voice of our Lord and Savior, who says: 'You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it; and I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you shall have bound on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall have loosed on earth shall be loosed in heaven' [Matt. 16:18-19]. The first see, therefore, is that of Peter the apostle, that of the Roman Church, which has neither stain nor blemish nor anything like it" (*Decree of Damasus 3* [A.D. 382]).

Synod of Ambrose

"We recognize in the letter of your holiness [Pope Siricius] the vigilance of the good shepherd. You faithfully watch over the gate entrusted to you, and with pious care you guard Christ's sheepfold [John 10:7ff], you that are worthy to have the Lord's sheep heard and follow you" (*Synodal Letter to Pope Siricius* [A.D. 389]).

Jerome

"I follow no leader but Christ and join in communion with none but your blessedness [Pope Damasus I], that is, with the chair of Peter. I know that this is the rock on which the Church has been built. Whoever eats the Lamb outside this house is profane. Anyone who is not in the ark on Noah will perish when the flood prevails" (*Letters 15:2* [A.D. 396]).

"The church here is split into three parts, each eager to seize me for its own. . . . Meanwhile I keep crying, 'He that is joined to the chair of Peter is accepted by me!' . . . Therefore, I implore your blessedness [Pope Damasus I] . . . tell me by letter with whom it is that I should communicate in Syria" (*ibid.*, 16:2).

Augustine

"There are many other things which rightly keep me in the bosom of the Catholic Church. The consent of the people and nations keeps me, her authority keeps me, inaugurated by miracles, nourished in hope, enlarged by love, and established by age. The succession of priests keep me, from the very seat of the apostle Peter (to whom the Lord after his resurrection gave charge to feed his sheep) down to the present episcopate [of Pope Siricius]" (*Against the Letter of Mani Called "The Foundation" 5* [A.D. 397]).

"[On this matter of the Pelagians] two councils have already been sent to the Apostolic See [the Bishop of Rome], and from there rescripts too have come. The matter is at an end; would that the error too might be at an end!" (*Sermons 131:10* [A.D. 411]).

Pope Innocent I

"If cases of greater importance are to be heard [at a council], they are, as the synod decrees and as happy custom requires, after episcopal judgment, to be referred to the Apostolic See" (*Letters 2:3:6* [A.D. 408]).

"In seeking the things of God . . . following the examples of ancient tradition . . . you have strengthened . . . the vigor of your religion with true reason, for you have acknowledged that judgment is to be referred to us, and have shown that you know that is owed to the Apostolic See, if all of us placed in this position are to desire to follow the Apostle himself [Peter] from whom the episcopate itself and the total authority of this name have emerged. Following him, we know how to condemn evils just as well as we know how to approve what is laudable. Or rather, guarding with your priestly office what the Fathers instituted, you did not regard what they had decided, not by human but by divine judgments, as something to be trampled on. They did not regard anything as finished, even though it was the concern of distant and remote provinces, until it had come to the notice of this See [Rome], so that what was a just pronouncement might be confirmed by the authority of this See, and thence other churches--just as all waters proceed from their own natal source and, through the various regions of the whole world, remain pure liquids of an uncorrupted head" (*ibid.*, 29:1).

Pope Celestine I

"We enjoin upon you [my legates to the Council of Ephesus] the necessary task of guarding the authority of the Apostolic See. And if the instructions handed to you have to mention this and if you have to be present in the assembly, if it comes to controversy, it is not yours to join the fight but to judge of the opinions [on my behalf]" (*Letters 17* [A.D. 431]).

Council of Ephesus

"Philip, presbyter and legate of [Pope Celestine I] said: 'We offer our thanks to the holy and venerable Synod, that when the writings of our holy and blessed Pope had been read to you, the holy members, by our holy voices, you joined yourselves to the holy head also by your holy acclamations. For your blessedness is not ignorant that the head of the whole faith, the head of the Apostles, is blessed Peter the Apostle. And since now [we], after having been tempest-tossed and much vexed, [have] arrived, we ask that you order that there be laid before us what things were done in this holy Synod before our arrival; in order that according to the opinion of our blessed Pope and of this present holy assembly, we likewise may ratify their determination'" (*Acts of the Council*, session 2 [A.D. 431]).

Pope Leo I

"Our Lord Jesus Christ . . . established the worship belonging to the divine religion . . . But the Lord desired that the sacrament of this gift should pertain to all the apostles in such a way that it might be found principally in the most blessed Peter, the highest of all the apostles. And he wanted his gifts to flow into the entire body from Peter himself, as if from the head, in such a way that anyone who had dared to separate himself from the solidarity of Peter would realize that he was himself no longer a sharer in the divine mystery. . . . [You, my brothers], must realize with us, of course, that the Apostolic See--out of reverence for it, I mean--has on countless occasions been reported to in consultation by bishops even of your own province [Vienne]. And through the appeal of various cases to this see, decisions already made have been either revoked or confirmed, as dictated by long-standing custom" (*Letters* 10:2-3 [A.D. 445]).

"If in your view, [Anastasius of Thessalonica], in regard to a matter to be handled and decided jointly with your brothers, their decision was other than what you wanted, then let the entire matter, with a record of the proceedings, be referred to us. . . . Although bishops have a common dignity, they are not all of the same rank. Even among the most blessed apostles, though they were alike in honor, there was a certain distinction of power. All were equal in being chosen [to be apostles], but it was given to one to be preeminent over the others. . . . [So today through the bishops] the care of the universal Church would converge in the one See of Peter, and nothing should ever be at odds with this head" (*ibid.*, 14:11).

"As for the resolution of the bishops which is contrary to the Nicene decree, in union with your faithful piety, I declare it to be invalid and annul it by the authority of the holy Apostle Peter" (*ibid.*, 110).

Peter Chrysologus

"We exhort you in every respect, honorable brother, to heed obediently what has been written by the most blessed Pope of the city of Rome, for blessed Peter, who lives and presides in his own see, provides the truth of faith to those who seek it. For we, by reason of our pursuit of peace and faith, cannot try cases on the faith without the consent of the bishop of Rome" (*Letters* 25:2 [A.D. 449]).

Council of Chalcedon

"Bishop Paschasinus, guardian of the Apostolic See, stood in the midst [of the Council Fathers] and said, 'We received directions at the hands of the most blessed and apostolic bishop of the Roman city [Pope Leo I], who is the head of all the churches, which directions say that Dioscorus is not to be allowed to sit in the [present] assembly, but that if he should attempt to take his seat, he is to be cast out. This instruction we must carry out'" (*Acts of the Council*, session 1 [A.D. 451]).

"After the reading of the foregoing epistle [*The Tome of Leo*], the most reverend bishops cried out: 'This is the faith of the fathers! this is the faith of the Apostles! So we all believe! thus the orthodox believe! Anathema to him who does not thus believe! Peter has spoken thus through Leo!'" (*ibid.*, session 2).

Pope Gregory I

"Your most sweet holiness, [Bishop Eulogius of Alexandria], has spoken much in your letter to me about the chair of Saint Peter, prince of the apostles, saying that he himself now sits on it in the persons of his successors. And indeed I acknowledge myself to be unworthy . . . I gladly accepted all that has been said, in that he has spoken to me about Peter's chair who occupies Peter's chair. And, though special honor to myself in no wise delights me . . . who can be ignorant that holy Church has been made firm in the solidity of the prince of the apostles, who derived his name from the firmness of his mind, so as to be called Peter from *petra*. And to him it is said by the voice of the Truth, 'To you I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven' [Matt. 16:19]. And again it is said to him, 'And when you are converted, strengthen your brethren' [Luke 22:32]. And once more, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me? Feed my sheep' [John 21:17]" (*Letters* 40 [A.D. 597]).

In A.D. 404, **St. John Chrysostom wrote to Pope Innocent**, "I beseech your Charity to rouse yourself and have compassion, and do everything so as to put a stop to the mischief at this point" (First Epistle to Pope Innocent I). Note that Chrysostom, the archbishop of Constantinople, a powerful diocese, recognized the need to appeal to the bishop of Rome to resolve a controversy.

The 150,000,000 Eastern Orthodox Christians, though not Catholic, even recognize a primacy of honor (though not a primacy of jurisdiction) for Peter and his successors. The true nature of the Papacy was perhaps best explained by the Eastern Church itself, in fact by the greatest doctors of the Greek Church, St. Maximus the Confessor, who died in 662 A.D. One of the last ancient heresies was Monothelism, which denied that Our Lord had a human as well as a divine will. St. Maximus suffered greatly in defense of the Catholic doctrine taught by Rome against some Eastern heretics. In the following passage, St. Maximus refuses to accept the heretical and irregular patriarch Pyrrhus, until he is reconciled to the Holy See. St. Maximus is very much venerated by the modern day Eastern Orthodox as an authority on prayer and the mystical life. The Roman Church venerates him as well, and prays that someday all of the Eastern Churches will accept what he says as an Easterner about the teaching role of the Popes of Rome.

If the Roman See recognizes Pyrrhus to be . . . a heretic, it is certainly clear that everyone who condemns those who reject Pyrrhus condemns the See of Rome, that is he condemns the Catholic Church. I need hardly add that he excommunicates himself also . . . It is unjust that anyone who has been condemned and expelled by the Apostolic See of Rome for his errors should be honored at all, until he has been received by her, returning to her and to the Lord Himself, by a devout confession of the orthodox faith, by which alone he can receive holiness . . . Let him hurry to satisfy in everything the See of Rome, for if Rome is satisfied all will agree that he is orthodox. For he only speaks foolishly who thinks he can persuade people like me, without first satisfying and begging the most blessed Pope of the Romans, the Apostolic See which has received universal and supreme authority and power of binding and loosing over all the Holy Churches of God in the whole world from the Incarnate Son of God Himself, and also by the holy synods in their canons and definitions. With it the Word who is above the powers of heaven binds and looses in heaven also. Anyone who thinks he can satisfy others without imploring pardon of the most blessed Pope of Rome, is acting like someone who is accused of murder or some other crime and does not prove his innocence to the lawfully appointed judge, but to uselessly demonstrate his innocence to private persons who have no power to acquit him. (Letter to the Priest Marinus of Cyprus, A.D. 641).

St. Maximus the Confessor is not the only great Eastern "Saint" to accept the universal jurisdiction of the Pope. The Iconoclasts indirectly denied the reality of the incarnation of God the Son as true Man by forbidding the veneration of sacred images. St. Theodore the Studite was a great monastic teacher of Constantinople whose holy rule many Eastern monastics follow, just as Western monastics follow the rules of St. Benedict and St. Augustine. He argues that the doctrine of the Church cannot be judged by a secular court, but should be decided by the See of Rome, so that all can be certain of the true Faith.

In no way can it be, Sir, that divine judgement be held equal to secular judgement . . . let him [the patriarch Nicephorus] make peace and unity by sending his synodical letters to the first see [of Rome], but if the emperor does not approve of this, and denies, as he already admits he does, the truth professed by Nicephorus, let a legation from each of the two parties be sent to the Roman See, and from thence will be received certitude in the faith. (Letter 129, A.D. 813).

The liturgy of the Greek Orthodox Church, so well known for its rich and explicit presentation of Catholic

dogmas, has many expressions of the faith of the early and undivided Eastern Church in the teaching role of the successors of St. Peter, the Popes. These two texts, which are translated from the Greek, speak of the doctrinal interventions of Pope St. Sylvester against Arianism and of Pope St. Leo against the Monophysites

On the feast of Pope St. Sylvester, January 2 at Lauds:

"Endowed with the See of the leader of the apostles, you became an outstanding minister of God, enriching, establishing, and increasing the church with divine dogmas. You were the prince of the sacred council and you adorned the throne of the head of the disciples; like a divine prince over the holy Fathers you confirmed the most sacred dogma."

On the feast of St. Leo the Great, February 18 at Matins:

"The pillar of orthodoxy, as the successor of Peter, endowed with his precedence and primacy, gave the divinely inspired definition of faith, appearing to the people of God like a new Moses, who, moved by God, engraved the teachings of the faith upon divinely stamped tablets, and who like a true patriarch fixed his tent in the City where the primacy and seat and order of the patriarchs now stand."

IV. THE EUCHARIST:

Now, what's the big deal with Catholics and the Eucharist. Citing a second century Christian, "Our way of thinking is attuned to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking." Catechism of the Catholic Church (hereinafter Catechism) p. 334 (citing St. Irenaeus, *Adv. haeres.* 4, 18, 5 (second century)). Now, what in the heck is old Irenaeus talking about, and what does that have to do with me 1900 years later. It all starts with the Incarnation.

Through the Incarnation, God touched humanity in a physical, or a sacramental way.²⁴ The Church is the continuation of the Incarnation; here we encounter the risen Christ as the ever-present Lord. Church Fathers refer to the Church as a "mystery." *Lumen Gentium*, no. 1. By this term, they do not mean that She is unknowable or obscure; rather, She is both a divine and also a visible reality. Not merely of human construction, but also founded by Christ. The Church is therefore visible and invisible, of this world and of God. The Church is simultaneously a "visible society" and an "invisible community of faith, hope and love." For me, and for Catholics in general, the spiritual and physical aspect of our Church cannot be separated. And so it is with Jesus, who through the union of the Holy Spirit and Mary, likewise became a physical/spiritual being, all God and all man. This physical and spiritual understanding reveals the mystery of the Eucharist, as well as all the Sacraments – visible yet holy, tangible yet divine, God coming to us in the form of bread and wine.

In both the Old and New Testaments there are numerous incidents where God uses physical means to convey grace. This is the sacramental principle that exists throughout the Bible. One striking example out of many is the case of the woman with a hemorrhage:

When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, 'If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.' Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. ... (Mark 5:27-34).

This passage contains all the elements of the sacramental principle: the woman's faith, the physical means (touching Jesus' clothes), and God's grace. When the woman came up to Him and with faith touched Christ's garment, the power of God was sent forth, and she was healed. In a very elementary way, this is how I as a Catholic view the sacraments; God uses physical signs (bread, wine, water, oil, the laying on of hands) as vehicles for His grace, which we in turn receive through faith. From baptizing a baby with water to spouses making love, each of the seven sacraments proclaims that the world does not divide God from humanity. When talking of sacraments I in no way want to deny the necessity of a personal relationship with Jesus, I simply want to build on it. Through the sacraments, the uniting of flesh and blood with the supremely sacred is now wholly incorporated into my faith and worship. This has revolutionized my life: case in point – my marriage.

21 The Word sacrament simply means a physical sign of God's grace.

I have come to love Genesis 1:27, where our Lord states that we were created in God's image, male and female. Gen. 1:27. Therefore, through the marital union male and female become one, mysteriously reflecting the unity and image of God. And because this physical union is so sacred, two becoming one can produce a third, a child. When a sperm and egg unite, God creates a soul, and all of eternity will never be the same. The marital union is the mechanism by which God chose to bring forth new souls into existence. Sex is no longer just good, though it's definitely good, it's not just great, you know what I'm saying, sex is HOLY! Because marriage is a sacrament, a tangible physical reflection of a supernatural reality, sex within marriage as much more than self-gratification, it is much more than mutual bonding, it is a renewal and celebration of the marriage covenant and therefore intimately involves God. I could go into much detail on this subject, but suffice it to say that the Church protected Mary and I from a terrible decision, and by the grace of God we avoided sterilization after the birth of our third child, Elizabeth. Which leads to the most wonderful result of our return to the Catholicism, there names are Luke, Kolbe and Nate. Luke was born six weeks early on July 4, 1995. He stayed in intensive care for two weeks. As I sat beside Luke's incubator, thanking God for my son and praying for his health, it began to make sense. There is so much more to my Christian walk than I previously realized. While the Christian walk may be at times difficult, God is always faithful. I have three sons additional sons to prove it.

Now, what does the Catholic Church's view of marriage and family have to do with the Eucharist? What does the Eucharist have to do with my relationship with Christ? I mean, just where in the heck to do I encounter Christ in my life? I find Christ and deepen my relationship with Him in prayer, in Scripture, in worship and praise, there are many ways that I find my Lord, and as a Catholic Christian I give an enthusiastic "high five" to all of the above. But is that all, is God's grace limited to purely spiritual avenues? If the Son of God redeemed humanity through His physical birth, death and resurrection, is my faith purely a "spiritual" exercise; or is there something more? When I say this I do not mean to denigrate Scripture or prayer, they are indispensable. But Christ also said "Do *this* in memory of Me!" What is the "*this*" that Jesus refers too. You see, just as Christ came to us physically, He also chooses to impart His grace to us, in part, by physical means – chief of which is the receipt of His body and blood. And now we enter into the realm of faith, because such a reality is impossible to explain (like the Trinity for instance). I choose to live my life in the "mysterious certainty" that I am being fed by Christ's body and blood, that when I kneel before the Blessed Sacrament I am actually kneeling before our Lord. My life has been transformed by this reality, but the issue from a Protestant's perspective is whether or not Catholicism is Biblical. From my perspective, I'm not sure how one can reconcile himself with Scripture and not be Catholic. Wow, big words, please let me explain.

a. Scriptural Reconciliation of Transubstantiation.

Transubstantiation itself is a big word, which was created in response to a 12th century heresy in order to further explain the Eucharist. Transubstantiation refers to the doctrine of the "Real Presence," the bulwark of the Catholic faith. Jesus first spoke of the Eucharist not at the Last Supper, but in Capernaum as reported by St. John. Here Christ prepares His disciples for the institution of the Eucharist. In John chapter 6, Jesus feeds the multitudes with five barley loaves and two small fish. Jn. 6:1-13. The people were astounded with this miraculous sign, for Jesus had changed the substance of matter, and created food that did not previously exist (just as He does in the Eucharist). Afterward Jesus withdrew to the desert because they intended to make Him king. Jn. 6:14-15. When the people found Jesus the next day they exclaimed, "Give us manna from heaven like our forefathers received so that we may believe in you." Jn. 6:30-31. Jesus responded by saying:

I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes will never be thirsty. Jn. 6:35.

At this the Jews began to grumble about Him because He said:

I am the bread that came down from heaven. Jn. 6:41.

Jesus responded to their grumbling by further emphasizing the point:

I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. *This bread is my flesh*, which I will give for the life of the world. Jn. 6:48-51.

At Jesus' statements the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us His

flesh to eat?" [Jn. 6:52](#). The question posed by the Jews was clear, how can Jesus give us His flesh to eat? Of most significance is how Christ responded to the question. Does Jesus respond by saying, "Hey guys, I was talking figuratively, you are missing the point?" No! Jesus drives the point home by declaring:

I tell you the truth, unless you *eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood*, you have no life in you. Whoever *eats my flesh and drinks my blood* has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For *my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink*. Whoever *eats [Greek: trogon] my flesh and drinks my blood* remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so the one who *feeds [trogon] on me* will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who *feeds* on this bread will live forever. [Jn. 6:53-59](#).

The disciples knew exactly what Jesus was saying, and many would not except it. Jesus nowhere hinted that He was telling a parable when He spoke to the crowd in John chapter 6. His hearers, at least, took His words as something other than mere symbolism. John's gospel states that the teaching was so difficult that many of Christ's disciples could not accept it:

This is a hard teaching, who can accept it? [Jn. 6:60](#).

The first announcement of the Eucharist divided the disciples, Scripture clearly states that from this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. [Jn. 6:66](#). It is this same mystery that is the occasion of division today. When the disciples were unable to accept Christ's explanation of the Eucharist, Jesus didn't say, "Wait folks! You misunderstood, I was talking symbolism, you don't really have to eat my flesh and drink my blood." No. Jesus let them leave and turned to his apostles and said,

Do you want to leave me too? [Jn. 6:67](#).

The Lord's question echoes through the ages, as does Peter's response.

Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the holy one of God. [Jn. 6:68-69](#).

While we can never fully comprehend the Eucharist, it is important to remember Peter's response, that to receive in faith the gift of the Eucharist is to receive the Lord himself.

Now, are Catholics guilty of taking too literal an interpretation of Scripture – a novel concept? Here Christ refers to the Eucharist as his flesh and blood seven times. The normal Greek verb "to eat" used throughout this passage, "phagon", is suddenly replaced by "trogon", meaning literally "to crunch or gnaw." The real corporal function of eating is obviously being stressed. The tense of the verb "trogon" implies a continuous consumption of the body and blood of Christ. So as death was introduced by eating the forbidden fruit, now life is restored by eating the "bread of life," that is, Christ's flesh.²⁵

So what?, you may ask. Jesus alienated a lot of people without apology. Indeed some do see in this passage nothing more than a test of faith: crazy-like-a-fox Jesus baffling His shallow followers with outrageous parables. But it does not wash. Mark tells us that Jesus *always* explained Himself to His befuddled Apostles. [See Mk. 4:34](#). Yet on this occasion He turns to the Twelve and asks only; "Well, are you leaving too?" Nothing else, no word of explanation, no deeper inner meaning, nothing. In fact, the whole exchange is strikingly similar to the times Jesus prophesied of His impending death and resurrection. [See Mk. 8:31; 9:9-10](#). In both cases His disciples were

²⁵ Many Protestants base their objection to the Catholic understanding of John 6 on the passage from [John 6:63](#): "It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life." The argument is that Christ is speaking metaphorically, not literally. The problem is that there is not a single example in Scripture where "spiritual" means metaphorical or symbolic. The fact that Jesus said that His words are spirit and life does not mean that He was speaking symbolically, in fact the exact contrary is true. Christ emphasizes the supernatural significance of what He just said. In response to the Jew's grumbling about His talk of "eating His flesh and drinking His blood," Jesus said "*I solemnly assure you ... my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink.*" [Jn. 6:53, 55](#). Christ is not denigrating His own flesh here, for His flesh saved all humanity. Christ is referring to our human nature, which left alone leads to destruction.

initially confused, and in both cases Christ offered no further explanation because He was stating a bald fact! The disciples ultimately understood what Christ was talking about after the Last Supper, and after Christ's death and resurrection.

Further evidence of the literalness of John chapter 6 is the fact that Christ used identical language with these same apostles at the Last Supper. Identifying Himself with the Passover, Jesus took the bread and wine and declared them to be His Body and Blood. Period. He gave the Eleven²⁶ no point of reference apart from the memory of His puzzling discourse at Capernaum from John chapter 6, and the mystifying prophecy of His death and resurrection.

The Eucharist was and is established by the very words of Christ, which are set out by the three synoptic Gospels and St. Paul.²⁷

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, gave it to his disciples saying, 'Take and eat, this is my body.' Then He took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them saying, 'Drink from it all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.' Mt. 26:26-30.

While they were eating, Jesus took bread and gave thanks, and broke it, and gave it to His disciples saying, 'Take it, this is my body.' Then He took the cup, gave thanks and offered to them, and they all drank from it. 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,' He said to them. 'I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God.' Mk. 14:22-26.

I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer ... 'This is my body given for you, do this in remembrance²⁸ of me.' ... 'This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you...' Lk. 22:14-20.

George Martin explains that Jesus' command at the Last Supper, "Do this in memory of me," is the most solemn of His instructions to us. The setting alone guarantees its importance: Jesus is eating a last meal with His closest followers on the night before He is to die. Christ's final words are His last will and testament, so to speak. Since "Do this in memory of me" is such an important command, we should ask: What is included in the "this" that we are to do in memory of Jesus? Faithful to the Lord's command, the Church continues to do "this" in His memory and until His glorious return. Catechism p. 336.

Nevertheless, many claim Jesus was speaking symbolically. If Jesus was speaking figuratively here, Paul is

²⁶ Judas did not participate in the Last Supper. Wonder why?

²⁷ Knowing that the hour had come to leave this world and return to the Father, in the course of a meal He washed their feet and gave them the commandment of love. In order to leave them a pledge of this love, in order never to depart from His own and to make them sharers in His Passover, He instituted the Eucharist as the memorial of His death and Resurrection, and commanded His apostles to celebrate it until His return; "thereby He constituted them priests of the New Testament." Catechism p. 337

²⁸ The Greek word "anamnesis" like its English counterpart "remembrance" means not only "to recall," but also "to make present."

certainly no help in clarifying the matter. Paul reiterated the reality of Christ's true presence in the Eucharist by stating:

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." The same way, after supper He took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. *For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.*²⁹ That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. 1 Cor. 11:27-30.

According to 1 Cor. 11:27-32, those who fail to discern "the body and blood of the Lord" in the Eucharist would eat and drink condemnation upon themselves. Paul took Jesus' words literally, as does the Catholic Church! If the Eucharist were merely a "symbol" lacking efficacy, Paul's stern warning to the Corinthians concerning its improper observance is incomprehensible - what other Christian symbol ever carried such a stern warning?

It is interesting to note that sacred Scripture states how the early Church responded to Christ's teaching on the Eucharist:

They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching [Scripture and oral tradition], and to fellowship, and to the breaking of bread [the Eucharist], and to prayer. [Sounds like the Catholic Mass]. Acts 2:42.

Devoting themselves to the breaking of the bread and to prayer (Greek: *tai klasei tou artou kai tais proseuchais*) was something other than the traditional after-church potluck. This verse, along with Acts 20:7, says that the Lord's Supper, or Eucharist in Greek (literally "to give thanks," as in John 6:23), was a central part of Christian Sunday worship described in the New Testament.

On the first day of the week, we came together to break bread. Acts 20:7.

Once I understood Christ's teachings on the Eucharist, and the history of the Holy Mass, the story of the "Road to Emmaus" took on a whole new meaning:

When He was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him, and He disappeared from their site. Luke 24:30.

Then the two told what had happened on the way, and *how Jesus was recognized by them when He broke bread*. Luke 24:35

b. Unity and Communion.

Through communion with Him, Christ's true presence in the Eucharist creates a most wonderful consequence - UNITY - unity of all in the body of Christ, unity of all in Christ's family. In 1 Cor. 10:16-17, Paul states that communion is the very basis of Church unity:

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? *Because there is one loaf, we who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.* 1 Cor. 10:16-17

Our fellowship (Greek: *koinonia*) in the body and blood of Christ is the basis for the Church's own *koinonia* - each member of the Body of Christ being one with each other. See Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-26. Therefore, St.

²⁹ This verse has often been the focus of Herculean efforts to "explain its true meaning." Typically, it is torqued into a mere reference to sinning against fellow Christians. But this is vanity. For nowhere in Scripture or subsequent Christian writings do we find the Church called the "Body and Blood of the Lord." The phrase always refers to the Eucharist. Hopefully, you can see why recognizing Christ's presence in the Eucharist is so important to us Catholics; for if we took communion without recognizing Christ's true presence, we would be eating and drinking judgment upon ourselves.

Augustine was able to explain why he was CATHOLIC:

We, the many, are one body in Christ. *This is the sacrifice which the Catholic Church continues to celebrate in the sacrament on the altar*, in which it is clear to the Church that She, Herself, is offered in the oblation that She makes to God. Speechless Child p. 106 (citing St. Augustine, City of God 10, 6).

When I read the words of sacred Scripture and the writings of the Early Church Fathers, the continuity of Catholic doctrine and Scripture become so wonderfully clear. For me, it is awesome to know that through the Eucharist the Creator of the universe becomes intimately united with me, and I with Him. Through this unity my Christian brothers and sisters truly make up the body of Christ.

Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name - the name you gave me - so that they may be one as we are one. Jn. 10:11.

I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as We are one: I in them and You in Me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me. Jn. 10:22.

Not only theological unity, but real and visible unity. Christ is in us, and we are one - Praise the Lord. Christ prayed for unity, and provided a visible means to impart His grace so as to maintain that unity. Christians must unite. The Scriptural references to unity are numerous and consistent.³⁰

c. The Old Testament Lamb and the Sacrifice of the Mass.

In order to deepen one's appreciation of the Eucharist, it is important to look to the Old Testament. One of Jesus' roles as Savior was to be that of Priest. As Priest, Christ offered the Father the perfect sacrifice for our sins. Offering sacrifices to God has been part of salvation history since Cain and Abel.³¹ The book of Leviticus describes sacrificial offerings in detail; these sacrifices were commanded as a way to show sorrow for sin. Through these sacrifices God's people hoped to obtain forgiveness. However, the Old Testament sacrifice was also a foreshadowing of Christ's ultimate sacrifice on the cross.

The Old Testament account of sacrifice reminds us of the three things that are required for any offering. First, a priest, someone to do the offering. In the Jewish nation God selected certain men to be His priests. Second, a victim, something to be offered. God told the Jews to offer certain animals, especially the Passover lamb. And finally, an altar, a place for this offering to take place. For the Jewish priests the altars of sacrifice were located in the temple.

³⁰ There is one body and one spirit - just as you were called to one hope when you were called - one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. Ephesians 4:4.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:28.

Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. Romans 12:4-5.

The body is a unit, though it is made of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:12.

I appeal to you brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought ... Is Christ divided? 1 Corinthians 1:10.

³¹ In the course of time Cain brought an offering to the Lord from the fruit of the soil, while Abel, for his part, brought one of the best firstlings of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not. Gen. 4:3-5.

All of the Jewish sacrifices were but a preparation for the one perfect sacrifice that Jesus was to offer to God. Jesus is our High Priest, the sinless Son of God come down from heaven to offer the perfect sacrifice to the Father. As our High Priest, Christ made the perfect offering to God when He celebrated the Passover meal with His apostles, thus initiating a New Covenant with God's people. Jesus is also the ultimate and final sacrifice, the perfect offering to atone for the sins of all mankind. His altar, or place of offering, was the table of the Last Supper. The Lord's Supper did not end the night before Christ's death, the last passover celebration ended at the cross, where Christ was sacrificed for our sins.

Remember the specifics concerning the original Passover. The Passover lamb was to be sacrificed, and none of its bones were to be broken. Exodus 12:46. Once the lamb was killed, its blood was to be wiped over the household door with a hyssop branch. Exodus 12:22. The Passover lamb, the sacrifice, was not only to be killed, but also to be eaten. Exodus 12:8. God ordered the Jews to continue to celebrate the Passover as a "lasting ordinance," as a continual renewal of God's covenant with them. Exodus 12:14, 24.

The similarity between the Old Covenant Passover and the New Covenant Mass is no mere coincidence. The Gospel clearly states that the Last Supper was a celebration of the Passover meal. Luke 22:14. Yet this final Passover was not a renewal of the Old Covenant, but was the initiation of the New Covenant. Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25. With this New Covenant a mere lamb was no longer sufficient, for our Lord Jesus Christ was the new sacrifice. Hence, when John the Baptist first saw Jesus he proclaimed, "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!", John 1:29, which explains why Paul refers to Christ as our Passover Lamb that has been sacrificed. 1 Corinthians 5:7. In Revelation, the multitudes of angels cry out "worthy is the Lamb that was slain." Revelation 5:12. There are numerous other references.

Therefore, just as in the Old Covenant, at the initiation of the New Covenant Jesus Christ, the new lamb, was slain. Christ was the Lamb without blemish or defect, see 1 Peter 1:19, and was sacrificed once and for all for our sins when He offered himself, see Hebrews 7:27. Also, like the first Passover, no bones of the Lamb, our Lord Jesus Christ, were broken. See John 19:31-33. A hyssop branch was even used to give Christ His last drink. See John 19:29.

Finally, just as God's people were commanded to eat the lamb at the first Passover, we too are commanded to eat the Lamb of the New Covenant. See Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:14; 1 Corinthians 11:23. The sacrifice of the Pascal lamb is not enough, for according to our Lord it must be eaten. So the second Passover, the New Covenant, continues to be celebrated as a lasting ordinance just as the first Passover. Through the Holy Eucharist at Mass, we do not merely celebrate the past, we actually participate in the New Covenant. With each communion, it is as if we were sitting down with our Lord Jesus Christ at the Last Supper. By giving us His actual body and blood, Jesus Himself renews His New Covenant, His sacrifice, and His Promise to us each time we attend Mass. The consecrated bread and wine at the Catholic Mass is the actual Body and Blood of our Lord, not symbolic lamb cookies to help us remember Christ's last meal.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that:

By celebrating the Last Supper with his apostles in the course of the Passover meal, Jesus gave the Jewish Passover its definitive meaning. Jesus' passing over to His Father by His Death and Resurrection, the new Passover, is anticipated in the Supper and celebrated in the Eucharist, which fulfills the Jewish Passover and anticipates the final Passover of the Church in the glory of the kingdom. Catechism p. 338

At the Last Supper Jesus, the perfect Priest, offered Himself to the Father under the appearances of bread and wine. He changed these into Himself with the words, . . . "This is my body, . . . this is my blood." Thus, the perfect victim was being offered. The words Christ spoke at the Last Supper, ". . . to be given for you," and ". . . will be shed for you" (Luke 22:20), tell us two things: that Jesus is offering a sacrifice to God for our sakes, and that this sacrifice of the Eucharist is connected to His crucifixion. You see Christ's redemptive act did not begin on Calvary, but in the upper room. By the same token, the Last Supper did not end in the upper room, but when the sacrifice was completed the next day on Calvary.³²

³² For a detailed treatment of this subject, one should obtain an audio series by Scott Hahn entitled "The Fourth Cup," and "The Lamb's Supper." St. Joseph's Communications, Inc., P.O. 720, West Covina CA 91793, (800) 526-2151. Hahn, a theology professor from the Franciscan University of

Steubenville, explains that a technical evaluation of the Last Supper reveals that the Passover celebration was not completed in the upper room. The fourth cup, or ritual ending to the Passover meal, was never drunk. On the Mount of Olives, Christ prayed to the Father, "if thou art willing, remove this cup from me." Luke 22:42. This cup is more than a symbolic reference to His death, but an actual reference to the last drink of the Passover meal, which would culminate the New Covenant with Christ's sacrificial death. The fourth cup was received by Christ from a hyssop branch, at which time He pronounced, "It is finished," and He bowed his head and gave up His spirit. Jn. 19:28-30.

Christ's Priesthood was foretold in the Old Testament. Melchizedek was a king of Salem (later called Jerusalem) and a priest who offered *bread and wine* to God in sacrifice. Gen. 14:18. Saint Paul tells us that this is why he is compared to Jesus. Except for Melchizedek, no one else had offered the gifts of bread and wine before Christ. That is why today, at the ordination ceremonies of Catholic priests, Psalm 110:4 is recited:

The Lord has sworn, and He will not change His mind: 'You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Ps. 110:4.

On Calvary, the Last Supper was culminated. Jesus was the Priest who offered Himself for the sins of the world. By His death, which the Lord offered for us, the one true sacrifice of sin was finally given to God. Unlike the animals offered by the Jewish priest, this sacrifice worked! It indeed made up for every sin and reconciled us to the Father. We can be sure of this fact because of the resurrection - which showed that God accepted the sacrifice of His Son.

Christ has achieved reconciliation for you in His mortal body by dying, so as to present you to God holy, free of reproach and blame. Col. 1:22.

If Christ was not raised, your faith is worthless. You are still in your sins. 1 Cor. 15:17.

St. Paul reminds us that the Eucharist is a reliving of, or a participation in, the sacrifice of the cross. In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul tells us:

Every time, then, you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes! 1 Cor. 11:26.

Consequently, the Mass, or celebration of the Eucharist, is the greatest act of worship we can offer to God. For Holy Communion is our actual and real union with the spotless Victim that is offered, and hence the fullest participation in the Holy sacrifice.

The Catholic Mass is more than just Sunday worship, it is a participation in the sacrifice offered by Christ once and for all on the cross. Upon the cross, Jesus offered himself in pain and bloody suffering. In the Mass, the same sacrifice of Christ is offered to God under the appearance of the consecrated bread and wine. The Eucharist, or Holy Mass, is the permanent sacrifice of the New Covenant, and is continued as the old covenant Passover as a lasting ordinance. That is why the true presence is so important to Catholics, for the Holy Mass is the sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ under the appearances of bread and wine in renewal of the sacrifice of the cross.

The presentation of the Eucharist at Mass is not a re-sacrifice of Christ, but a participation in Christ's one and only sacrifice. The sacrifice of the Mass does not add to the sacrifice of the Cross any more than prayers for our daily bread add to God's providence. Rather, as the offering of our prayers is part of God's providence and not a useless addition to it, so the sacrifice of the Mass is incorporated into the Cross. Christ is the sacrament, His body and blood being truly present in the Eucharist. Because God is omnipresent, He is not bound by time and space, but lives in the "forever now." Thus, Christ renews His *New Covenant* with us 300,000 times a day, every day, all over the world during the Holy Mass. It is absolutely awesome. You see, Christ's prayer is being answered (as if it wouldn't), for we are one through Him by partaking in the Holy Eucharist.

d. The Eucharist and Church History.

If the Catholic Church is true, and the Real Presence authentic, then we should expect to find a growing body of witnesses to it among those whom the Apostles taught. And we do. In fact, the post-Biblical record is nothing short of a massive testimony to the Real Presence in the consecrated bread and wine. You see, not only is Christ's real presence in the Eucharist recognized by Catholics, but His presence has been an established Church doctrine for 2000 years.

It is wonderful to read what the Early Church Fathers wrote, especially when they wrote on the Eucharist. Ignatius knew the apostle John, Irenaeus knew Polycarp, who was a friend of the apostles. They were not confused as to what the Eucharist was. No record exists in the first eight hundred years of the Church whereby Christ's real presence was denied. But more important, the belief has been held by the faithful not just unexamined cultural baggage, but as an integral part of their faith. To name a few:

St. Clement of Rome (First Century, and the third successor to Peter)

St. Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35-110)

St. Justin Martyr (c. 100-165)
St. Melito of Sardis (mid 2d cent. to 190)
St. Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130-200)
St. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215)
Origen (c. 185-254)
Tertullian (c. 160-225)
St. Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258)

EASTERN FATHERS

St. Ephraem (c. 306-373)
St. Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 313-387)
St. Basil the Great (c. 330-395)
St. Gregory of Nyssa (c. 330-395)
St. John Chrysostom (c. 347-407)

WESTERN FATHERS

St. Hilary of Poitiers (c. 315-367)
St. Ambrose (c. 339-397)
St. Augustine (c. 354-430)
St. Leo the Great (d. 461)

St. Ignatius, a man who had heard the good news from the apostle John himself, writing in 110 A.D., stated:

Let no man do aught of things pertaining to the Church apart from the bishop. Let that be held a valid Eucharist which is under the bishop or one to whom he shall have committed it. Wheresoever the bishop shall appear, there let the people be; even as where Jesus may be, there is the Catholic Church. ... Pay close attention to those who have wrong notions about the grace of Jesus Christ, which has come to us, and note how at variance they are with God's mind. ... They hold aloof from the Eucharist and from services of prayer, because they refuse to admit that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins and which, in his goodness, the Father raised from the dead. Cyril C. Richardson, Early Christian Fathers, Collier Books p. 114 (citing Ignatius' *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*).

I take no delight in corruptible food or in the dainties of this life. What I want is God's bread, which is the flesh of Christ, who came from David's line; and for drink I want his blood: an immortal feast indeed. Early Christian Fathers p. 105 (citing Ignatius' final *Letter from Smyrna to the Church of Rome*).

Be careful, then, to observe a single Eucharist. For there is one flesh of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and one cup of His Blood that makes us one, and one altar, just as there is one bishop along with the presbytery and the deacons my fellow slaves. Early Christian Fathers p. 108 (citing Ignatius' *Letter from Troas to the Philadelphians*).

St. Irenaeus in the Second Century:

For when the mixed cup and the bread that has been prepared receive the Word of God, and become the Eucharist, the body and blood of Christ, and by these our flesh grows and is confirmed, how can they say that flesh cannot receive the free gift of God, which is eternal life, since it is nourished by the body and blood of the Lord, and made a member of Him? As the blessed Paul says in the Epistle to the Ephesians, that we are members of His Body, of His flesh and His bones. He does not say this about a [merely] spiritual and invisible man, for the spirit has neither bones nor flesh, but about [God's] dispensation for the real man, [a dispensation] consisting of flesh and nerves and bones, which is nourished by His cup, which is His blood, and grows by the bread which is His body. Early Christian Fathers p. 388 (citing Irenaeus *Adversus Haereses*).

St. Justin Martyr in the Second Century:

When the president has given thanks and the whole congregation has assented, those whom we call deacons give to each of those present a portion of the consecrated bread and wine and water, and they take it to the absent.

This food we call Eucharist, of which no one is allowed to partake except one who believes that the things we teach are true, and has received the washing for forgiveness of sins and for rebirth, and who lives as Christ handed down to us. For we do not receive these things as common bread or common drink, but as Jesus Christ our Savior being incarnate by God's word took flesh and blood for our salvation, so also we have been taught that the food consecrated by the word of prayer which comes from Him, from which our flesh and blood are that incarnate Jesus. For the apostles in the memoirs composed by them, which are called Gospels, thus handed down what was commanded them: that Jesus, taking bread and having given thanks, said, "Do this for my memorial, this is my body"; and likewise taking the cup and giving thanks he said, "This is my blood"; and gave it to them alone. Early Christian Fathers p. 286 (citing the *First Apology of Justin*).

St. Ambrose in the Fourth Century:

Be convinced that this is not what nature has formed, but what the blessing has consecrated.³³ The power of the blessing prevails over that of nature, because by the blessing nature itself is changed ... Could not Christ's word, which can make from nothing what did not exist, change existing things into what they were not before? It is no less a feat to give things their original nature than to change their nature. Catechism p. 347 (citing St. Ambrose, *De myst.* 9, 50; 52).

When consecration has been added - from bread it become the flesh of Christ. A Speechless Child Is The Word Of God - An Interpretation of St. Augustine (hereinafter "Speechless Child") p. 105 (citing St. Ambrose).

St. Basil the Great³⁴ in the Fourth Century:

To communicate each day and to partake of the Holy Body and Blood of Christ is good and beneficial; for He says quite plainly: 'He that eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood has eternal life' (citing Jn. 6:54). Letter to a Patrician Lady Caesaria [93] ca. 372.

St. Gregory of Nyssa:

Rightly then, do we believe that the bread consecrated by the word of God has been made over into the Body of the God the Word. For that Body was, as to its potency bread; but it has been consecrated by the lodging there of the Word, who pitched His tent in the flesh. The Great Catechism [37: 9-13].

The bread is at first common bread; but when the mystery sanctifies it, it is called and actually becomes the Body of Christ. Orations and Sermons 9 [Jaeger Vol. 9, pp 225-226] ca. 383 A.D.

³³ By consecration I am referring to the prayer of the priest at Mass who, by and through the person of Jesus, voices again Christ's words at the Last Supper, This is My Body ... This is My Blood, thereby changing the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of our savior.

³⁴ St. Basil is recognized as the founder of Eastern monasticism. He was ordained Bishop of Caesarean in 370 A.D. He defended the Catholic Church against two waves of Arian attacks. The first movement denied the divinity of Christ. The second denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit. He is considered one of the greatest saints of the Oriental Church.

St. Augustine in the fourth century:

You ought to know what you have received, what you are going to receive, and what you ought to receive daily. That Bread which you see on the altar, having been sanctified by the word of God, is the Body of Christ. The chalice, or rather, what is in that chalice, having been sanctified by the word of God, is the Blood of Christ. Sermons, [227, 21].

Because these and these alone have eaten, *not merely a sacramental symbol*, but the reality of the body of Christ by reason of the incorporation in His body. Because the bread is one, we, though many, are one. Speechless Child p. 105 (citing St. Augustine, *City of God* 21, 25).

Here he shows what is meant by eating Christ's body and drinking His blood, *not merely in the outward sacramental sign*, but in the reality and truth of remaining in Christ, so that Christ may remain in him who eats and drinks sacramentally. Speechless Child p. 106 (citing St. Augustine, *City of God*).

That bread which you see on the altar, consecrated by the word of God, is the body of Christ, and the wine, also blessed by the word of God, is the blood of Christ. Speechless Child p. 107 (citing St. Augustine, *Easter Sermon* s 227 f).

If you cannot understand how Christ can turn the bread and the wine into his body and blood, I feel that St. Augustine's explanation says it all:

He Himself commanded it and it was created. Speechless Child p. 105 (citing St. Augustine).

St. John Chrysostom in the fourth century:

It is not man that causes the things offered to become the Body and Blood of Christ, but He was crucified for us, Christ himself. The priest, in the role of Christ, pronounces these words, but their power and grace are God's. This is my body, he says. This word transforms the things offered. Catechism p. 347, (St. John Chrysostom, *prod. Jud.* 1:6).

St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Cyril of Alexandria:

That in this sacrament the true Body of Christ and His true Blood is something that cannot be apprehended by the senses, but only by faith, which relies on divine authority. Catechism p. 348 (citing St. Thomas Aquinas, *S. Th. III, 75, 1*). Thomas Aquinas cites St. Cyril of Alexandria, who centuries earlier explained: "Do not doubt whether it is true, but rather receive the words of the Savior in faith, for since He is the truth, He cannot lie." Catechism p. 348 (citing St. Thomas Aquinas, *S. Th. III, 75, 1*; Cyril of Alexandria, in *Luc. 22, 19*).

In the Council of Trent, the Church again repeated 1600 years of consistent teaching:

Because Christ our Redeemer said that it was truly His Body that He was offering under the species of bread, it has always been the conviction of the Church of God, and this holy Council now declares again, that by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of His Blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation. Catechism p. 347 (citing *Council of Trent, DS 1641*).

Christians have worshiped Christ in essentially the same way for 2000 years. In fact, St. Justin wrote to the pagan emperor Antoninus Pius (138-161) around the year 155 A.D., explaining how the early Christians celebrated Mass and the sacred Eucharist. The following explanation of the Catholic Mass, made over 1800 years ago, is the same Mass the Catholic Church celebrates today. (Those areas in parenthesis correspond to a specific portion of the holy Mass):

On the day we call the day of the sun, all who dwell in the city or country gather in the same place. (The faithful gather for Mass on Sunday.)

The memoirs of the apostles and the writings of the prophets are read, as much as time permits. (The Liturgy of the Word, which consists of four (4) Scripture readings.)

When the reader has finished, he who presides over those gathered admonishes and challenges them to imitate these beautiful things. (The homily, which consists of a sermon on the Scripture readings.)

Then we all rise together and offer prayers for ourselves ... and for all others, wherever they may be, so that we may be found righteous by our life and actions, and faithful to the commandments, so as to obtain eternal salvation. (General intercessions.)

When the prayers are concluded we exchange the kiss. (The sign of peace.)

Then someone brings bread and a cup of water and wine mixed together to him who presides over the brethren. (Presentation of the Bread and Wine).

He takes them and offers praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and for a considerable time he gives thanks (in Greek: eucharistian) that we have been judged worthy of these gifts. When he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all present give voice to an acclamation by saying: Amen. When he who presides has given thanks and the people have responded, those whom we call deacons give to those present the *eucharisted* bread, wine and water and take them to those who are absent. (Liturgy of the Eucharist, consecration of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, and communion.) Catechism p. 339 (citing St. Justin, Apol. 1, 65-67.)

St. Justin later stated:

Because this bread and wine have been made Eucharist ("eucharisted," according to an ancient expression), we call this food Eucharist, and no one may take part in it unless he believes that what we teach is true, has received baptism for the forgiveness of sins and new birth, and lives in keeping with what Christ taught. Catechism p. 342 (citing St. Justin, Apol. 1, 66, 1-2).

Therefore, the Liturgy of the Word (Scripture reading and homily) and the Liturgy of the Eucharist together form "one single act of worship"; the Eucharistic table set for us is the table both of the Word of God and the Body of the Lord. Catechism p. 340. The Catholic Catechism explains as follows:

If from the beginning Christians have celebrated the Eucharist in a form whose substance has not changed despite the great diversity of times and liturgies, it is because we know ourselves to be bound by the command the Lord gave on the eve of his Passion: "Do this in remembrance of me." We carry out this command of the Lord by celebrating the memorial of His sacrifice. In so doing, we offer to the Father what He has Himself given us: the gifts of His creation, bread and wine which, by the power of the Holy Spirit and by the words of Christ, have become the Body and Blood of Christ. Christ is thus really and mysteriously made present. Catechism p. 342.

Similarly, even the earliest "Protestant Saints" had a deep respect for the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. John Wycliffe said that the Eucharistic prayer of consecration "effects the presence of the Body of Christ. ... Not that the bread is destroyed, but that it signifies the Body of the Lord there present in the sacrament." John Wycliffe, *De Eucharistia*. Likewise, John Hus wrote, "The humble priest doth not ... say that he is the creator of Christ, but that the Lord Christ by His power and word, through him, causes that which is bread to be His Body; not that at that time it began to be His, but that there on the altar begins to be sacramentally in the form of the bread what previously was not there and therein."

e. Protestant Objections.

In his Protestant view of Church History, Mr. Louis Berkhof points out that all the reformers rejected the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation (i.e. the doctrine of the Real Presence), but acknowledged that that is all they could agree on. Berkhof, The History of Christian Doctrines (hereinafter referred to as "History") p. 254. Berkof confirms that the reformers were totally unable to come to any agreement on a positive Scriptural doctrine of the Lord's Supper. History, 254. Berkhof cites three of the founding fathers of the reformation to exemplify the reformers lack of unity.

First, Berkof analyzes the position of Martin Luther. Luther asserted the necessity of taking Christ's words literally and assumed a real bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Id. Luther stated that:

The very body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ are, by the word of Christ, instituted and given to us Christians to be eaten and drunk in and under bread and wine. Id.

Zwingli, on the other hand, opposed the Mass as idolatry, and denied absolutely the bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Id. He interpreted Christ's words figuratively, and saw the bread and wine as mere symbols. Id. John Calvin held an intermediate position. Id. at 255. He agreed with Zwingli in rejecting absolutely

the bodily and substantial presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, but disagreed with Zwingli's assertion that communion is nothing less and nothing more than an expression of belief. Id.

Mr. Berkhof acknowledged that all three positions on the Lord's Supper have found favor in Protestant circles, and even recognizes that in England the Oxford Movement marked a return to the position of the Catholic Church. Id. at 255-56. We all agree that the Lord's Supper is important, but three of the founding fathers of the reformation could not agree on what the Eucharist was. Today, all of Protestantism is still divided on the issue. Is man free to just choose which position he likes best? Does it really matter?

1. Idolatry.

As C.S. Lewis understood, the Ascension is more than just the reversal of the Incarnation. The Church has always believed that Christ provided a permanent means to share in the reality of His presence on this earth. That means is the Eucharist. Yet many are haunted by the feeling that "physical" and "spiritual" are somehow intrinsically opposed. But that opposition is man's idea, not God's. You see, "physical" and "spiritual" quarreling cease at the Eucharistic altar. The Sovereign Lord is utterly free to meet us either verbally, as in prayer and Scripture, or non-verbally, as in the consecrated bread and wine. For He is, after all, the Word made flesh, not merely the Word made word.

Sacrament is nothing more than the visible physical reality of God's presence on this Earth. We worship an older Brother whose hands know the feel of wood, whose feet know the dust of the hills, and whose heart was pierced with a Roman sword. Here, at least, Evangelicals are at home with the sacramental principle. Here, at least, Protestants and Catholics unite around one of the great paradoxes of the Gospel: No man may be worshiped, but the Son of Man must be adored.

This paradox is absolutely central to dealing with the supposed idolatry of the Blessed Sacrament. God entered time and space in the human body of Jesus, and He continues His presence with us through the Eucharist. What a wonderful way for the Creator to nourish the body and souls of His creation. Consequently, if God visits us in the form of bread and wine as He has in the flesh of Christ, then worship of the Eucharist is no more sinful than Thomas' cry, "My Lord and My God!" Jn. 20:24-28. The crux of the matter is this: If the real presence is untrue, then worship of the Eucharist is indeed idolatrous. But, if the Eucharist is the actual Body and Blood of our Lord, then Protestants have something to think about.

According to the Church, the Eucharist is centered at the very heart of Christianity - in the Incarnation, Death and Resurrection of Christ. As the Gospel consummates rather than cancels the law, so the Real Presence consummates all the various ways in which we touch our Lord. Certainly Protestants have a valid relationship with Christ, but that is precisely the point. For the Eucharist, if the Real Presence is true, is the most concentrated manifestation of what Christians experience every day.

Both Scripture and experience testify that our hearts thirst to be met by God. We long to say with Jacob, "Surely the LORD is in this place." Gen. 28:16. But our souls cannot feed on mere abstract omnipresence; we hunger for a *touch*. In the Eucharist, God touches us - we meet Him there most fully. As Father John A. Hardon writes:

If we could make a graphic comparison, there is as much difference between Christ's presence in the Blessed Sacrament and His presence elsewhere on Earth as there was between His presence among the disciples when He appeared to them on Easter Sunday and His presence in their midst before and after the appearance. Hardon, The Catholic Catechism, p. 465.

2. Sacrifice of the Mass.

The Epistle to the Hebrews says that Christ's sacrifice was done "once for all." Heb. 10.10. Consequently, many Protestants claim that the sacrifice of the Mass is a needless addition to His finished work on Calvary. However, Catholics do not believe that the Mass is a re-sacrifice of Christ, but a participation in His finished work. The key is not the repetition of His death (which the Church states is impossible), but our present participation in the one eternal sacrifice of Christ on Calvary. We drink each day from the well He dug once for all, we eat the one loaf He has prepared.

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not

the bread we break a participation in the body of Christ. 1 Cor. 10:16.

Many people treat Jesus as if He is stuck on the time line. But Christ says that He is I AM from "everlasting to everlasting," that He "makes known the end from the beginning," that He is "the same yesterday, today, and forever." Psalm 90:2; Isaiah 46:10; Heb. 13:8 (respectively). He describes Himself as the "Alpha and the Omega, the One Who is and Who was and Who is to come." Rev. 1:8. With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 2 Pet. 3:8. God is not mired in time as we are, He surrounds time and enters it at His choosing.³⁵ All times are present to Him just as all places and things. Christ transcends time because He created it. Thus, Christ is truly present at every Mass every day throughout the world.

The eternal Humanity of Christ is something all Evangelicals believe in: the fact that Jesus of Nazareth, born two thousand years ago, is personally accessible to us here and now by simple faith. The Catholic Church rejoices in this mystery, but in a deeper way. Christ provided the permanent means to share in that eternal reality when He offered the loaf and cup to His disciples with the words, "This is my Body. This is my Blood." Christ provided a way for us to sit with Him at the New Covenant meal; a way for Him to be tangibly present with us for our entire life on this earth. Scripture expresses this in a fascinating way: It describes Him as the:

Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Rev. 13:8.

The Church then speaks of the Eucharist as re-presenting, not re-sacrificing, Jesus Christ. Thus, the sacrifice of the Mass does not add to the sacrifice of the Cross any more than prayers add to God's providence.

3. Symbolism.

As pointed out earlier, there is simply no shred of evidence that Christ's words should be taken at something other than face value. If Catholics are guilty of a literal interpretation of Scripture, so be it. However, many Protestant's argue that the Catholic Church denies the symbolism of the Lord's Supper. But such an argument misses the point. The Church does not deny the symbolism that exists with the Eucharist. The symbolism of Holy Communion and the reality of Christ's presence in the Eucharist complement each other, they do not conflict. While Catholicism embraces such dualism, Protestantism cannot. It is an either/or proposition. It is either a symbolic interpretation or literal interpretation. For Catholicism, it is symbolic and literal.

There is another problem with the purely symbolic position. There is not a single Early Church Father who denied the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In fact, Christ's true presence in the Eucharist was not even questioned for the first eight hundred (800) years of the Church.

4. Human Sacrifice.

Some Protestant's believe that since the heart of Catholic worship is the sacrifice of the Mass, this is heretical because Scripture plainly forbids human sacrifice. Such an objection has been enough to keep scores of Protestants from even addressing the Real Presence. However, all orthodox Christians believe Jesus Christ was both Lamb of God and Son of Man; that is, that He was a human sacrifice. If we base our objection to the Real Presence on the proposition "God always forbids human sacrifice," we ironically find ourselves in opposition to the testimony of Scripture. 1 Cor. 15:3 (among endless other citations).

V. SALVATION:

By salvation I am talking about heaven, and how unworthy people can get there. With no formal religious education I am obviously unqualified to discuss such a topic, but hopefully my unqualified perspective can be of

³⁵ The ancient Arameans believed God was present only in the mountains. 1 Kings 20:28. Today many Protestants believe God is present only in the present, yet both are wrong. God dwells everywhen as well as everywhere.

some benefit. I must say at the outset that my discussion on the issue will be very elementary and only touch on the truth of the Church's understanding. In many ways I feel that denominational theories on salvation are circular, leading to the same place; other times I feel that the differences are substantial and should be hashed out. So let's hash it out.

The topic of salvation is such a divisive concept. Each denomination devises its own theory, claiming Holy Spirit inspiration and Biblical authority, and their particular theory becomes law. As stated earlier, I look for Holy Spirit guidance not only from Scripture and personal experience, but from my Church. Nevertheless, to explain salvation, I will resort to my own personal experience. In writing this I try to avoid the denominational colloquialisms that so often separate us. For instance, when a Southern Baptist asks a Catholic, "Have you been born again." The Catholic response may be 1) to run, 2) to say "yes" and then run, 3) to recollect some spiritual experience and respond "yes", or 4) to say "yes, I have been Baptized"; the latter being the Church's consistent understanding of the term "Born Again".

In order to understand the Church's teaching on salvation, one must understand family. Through the Catholic Church, God the Father reestablished mankind into the Family of God. This was accomplished by the unmerited gift of our first born Brother, Jesus Christ, who gives us a participation in His divine Sonship. Salvation involves participation in Christ's Sonship, whereby we become members of God's family and call Christ BROTHER, and God FATHER. Perhaps the Catholic term "Holy Mother Church" now makes more sense. As Christians, we are initially adopted into God's family, thus becoming sons and daughters of our Lord, through Baptism. See Jn. 3:1-12, 22; 1 Pet. 3:20-22; Acts 2:38-39; 16:30-33; Col. 2:11-12; Mt. 19:14; Luke 18:15-16; However, Baptism is no guarantee of salvation, Baptism is not the end of the story, just the beginning.

The Church is the bride of Christ, and it is for Her that Christ sacrificed Himself to make Her holy. Eph. 5:25-26. As the bride of Christ, the Church brings forth new life in Christ through the sacrament of Baptism. Through Baptism, She gives the Lord the children of whom She is mother. Early Christians understood the maternal aspect of Church, for baptismal pools were frequently shaped like a mother's womb. Infants and converts were placed in the waters and emerged "born again of water and spirit." Jn. 3:5. Thus, when we are spiritually reborn at Baptism, we acquire a new mother, Holy Mother Church. Since the Church is our mother, we are all members of the same great family. "All the saints and angels belong to us," wrote Jesuit theologian Henri de Lubac, "the heroism of the missionary, the inspiration of the doctors of the Church, the generosity of the martyrs, the genius of the artists, the burning prayer of the contemplatives." Mother Church is wide open - not a small group of like-minded individuals, She is truly Catholic (i.e., universal). Not an elitist, She has room for every culture, class, education level, and personal temperament. This family is as wide as the world.

Fr. Benedict Groeschel explains that "Catholics don't go to church with their friends, they go with their family." Through the Mass, the family of God is drawn together to offer praise and thanksgiving, and to participate in the once for all sacrifice of our Lord through His sacred family banquet. Because there is one loaf, we who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf. 1 Cor. 10:17. Once I began to understand the relevance of family and Eucharist, I began to appreciate the Mass. The value of Sunday service was no longer sermon centered and dependent on the personality of a preacher. Mass is worship, and through the Mass I am one with millions of fellow believers who partake in the same loaf all over the world.

A major Protestant objection to Catholicism concerns the Catholic rejection of Sola Fide, or faith alone, and related Protestant doctrines concerning assurance of salvation. Since Catholicism rejects Sola Fide, many conclude that Catholics believe in earning your way to heaven - which is not true. And since Catholics reject a belief in once saved always saved, many conclude that Catholics live in constant fear of damnation - which is also not true. Catholics reject Sola Fide because the concept is simply unBiblical. I am sure my Protestant brothers and sisters will gasp at such a statement, so let's talk about it.

a. SOLA GRATIA - MAN IS SAVED BY GRACE ALONE:

Martin Luther declared that salvation is attained by faith alone, or "Sola Fide," which offers a satisfying closed system of theology and likewise provides many answers. However, the doctrine of "faith alone" went beyond the Church's ancient doctrine of "Sola Gratia," or grace alone, as so eloquently espoused by Augustine in the fifth century. Consequently, a controversy ensued in which neither the reformers nor the Church paid much attention to the other's valid concerns.

By rejecting the Protestant proposition of faith alone, Catholics were accused of believing in a system of

merit whereby a believer could simply earn his way to heaven. If there is one aspect of the Church's teaching that is more widely misunderstood than any other, it would be this question of merit. Enormous numbers of people - both Catholic and Protestant - suppose that the Church teaches that, somehow, we must accumulate enough merit in this life to warrant God's letting us into heaven. I might as well say at the beginning that the Catholic Church does *not* believe that you can work or earn your way to heaven. We do not teach a system of salvation based on human works independent of God's grace. *We also believe that man is saved by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, but just not by faith alone.*

For Catholics, salvation is by the grace of God alone, "Sola Gratia." So what is grace? How about God's unconditional love and His unmerited assistance. Ultimately it is the very life of God within us. It is only by God's grace (unconditional love and unmerited assistance) that we can enter heaven and spend eternity with Him and His family.

We have all sinned; there's no reason for anyone to look down their noses at anyone else - we've all done it folks. The wonderful news is that our rejection of God does not have to be eternal. God loved us so much that He became man and freely accepted the punishment that you and I deserve. In other words, Christ earned heaven for us. And because Christ earned heaven for us, Heaven is God's gift to those who respond to His call. The point of contention between Catholics and Protestants is how do we avail ourselves of God's free gift? For Catholics, we accept God's call by responding to God's call; by answering the door when Christ knocks. Christ says, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me." Rev. 3:20. Just open the door!

The tangible result of the Church's doctrine of grace is that we do not have to be good before we can "open the door to Christ." Cf. Rev. 3:20. Due to God's unconditional love, we can come to Christ as we are. There is nothing we can do to merit God's love, for God does not love the Holy more than the sinful. Jesus did not tell the prostitute or the tax collector to be nice for a year and then get back to Me. God simply asks that we respond to His call, regardless of our present condition. Our response is called conversion. The great paradox is that while we are called to respond, the doctrine of grace teaches that it is only through God's divine assistance that we are able to respond in the first place.

Dr. Thomas Howard provided a wonderful synopsis on the Catholic view of merit. Salvation through grace is generally thought to be a Protestant notion, but Luther didn't coin the idea. Listen to the Catholic Catechism describe how faith itself is a gift of God:

Faith is a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by Him. Before this faith can be exercised, man must have the grace of God to move and assist him ... (no. 153).

The ability to have a loving relationship with God requires something beyond our human abilities. God must help us know Him through the gift of faith. Nature and conscience can tell me there is a God, revelation tells me this God loves me, but the grace of faith enables me to know it:

When St. Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus declared to him that this revelation did not come 'from flesh and blood,' but 'from my Father who is in heaven.' (Mt. 16:17). Faith is a gift of God, a supernatural gift infused by Him. (Catechism, no. 153).

Any aspirations for God are themselves gifts of God's grace, which takes the initiative and comes seeking after us. But the next two paragraphs in the Catechism provides quintessential Catholic teaching. It is the idea that grace actively draws us into *genuine participation* in this process that we call salvation. We are not pawns, not passive recipients of edicts issued from heaven. God does not stamp some saved and damn others before they are even born. Here is how the Catholic Catechism puts it:

Believing is possible only by grace and the interior helps of the Holy Spirit. But it is no less true that believing is an authentically human act. ... In faith, the human intellect and will cooperate with divine grace: 'Believing is an act of the intellect assenting to the divine truth by command of the will moved by God through grace.' (Catechism, nos. 154-55).

It is one of the most profound mysteries of grace, this sense in which the work is "all of God," and yet salvation requires our participation. Of course God can do whatever He wants, all by Himself. He does not "need" us, if we are speaking of His sheer sovereignty. While man is saved by God's grace, God's grace is not to be presumed upon. God created humanity in His own image, with a free will. As responsible and rational people, we

must continually reach out for His grace in order to be saved. As the Catechism states:

God is the sovereign master of his plan. But to carry it out He also makes use of His creatures' cooperation. ... For God grants his creatures not only their existence, *but also the dignity of acting on their own.*³⁶ ... God thus enables men to be intelligent and free causes in order to complete the work of creation. ... [T]hey can also enter deliberately into the divine plan by their actions, their prayers, and their sufferings. (Nos. 306-307).

The Virgin Mary's role in the immense drama of salvation is the primary case in point. Her fiat mihi (Luke 1:38) was her response to God, the response the Divine Love "needed" for things to go forward. But of course her response was itself a gift of God. She was chosen, prepared, and enabled by God's grace to agree "[m]ay it be done to me as you have said." The Church venerates Mary not because she is anything special in and of herself, but because she is the "purest realization of faith" in Christ. (Catechism, no. 149).

This is all brought to unimaginable depths when we come to the mystery of God's drawing us into the self-offering of His Son, which was, all by itself, the wholly superabundantly sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. We can add nothing to the merits of Calvary. Nothing! But, at the same time, the Church would point out that we do not do grace any service by picturing ourselves as inert, robotic recipients. *This grace not only comes to us as a sheer gift: it draws us in and makes us genuine participants.* This is the foundation of the Catholic teaching on merit.

With regard to God, there is no strict right to any merit on the part of man, for we have received everything from Him, our Creator. The merit of man before God in the Christian life arises from the fact that God has freely chosen to associate man with the work of his grace. (Nos. 2007).

One more final quote, lest anyone doubt the Catholic teaching on merit:

The charity [love] of Christ is the source in us of all our merits before God. Grace, by uniting us to Christ in active love, ensures the supernatural quality of our acts and consequently their merit before God and before men. The saints have always had a lively awareness that their merits were pure grace. (No. 2011).

He saved us, not because of righteous things we have done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. Titus 3:5.

b. THE NEW COMMANDMENT - LOVE:

Catholics believe that "we are saved by grace through faith which works by love." Gal. 5:6. Our salvation is a function of the God given virtues of faith and love, not faith alone.³⁷ The fact that Catholics deny the doctrine of Sola Fide as unBiblical does not mean that Catholics deny the importance of faith, for without faith salvation is impossible. St. Paul says it best: "Without faith it is impossible to please God." Heb. 11:6. St. Thomas Aquinas

³⁶ See 2 Pet. 3:9, 1 Tim. 2:4, 1 Jn. 2:2, 1 Jn. 4:14, Rom. 5:18, Mt. 18:14, Mt. 22:14, Titus 2:11.

³⁷ For Catholics, salvation is a function of faith (belief), hope (trust in and desire for), and love (charity). From my perspective, most Protestants include the Catholic understanding of faith and hope in their definition of faith, although there are numerous variations across the Protestant landscape. Consequently, I will speak of faith and love rather than faith, hope and love.

repeated it: "Faith is the foundation of our spiritual life." S.Th. III, 73, 3. John Henry Cardinal Newman exclaimed it: "Faith is the foundation, charity is the building. Faith is the first and chief essential - Love the higher and more perfect." Address to his Oratorians in 1848. Lest anyone doubt the Catholic position on faith, Pope Paul VI finalized it: "Faith is the sine qua non - the *indispensable prerequisite* - to our eternal salvation."

However, just as God gives us the grace to believe, God also gives us the grace to love. And just as God requires that we respond to His call and believe, God requires that we respond to His call and love. Jesus explained the importance of love in His parable of the good Samaritan;

On one occasion an expert in the law asked Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life." What is written in the law, how do you read it? He answered: "Love your Lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself." "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied, "do this and you will live." Luke 10:25, et seq.³⁸

Personalize this passage, ask Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Lord, how do I open the door of my heart to you? For Catholics, we respond to God's call by faith and love, not just faith alone. We respond by first loving God, and by loving our neighbor as a reflection of our love for our Creator.

If you love Me you will keep my commandments. ... If a man loves Me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and We will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep my words ... Jn. 14:15; 23-24.

Consequently, to understand Catholicism one must understand "love." Love is not only a warm fuzzy feeling, as defined by the Greek word "phileo." It is not limited to the reciprocal form of love, as defined by the Greek word "eros" (i.e. I love you because you love me). Love is defined by the Greek word "agape," which means more than affection. Agape love is unconditional (i.e. I love you even if you don't love me). Because agape love is unconditional, it concerns commitment and devotion, it is directed by the will and commanded as a duty.³⁹ It is the kind of love mirrored perfectly for us by Jesus Christ. It is the purpose of our lives, the motivator for all we do as Christians. *Therefore, when "good works" are used in the context of salvation, what is meant by Catholics is that we must love.*

If we do not love, it is as if we are standing on the rooftops and pronouncing that we do not accept Christ. It is not enough to simply believe that Christ is Lord, for:

[E]veryone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness. 2 Tim. 2:19.

By not turning away from wickedness, by not loving, we say no to Christ. Christ clearly gave us His new

³⁸ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and the greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and prophets hang on these two commandments. Matthew 22:37.

³⁹ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no records of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 1 Cor. 13:1 (et seq.).

Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions and in truth. 1 Jn. 3:18.

commandment, to love:

A new command I give you, Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. Jn. 13:34.

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Jn. 15:12.

Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God; *for God is love.* 1 Jn. 4:7.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, forbearing one another and if one has a complaint against another forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. Col. 3:12-15.

But this love is not a method by which we earn our way to heaven. Love is how we respond to God's call, in the same way that faith is a response to God's call. Therefore, our ability to love (i.e. "do good works") is not a result of our merit, but a result of God's grace which enables us to love in the first place. Therefore, just as Christians cannot boast that we believe, Christians cannot boast that we love, for both come through God's grace. Again, the Catechism:

[T]he merit of good works is to be attributed in the first place to the grace of God, then to the faithful. Man's merit, moreover, itself is due to God, for his good actions proceed in Christ, from the predispositions and assistance given by the Holy Spirit. Filial adoption, in making us partakers by grace in the divine nature, can bestow true merit on us as a result of God's gratuitous justice... (Nos. 2009).⁴⁰

The Catholic understanding of grace, whereby through grace God gives us the ability to love (i.e. "do good works"), is supported by Scripture:

For the *grace of God* that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It [grace] teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age. Titus 2:11.

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, *but the same God who works all of them in all men.* Cor. 12:4-6.

No, I worked harder than all of them - yet not I, *but the grace of God was with me.* 1 Cor. 15:10.⁴¹

It is Christ who rescues us from our sin and gives us the grace to turn to him through faith and love. It is Jesus who takes hold of us, not us who take hold of Him.

This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we ought to love one another. 1 Jn. 4:70.

⁴⁰ The Catechism then quotes St. Augustine, a major contributor to the Catholic Church's doctrine of "sola gratia," or grace alone; "Our merits are God's gifts." (Nos. 2009). We must choose to allow God's grace to work through us. He does not force us to "continue in grace." Cf. Acts 13:43.

⁴¹ Do not live according to your sinful nature, but live according to the spirit. Those who live according to sinful nature are weakened, unable to obey God. But those who live according to the spirit *are strengthened by our Lord Jesus Christ.* Rom. 8:1-7.

With this in mind we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and *that by His power* He may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, *according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.* 2 The. 1:11.

I know that nothing good lives in me, that is in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out ... What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God - through Jesus Christ our Lord! Rom. 7:18, 24.

c. **WHAT ABOUT SOLA FIDE - FAITH ALONE**

If the Protestant notion of salvation is true, if all it takes to be saved is to pray a sinner's prayer and really believe it when you say it, then why must one love? Oh sure, I should strive to please God, but if I don't, what does it really matter? My salvation is assured. However, Scripture is directly on point when speaking of faith without love:

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am nothing but a resounding gong or a clanging symbol. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, *and if I have faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.* If I give all my possessions to the poor and surrender my body to flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. 1 Cor. 13:1-3.

And now these things remain: faith, hope and love. And the greatest of these is love. 1 Cor. 13:13.

We respond to God's call through faith and love, for in the context of salvation faith and love are not an either/or proposition. Through God's grace we are given the ability to believe and love, and we must respond to God's call if we are to live with Him. Therefore, our love is worthless if we have no faith, just as our faith is worthless if we have no love. This is the Catholic understanding of salvation.

The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. Gal. 5:6.

It is not enough to simply believe that Christ is Lord, for *everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.* 2 Tim. 2:19.

Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord", will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father in heaven. Mt. 7:21.

If we claim to have fellowship with Him yet walk in darkness we lie and do not live by the truth. 1 Jn. 1:6.

We know that we have come to know Him if we obey his commands. The man who says, "I know Him," but does not do what He commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys His words, God's love is truly made complete in him. *This is how we know we are in Him, anyone who claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did.* 1 Jn. 2:3.

No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him. 1 Jn. 3:6.

Why do you call me "Lord, Lord" and do not do what I say? Luke 6:46.

I do not doubt that what motivated the reformers was a profound devotion to Christ and perceived error by certain members of the Church. Consequently, Catholics must be able to explain those passages within Scripture whereby Paul explains that man is justified by faith apart from the law. First, Catholics agree fully with what the Bible teaches and what Paul said,

Man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. Rom. 3:28.⁴²

In Romans and Galatians, Paul addressed the judiazing tendencies of the early Church. Early Christians were mistakenly teaching that a person must observe the Mosaic Law if he is to be saved. This is why Paul spent so much time hammering home the fact that it is not necessary to be circumcised to be saved - circumcision being one of the key rituals of the Mosaic Law. Circumcision is mentioned numerous times by Paul in this context. See Rom. 2:25; 3:30; 4:9-12; Gal. 2:3; 5:2-6; 6:12-16. What Paul said is true:

We are justified by faith in Jesus Christ apart from works of the [Mosaic] Law. See Rom. 3:28.

This would be more obvious to English-speaking Bible readers if translators used the Hebrew word for law,

⁴² When interpreting the Greek, Luther inserted the word "alone" into Romans 3:28, knowing full well that this was contrary to the plain language of the Biblical text. See The NIV Study Bible comment to Rom. 3:28. Luther also attempted to delete the Book of James and Revelation from the Bible because these Books were not consistent with his theology. Is this consistent with Sola Scriptura?

Torah, which is also the name of the first five books of the Bible which contain the law of Moses. Paul said,

We hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the [Torah]. See Rom. 3:28.

We can prove this by looking at the very next text:

[O]r is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also. Rom. 3:29.

If Paul did not mean "works of the Torah," then this question and its answer would be meaningless. By the phrase "works of the Law" Paul refers to something Jews have but Gentiles don't: the Mosaic Law. He makes this point in the next verse:

Since God is one; and He will justify the circumcised [Jews] on the ground of their faith and the uncircumcised [Gentiles] through their faith. Rom. 3:30.

So the "works of the Law" Paul talks about in verse 28 are those works which characterize Jews, not Gentiles, the chief work being circumcision. The same understanding is true for those verses dealing with the "works of the law" in both Romans and Galatians.⁴³

This means that the Jewish laws of circumcision, ritual purity, kosher dietary prescriptions, and the Jewish festal calendar are, now that we are under the New Covenant in Christ, entirely irrelevant to our salvation. Keeping the ceremonial Law of Moses is not necessary for Christians. What is important is keeping "the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2), which is summarized as "faith working through love" (also translated as, "faith made effective through love." (Gal 5:6)).

Galatians chapter five (5) gives a wonderful explanation of what I am so unartfully trying to explain. Here Paul addresses those who are seeking justification through the Mosaic Law - circumcision. See Gal. 5:2-4. Paul explains that reliance on such works of the law alienate one from Christ, because neither circumcision nor

⁴³ For we maintain that man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. Rom. 3:28.

But Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. Rom. 9:31.

A man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. Gal. 2:16.

I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be attained through the law, Christ died for nothing. Gal. 2:21.

You who are trying to be justified by the law, have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from Grace. Gal. 5:4.

For it is by grace you have been saved through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. Eph. 2:8-9.

uncircumcision matter, *ONLY FAITH EXPRESSING ITSELF THROUGH LOVE*. Gal. 5:6. Paul then summarizes all the law in a single command: *LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF*. Gal. 5:14. The fruit of the Spirit is love (Gal. 5:22), while the fruit of the sinful nature is the opposite of love: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like (Gal. 5:19-21). Paul then warns the Galatians, that those that live a life contrary to love will not inherit the kingdom of God. Gal. 5:21.

The standard is not faith alone, but faith working itself through love, and Gal. 5:6 is not the only Biblical authority for such a proposition:

And this is His command: to believe in the name of His son, Jesus Christ *and* to love one another as He commanded us. 1 Jn. 3:23.

I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance *and* have faith in our Lord Jesus. Acts 20:21.

He will punish those who do not know God *and* who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus. 2 The. 1:8.

Martin Luther proclaimed that "Sola Fide" is the basic tenant upon which the church stands or falls. But for a Catholic, if faith alone is THE basic tenant of the Church, then the words "faith alone" should appear somewhere in the Bible.⁴⁴ In fact they do, the words "faith alone" appear in one place in Scripture, James chapter two. In it, James asked the question:

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds (i.e. love)? Can such faith save him? James 2:14.

James answers his own question, hammering the point home:

A man is justified by what he does and *not by faith alone*. James 2:24.

Faith by itself, if not accompanied by action, is dead. James 2:17.

You foolish man, you want evidence that faith without works is dead - consider Abraham - his faith was made complete by what he did. James 2:20.

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. James 2:26.

The Bible simply does not teach salvation by faith alone. In fact, in the only place where "faith alone" is stated in the Bible the direct opposite is taught. I am continually amazed when I see sincere well educated men attempt to interpret away the plain meaning of this text. Perhaps that is why Luther felt compelled to add the word "alone" to Rom. 3:28. Scripture is clear that mere belief is not enough:

You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that - and shudder. James 2:19.

While the Church teaches that faith is the *indispensable prerequisite to our salvation*, mere belief is not enough. Under pain of eternal damnation, God commands us to love, to love God⁴⁵ and to love each other⁴⁶. We must be prepared,⁴⁷ for a life of sin is antagonistic to Christ's command to love and may lead to eternal damnation.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ In fact, if sola fide is the basic tenant of the church, then some church father during the first twelve hundred years of Christianity should have used the words faith alone in such a way. However, none did.

⁴⁵ Whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my father in heaven. Mt. 10:33.

⁴⁶ God will give to each person according to what he has done. To those who by persistence in doing good [i.e. by loving] seek glory, honor and immortality, He will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil [i.e. who do not love], there will be wrath and anger. Rom. 2:5, et seq.

⁴⁷ But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. Friend, he asked, how did you get here without wedding clothes. The man was speechless. Then the King told the attendants, tie him hand and foot and throw him outside into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Mt. 22:11, et seq. (Parable of the Wedding Banquet).

In Matthew, chapter 5, Jesus gives the greatest of all sermons, the "Sermon on the Mount." Christ begins by pronouncing a blessing on those who display Christian virtues, "the Beatitudes:"

- Verse 3: Blessed are the poor in spirit ...
- 4: Blessed are those who mourn ...
- 5: Blessed are the meek ...
- 6: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness ...
- 7: Blessed are the merciful ...
- 8: Blessed are the pure in heart ...
- 9: Blessed are the peacemakers ...
- 10: Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness ...

Then, in Matthew 5:20, Jesus gives the theme for the remaining of his sermon:

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, *you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.* Mt. 5:20.

Jesus is talking about heaven, and states that righteousness is the way to get there. Not an "imputed" sort of righteousness whereby we are stamped saved at the moment of belief, but a righteousness that is "imparted" to us through God's grace which enables us to live a holy life. The use of the term righteousness is related to God's call to love (i.e. live a holy life) and has a direct bearing on our personal salvation. In fact, the whole sermon on the mount is concerned with living a holy life. See for yourself:

- Mt. 5:21-25: Jesus talks of murder, anger and forgiveness.
- Mt. 5:27-30: Jesus talks of adultery, lust and the consequences of sin.
- Mt. 5:43-48: Jesus tells us to love our enemies, and to "*be perfect, as our heavenly father is perfect.*"
- Mt. 6:1-4: Jesus talks of sincerity and giving to the needy.
- Mt. 6:5-14: Jesus talks of sincerity in prayer, and gives us the Lord's Prayer. Jesus says that, "*if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*"
- Mt. 6:16-18: Jesus talks of sincerity in fasting.
- Mt. 6:25-34: Jesus tell us not to worry.
- Mt. 7:1-6: Jesus tells us not to judge.

Finally, Jesus tells us to seek him, to enter through the narrow door, and that:

"Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my father in heaven." [Jesus goes on to say that], "*everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock ... but everyone who hears theses words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.*" Mt. 7:7-29.

The sermon on the mount teaches that salvation does not come from mere belief faith in Jesus, it clearly teaches that salvation is founded on faith *and* love. GOD WANTS US TO LOVE HIM BACK!

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant, Matthew 18:23-35, clearly reiterates the importance of love:

Therefore, the Kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him 10,000.00 talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

The servant fell on his knees before him. Be patient with me, he begged, and I will pay back everything.

⁴⁸ If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off, it is better to enter life maimed and crippled than to have two and be cast into eternal fire. Mt. 18:8.

The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

But when the servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him, 'Pay back what you owe me, he demanded.'

His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay off his debt. When the other prisoners saw what had happened they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

Then the master called the wicked servant in, 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all the debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart. Mt. 18:23-35.

Here God is represented by the King, for only the King has the power to forgive sins. There is never any doubt of whether or not the servant believes in the King. However, the servant refuses to love. Because of this refusal to love, to forgive others as the King forgave him (i.e. the Lord's Prayer), the servant is cast into eternal damnation.

For Catholics, faith alone may also have a dangerous consequence, the belief by Christians that repentance is not necessary. You see, we are all called to repent, it is a message taught clearly by Scripture:

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near. Mt. 3:2 (John the Baptist).

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near. Mt. 4:17 (Christ).

But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Luke 13:1-9 (Christ).

Repent and turn to God, so that your sins will be wiped out. Acts 3:19.

When people heard this they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do." Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." Acts 2:31.

In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent. For He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the man He has appointed. Acts 17:30-31.

John the Baptist taught that we are to "produce fruit in keeping with repentance." Mt. 3:8. What happens if we refuse to produce fruit, if we refuse to love? John was posed with this question, and this was his answer:

The ax is already at the root of the tree, and every tree that does not produce fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. 'What should we do,' the crowd asked. John answered, 'The man with two tunics should share with him who has one, and the one who has food should do the same.' Luke 3:9. [i.e. John answered that we should love.]

Christ also addressed the issue of love using the metaphor of fruit production:

I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in Me that bears not fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. Jn. 15:1, et seq.

In Matthew chapter 25, Christ gives us the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. Here Christ directly tackles the issue of who will go to heaven and who will not. In the parable, all the participants believe in Jesus, but not all the participants go to heaven - see where Jesus draws the line:

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left.

Then the King will say to those on His right, Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave

Me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited Me in, I needed clothes and you clothed Me, I was sick and you looked after Me, I was in prison and you came to visit Me.

Then the righteous will answer Him, Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You something to drink? When did we see You a stranger and invite You in, or needing clothes and clothe You? When did we see You sick or in prison and go to visit You?

The King will reply, I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for Me.

Then He will say to those on His left, depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave Me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite Me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe Me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after Me.

They also will answer, Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help You?

He will reply, I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for Me.

Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life. Mt. 25:31-46.

The goats believed but they did not love, and the consequences were severe. But this is not the only place where Christ speaks of judgment, and of our refusal to love:

For the Son of Man is to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay every man for what He has done. Mt. 16:27.

But I tell you that men will have to give an account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you have been acquitted and by your words you have been condemned. Mt. 12:36.

The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will weed out of His kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Mt. 13:41.

For we must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for things done while in the body, whether good or bad. 2 Cor. 5:10.

Then all the churches will know that I am He who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. Rev. 2:23.

Another book was opened, which was the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. Rev. 20:12.

Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with Me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. Rev. 22:12.

I have engaged in these polemics with the hope of providing a basis for the Catholic position that man is saved by faith, just not by faith alone. In seeking support for Sola Fide, most Protestants point to those versus that say that believing in Jesus is the ticket to salvation.⁴⁹ Catholics agree, but for us belief is not just an intellectual

⁴⁹ For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. Jn.3:16.

I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Jn. 11:25.

Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved - you and your household. Acts 16:31.

I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for everyone who believes ... For in the gospel a

acknowledgment that Jesus is God,

Even the demons believe, and shudder. James 2:19.

To believe in Jesus means to believe in all He says and all He commands us to do. It is more than just an intellectual belief in who Jesus is. Consequently, if I may amend Luther's tenant, "*Man is saved by grace alone, in Christ alone, through faith and love alone.*"

d. THE GOSPEL OF NICENESS

"What must I do to be saved?" Peter Kreeft, a professor at a Catholic university (Boston College), wonders if your average Catholic knows the right answer. While most of his students are cradle Catholics, and the response he usually gets is "by being a nice person." Today, many Catholics believe the Church and the Bible teach that we will go to heaven if we are nice enough to warrant heaven. The Church is not at all opposed to being nice, but it does have one little reason for failing to endorse the notion that being nice is the ticket to heaven: *Almighty God Forbids It!*

The gospel of niceness is a delusion. It deceives us into taking the easy road, and never actually giving ourselves to Christ. Jesus said:

If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will loose it, but whoever looses his life for Me will find it. What good will it be for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul. Mt. 16:24-26; see Mt. 10:37-39, Mk. 8:24, Lk. 14:27, Lk. 17:33; Jn. 12:24-26, etc.

But the gospel of niceness says hey, if I go to Church most Sundays and act "nice," that's good enough to make the grade. We are able to avoid all the "negativism of sin" (bad for self esteem) by claiming our God is "open and tolerant". We are able to justify the affair, the abortion, the homosexual act, because our God is a "God of Love," and besides, we're nice people. But with that attitude, we never have to take God serious - we never have to cross over the line.

This niceness doctrine even seems to be invading the American Catholic Church. Under the guise of Catholicism many preach a socialized version of the Gospel that says if we can just be nicer to each other everything will be alright. All this environmentally concerned, socially aware, civic minded, caring and sharing is precisely 180 degrees opposite to what the Bible and the Church have always taught concerning the God of Love. Without Jesus Christ, all the niceness in the world will get you nowhere. The idea of Catholicism is intoxicating. Throughout

righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written, "The righteous will live by faith."

Rom. 1:16, et seq.

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Rom. 3:22.

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raise him from the dead you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth you confess and are saved. Rom. 10:13.

history Catholics were willing to risk martyrdom for their faith, yet today many Catholics don't seem willing to risk embarrassment. Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ, a member of the fellowship of the unashamed? Has the die been cast, has the decision been made, have you stepped over the line?; Or do you continue to live separated from Him and claim you have eternal security, because you say you believe and act "nice". Again, Christ said:

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm - neither hot nor cold - I am about to spit you out of my mouth. Rev. 3:15-16.

God does not want your occasional niceness, God wants you! In fact, the Church and the Bible are quite explicit that you can be as nice as you please and that, by itself, won't help you get one inch closer to heaven. Isaiah, for instance, compares our niceness to a bundle of filthy rags in God's sight. Is. 64:6. St. Paul is even more blunt (good old St. Paul), declaring that there is no one, not even one, who is truly nice. Ro. 3:10. God wants you to love Him back - anything short of that is unacceptable. Mark Shea, a Catholic writer, explains why:

The Church and the Bible teach a loving God, a God who accepted betrayal, abandonment, scourging, a crown of thorns, nails through his wrists and feet, all on our behalf. Christ accepted the death that you and I deserve:

Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many. Mt. 21:28.

Christ died for us, once for all, the righteous one for the unrighteous. 2 Pet. 3:18. If we were able to please God by ourselves by being nice, then there would have been no need for Christ to suffer and die on our behalf. But we can't please God by ourselves, all we can do is love him. That is why Christ said that it is not the perfect, but the bad people - the very cream of the dregs - who get into heaven ahead of everyone else. Jesus made clear that these tawdry people (whom we nice people would not be seen with) enter heaven, not by impressing God with niceness, but by letting Him save them from the sewer of their sins, by recognizing their sinfulness and giving themselves to God. In short, we are helped by God not when we help ourselves (by being nice), but when we realize we can't help ourselves. The Church calls us to snap out of our illusions of niceness and understand the Gospel for what it is: GRACE!

Those who believe in salvation by niceness don't understand grace. God is not standing with a checklist at the end of each day, ready to love us if we get our salvation the old fashion way, by earning it. It is just this idea of our being good enough for heaven on our own that St. Paul teaches as being "another Gospel." Gal. 1:8-9. The gospel of niceness is merely a restatement of "merit-based" salvation which the Church has never accepted.

Why? Because love that is earned is not real love - and Jesus is nothing but real love. To the extent that we approach Jesus with the idea we must earn His love, to that extent we are approaching a fake Jesus that lives only in our imagination. Any attempt to get Him to love us is stone blind to the reality that He already loves us, even when we did not love him. It is not my achievements that God wants, but me that God wants. And not just a little of me, but all of me. The great paradox of the faith is that God's love for us burns just as brightly when we have been jerks, but we can only see that for ourselves when we frankly admit that we have been jerks.

Tragically, the Gospel of Niceness primes us for the moment of our inevitable failure to be a nice person. For when we lose our temper repeatedly, struggle with booze, continue to indulge in mental lust, or grapple with some other sin, we discover that we are NOT NICE. If we worship at the altar of niceness, what then - does God love us less because we are not nice. Absolutely not! Because of grace, we don't have to run away to avoid the condemnation of God. We don't have to blame someone else, we don't have to pretend we haven't sinned, we don't have to abandon our faith, we don't have to put on a fake mask of religious niceness. You see, the gospel of niceness forces a separation between God and man by promulgating the heresy that God loves us more if we are nice and less if we are not.

So what is there instead? The glorious truth that St. Paul and the entire Catholic Church have thundered for centuries: God's love is unconditional and He offers His salvation by grace. It is precisely in this that God proves His love for us: that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Ro. 5:8. It was not after, but long before we are able to earn God's love that God embraced us. And this embrace leapt across all voids, beat down all walls, endured crucifixion and will continue to pursue us until our last breath. All we have to do is respond to His great love.

It's amazing, but God created us with the ability to reject him, so God isn't shocked when we sin. Does this mean we can do anything or nothing? No! If we reject the love of God by failing to surrender ourselves to Him, if we reject what Christ did on our behalf, then we shall certainly receive what we have chosen. Yet, if we do choose

God's love we shall have it, not because we "niced" our way into His affections, but because He has been flooding us with love relentlessly. We shall find that our acts of "niceness" were not our gifts to God, but His gifts to us: a chance to participate in His love. Thus, our good deeds are nothing more than our way of loving God, not earning His love for us.

e. ONCE SAVED ALWAYS SAVED

"Once saved always saved" is a doctrine espoused by many, but not all, Protestant denominations. The doctrine provides that a person is eternally secure after he/she receives Christ by faith, generally by praying a sinner's prayer. Accordingly, no sin committed after being saved, no matter how heinous, will deny one access to heaven. Indeed, the doctrine provides that if one were truly saved, such a sin would never have been committed in the first place. A Christian might backslide into sin, but he will ultimately repent. If he doesn't, he was never a Christian to begin with.

Like many Protestants, Catholics do not agree with "once saved always saved" because it is again contrary to the plain language of Scripture. While one is not to live his life in constant fear losing salvation, the Bible makes clear that if one turns from God a healthy dose of worry is recommended. For instance, The Bible warns again and again of the danger of falling away from your faith in Christ:

If they have escaped the corruption of the world by *knowing* our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better off for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. 2 Pe. 2:20.

It is impossible for those who have once been *enlightened*, who have *tasted the heavenly gift*, who have *shared in the Holy Spirit*, who have *tasted the goodness of the word of God* and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of Man all over again and subjecting Him to public disgrace. Heb. 6:4-6.

Watch out that you do not loose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. 2 Jn. 1:8.

The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. Mt. 13:20.

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. Mt. 5:18.

The Bible is much more vocal on the need for perseverance rather than on the state of eternal security:⁵⁰

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but how much more in my absence, *continue to work out your salvation in fear and trembling*, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose. Phil. 2:12.

All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. Mt. 10:22.

Some Protestants point to the fact that many times Scripture references salvation as a past tense event:

For by grace you *have been saved*. Eph. 2:8.

However, while salvation is spoken about in the past tense, it is also spoken about in the present tense, for example, Paul says:

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who *are being saved* it is the power of God. 1 Cor. 1:18.

Salvation is also described as a future event:

He who endures to the end *will be saved*. Mt. 10:22; 24:13.

In fact, an exhaustive word study on the Greek terms related to the English word "justification" reveals that justification is inextricably linked to the issue of sanctification. The Bible speaks of justification in the past, present and future tenses, implying that it is an ongoing process in the life of each believer. Protestants also point to those

⁵⁰ See James 1:2-3; 1:12; Rom. 8:28; Eph. 6; 1 Pet. 5; Psalm 7:9; 17:3; 119:67, 72.

verses that deal with a Christian's assurance of salvation:

These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may *know* that you have eternal life. Jn. 5:13.

Catholics believe that Christians have a moral assurance of salvation - meaning that God will always remain faithful to his promise of eternal life for those who love and obey him. Nevertheless, the Bible explicitly says that Christians do not have an absolute assurance of salvation. Paul said:

It does not concern me in the least that I be judged by you or any human tribunal; I do not even pass judgment on myself; *I am not conscious of anything against me, but I do not thereby stand acquitted*; the one who judges me is the Lord. 1 Cor. 4:4-5; see also Rom. 11:22; Heb. 10:26-29; 2 Pet. 2:20-21.

Saint Paul did not bask in once saved always saved eternal security.

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize. Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore, I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. *No, I beat my body and make it a slave so that after I have preached to others I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.* 1 Cor. 9:24-27.⁵¹

Marcus Grodi, an ex-Presbyterian minister, once believed Calvin's doctrines of predestination and perseverance of the saints. But how does the doctrine manifest itself? He was unsettled by the knowledge that no matter how earnestly he may have thought one of his recently deceased members were predestined, they may not have gone to heaven. What if he had secretly "backslidden" into sin and rebelled against God at the time of death? Reformed theology told him that the poor fellow may have been deluded by false security, thinking he was predestined and regenerated when he was actually chosen for hell all along. Calvin taught that the Lord's elect will - must - persevere in grace. But if a person doesn't persevere, he proves he never was one of the elect. What kind of absolute assurance was that?

Case in point. During a prosecutors conference we evaluated a particular murder case. Tragically, a long-time minister had an affair. One thing lead to another until he eventually contracted with two local thugs to kill his wife, to shoot her quickly and mercifully. Well, they took his money, spent it on cocaine rather than buying a gun, and beat her to death with a fireplace tool. When he realized what had happened, he despaired and killed himself. Now, I make this point not to demonize Protestantism, for many Catholics have likewise sinned, but to pose a question. Was this man saved? Are we to believe that this preacher never in his whole life ever prayed the sinner's prayer sincerely? Did he live his entire life under the delusion that he was assured of salvation? What good is assurance if one can end his life on such a note? If the opportunity had presented itself, on the eve of this deed would it have been proper for someone to question this minister's salvation, to have him worry alittle? What about the preacher who recently left his wife to be with a woman he met on the Internet? We know Christ said adulterers have no place in His kingdom. What about this man, did he never pray a sinner's prayer either?

How ironic that a doctrine designed to give one eternal assurance can, during a spiritual crisis, leave one doubting whether he was ever a Christian to begin with. Such assurance assures the believer that the elect will assuredly go to heaven, but can't assure him that his born again experience was authentic and that he's assuredly among the saved. There are scores of Biblical passages that deny this notion.⁵² Cf. Heb. 6:4-6; 2 Pet. 2:20; Rom.

⁵¹ Paul speaks of this race throughout his letters:

You were running the good race, who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth. Gal. 5:7; see Phil 3:12-14; 2 Tim. 4:7-8; 1 Tim 6:12.

⁵² There is also the concept of suffering. Christ commanded us to die to self by taking up one's cross and suffering with him. By Christ's passion and crucifixion Jesus gives us himself as an example of how we should follow in our suffering.

If we have died with him we shall also live with him. If we persevere, we shall also reign with him. But if we deny him, he will deny us. 2 Timothy 2:11-12.

11:22; 1 Cor. 4:4; 9:24-27; 11:32; 15:2; Col 1:21-23; Phil. 2:12; 1 Tim. 4:16; 2 Tim. 2:11-13; Jas 1:12; Mt. 5:18; 10:22; 13:20; et al.

Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house will come, ... lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you *I say to all: WATCH.* Mk. 13:36-37.

VI. TESTIMONY - CONFESSIONS OF A SECRET AGENT:

I was raised in a Catholic home by wonderful loving parents. Looking back, I now realize how God was always present in my life, with certain spiritual aspects of my upbringing that I still remember vividly. My family came into the Church when I was five, I can still picture a middle aged priest looking into my eyes as I was baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I gave a Scriptural reading during the Mass that I received first Holy Communion, with my family in attendance, cameras in hand. I was scared to death at my first confession, but Monseigneur Clunan helped my through. At parochial school I remember a nun whispering "my Lord, my God" as a priest consecrated the host at Mass. During confirmation preparation in eighth grade, I struggled intensely with whether to become a priest or veterinarian; sounds silly now but it sure wasn't at the time. These memories are now etched into my soul - this is how I forgot them.

During my adolescent years family devotion consisted primarily of weekly Mass and a meal blessing. I guess my parents believed I received the remainder of my spiritual guidance from Catholic school - I didn't. It was as if everyone assumed I had been properly processed into the Church, so lets move on to caring for the poor and feeding the sick. At school there were classes on social justice, but no one ever spoke to me about a relationship with Jesus Christ. Church youth group consisted of planning the next car wash or party. There was little if any guidance on formation of the inner life. I went to Mass and received the sacraments, thank God, but no one ever explained why.

My spiritual life in high school evolved into a sort of bargaining relationship with Christ. What do I have to give up to be a Christian. If I only get drunk once a week, is that good enough to get to heaven? If I go to Mass every Sunday, can I play professional football? How could I mesh being a Christian and a tough guy at the same time. I knew that there was more to my faith than status quo living, but status quo living was so much easier. Looking back, those gentle convictions were God's call, it just took Him awhile to get my attention.

I went to college in 1981, the University of Mississippi (i.e. Ole Miss), and from a worldly perspective had an excellent year. I made super grades, partied every weekend, who could ask for more? I also quit going to Mass and became utterly miserable. I had created an image and by all outwardly appearances seemed to have it all together, but inside there was a confused young man who was very unhappy. I slowly came to the realization that having fun didn't make me happy. There was a void that inside that I just couldn't fill. Something had to change, but what?

My roommate was dating a girl whose roommate happened to be Catholic. Her name was Mary and she was beautiful! I introduced myself to Mary at a fraternity party and made a wonderful first impression. We had filled a trash can with Hawaiian Punch and vodka, I had the tale tell red ring around my lips as I staggered up to her and made a fool out of myself. While she was not impressed I was. Several weeks later I decided to go to Mass, the

The role of suffering in the life of a Christian is something that is rarely taught in Protestant circles. As a secure "don't worry, I have worked it out" believer, is there ever any need to embrace suffering? Is suffering something to be merely tolerated? Is the idea of embracing suffering as a redemptive act of love and union with Christ crucified a new concept to you?

first time I had been all year. After church I notice Mary walking back to her dorm room and asked if I could give her a ride. When we arrived at her dorm I asked her to lunch. She smiled and said, "Thanks but no thanks," got out of my jeep and left. So much for first impressions.

The summer after my freshman year I left home and worked construction, I needed time away to get my head on straight. I decided that I would go back to Ole Miss, but I set up several parameters to get my life back in order: (1) I would go to Mass every Sunday, (2) I would quit partying so much, and (3) I would ask out Mary. I implemented items one and two, but I needed some help with number three. My opportunity came in late September.

While eating lunch with several friends Mary walked by and I commented that she had the best looking legs on campus. One of my friends, Terry, put five dollars on the picnic table and challenged me to ask her out. Well, it was the motivation I needed. I got up and slowly walked in her direction, but by the time I got to her some other guy had beaten me to the punch. I had to wait in line for ten minutes, and when it was my turn to speak all I could do was ask her to Mass on Sunday, and she said yes. Terry took back his five dollars and said that didn't count for a date, but it did for me.

I asked her to homecoming several weeks later and she accepted, we never had another date with anyone else. She was the one, but of course I had to convince Mary that I was the one - a little harder sell. I'll never forget dropping off a half dozen roses at the front desk of her dorm for Valentines Day. There were lots of other flowers at the front desk, so I thought I would do a little checking. HOLY COW ... two other guys had each left her a dozen roses. So as not to be outdone, I had to speed back to the florist and buy more flowers before she came down. Mary assured me they were just friends - but I still had the most flowers.

God truly blessed me with this wonderful Catholic girl, for in Mississippi there are many beautiful ladies but not many Catholics. And Mary was a capital "C" Catholic. She never tried to act "religious," there was just a special "sense of faith" that attracted me to her like a magnet. She attended daily Mass held in a little room on campus, so I started tagging along - I would go anywhere to be with her. I can remember asking her to go to Protestant Sunday service with a group of friends, she agreed only if she could go to Mass that evening. Mary would not miss the Eucharist. Just being around her changed me. Christ used this wonderful girl to bring me to Him, and in a special way my relationship to God was and is tied to my relationship with this Catholic girl from Columbus, Mississippi.

Through Mary I also met a wonderful priest, Father Frank Cosgrove. He was the parish priest at the Catholic Church just off campus. His Mass was packed with college kids, there was literally nowhere to put them. If the congregation didn't participate Father Cosgrove would literally stop Mass and remind us where we were. He was also the first Priest I ever heard devote his homily to abortion. I remember seeing tears running down his face one Sunday as he talked about the tragedy, I'm sure he saved numerous unborn lives while on this college campus. Father Cosgrove also held retreats every semester, to get the college kids off campus for a few days to reflect on their lives and their faith. After years of not going to confession, I received the sacrament of reconciliation at my first retreat. I felt so clean and free, I stayed up all night rejoicing.

Also during this time a young man with Campus Crusade for Christ, Clint, came and spoke to my fraternity. Campus Crusade is a Protestant organization designed to evangelize college age youth. He spoke candidly of his faith and love for Christ, and his testimony included a word picture that I'll never forget. He said his college days were analogous to a group of kids speeding down a dark highway. The car was packed with friends and beer. Everyone was talking and drinking, the radio was turned up loud, it was a great time. However, occasionally the car would pass a sign that would say "Wrong Way". No one else saw the sign. The car kept going faster, the music kept getting louder, but there were always the wrong way signs. He didn't want to end the party and stop the car, but he was convinced the signs were right - the car was heading for destruction. He said that the signs are from God, and that there are severally people in the room right now that need to stop the car, and that he was there to help.

Clint was talking to me and I knew it. At the end of his talk he passed out cards to everyone in the room. The cards asked some benign questions, one of which was would you like to have lunch. If anyone knew that I was talking to this guy I would be ruined - it didn't fit my image. I secretly checked the lunch response and put the card in the basket while I outwardly discounted everything this crusader just said. I left the meeting and anxiously awaited his call.

During lunch I asked Clint if I had to give up country music, lifting weights and hunting and fishing in order to be a Christian. He smiled and gently explained that I had missed the point. Christianity was more of a state of being rather than a state of doing. God created me just as I am. The initial inquiry should be whether or not I have given my life to Christ, Jesus will help me out the other peripheral details. The meeting impacted my life, not so much by what was said but the fact that the reality of Christ was dealt with in such an up front manner. These guys loved Jesus and weren't afraid to say it. The next week I walked into a fraternity Bible study, you could have heard a pin drop. I saw no conflict with my Catholic faith and Campus Crusade, so I continued in both directions.

My relationship with Mary proceeded and we were married the summer before our senior year, and graduated in Christmas of 1984. We moved to New Orleans and I went to work for an accounting firm. We were twenty-one years old and for the first time in our lives, on our own.

Immediately after our arrival in New Orleans one of my superiors ask Mary and I to join a Bible study. He was an ex-Catholic preparing to quit his job and attend a nondenominational Bible seminary. Since we didn't know the difference between nondenominational Christianity and Catholicism, we agreed to go. Heck, it seemed like Protestants were the only people having Bible studies anyway. We met once a week for prayer and study. Never had I been around people who were so vocal about their faith. Our study leader explained that a rapture would occur soon, when all Christians would be taken to heaven. Immediately after this rapture there would be a seven year tribulation period of great torment, followed by a thousand year period when Christ would come back to rule the world. Wow! I had never heard such a thing. At the time I didn't know that this type of dispensationalist theology had only been in existence for a little over a hundred years, and was not even accepted by much of Protestantism. All I knew is that these people were sincere and appeared legitimate, they had a Scripture verse for every proposition.

The study leader gently explained that the reason I had never heard of the rapture and thousand year reign was because Catholics didn't believe in the Bible, and that most Catholics would be left behind when the rapture occurred. Now wait a second, "Them's fightin' words!" He challenge me to find purgatory in the Bible, and used my dumbfounded expression to prove the point that Catholics were unBiblical. While I could not respond to his allegations, I could not deny the fact that these folks were sincere, and they were convinced that Catholicism was heresy. We stayed in the Bible study, and through it all our faith in Christ continued to grow.

In 1985 Mary and I moved to Nashville, Tennessee, so that I could become a real estate magnet. We also joined a local Catholic Church and got involved in the parish youth group. As our participation in Church increased, my desire for a deeper relationship with Christ increased. I began to read the Bible and drop by Church to pray on my own. We were invited to join another Bible study hosted by several Church of Christ couples in our neighborhood. Seeing no conflict in our beliefs, Mary and I decided to go. Nevertheless, the hosts perceived a conflict because we were uninvited after several months. It really didn't matter, our faith seemed to inch along, step by baby step.

In 1986, I heard of a children's home in Gadsden, Alabama, founded by John Croyle, an All-American Alabama football player. Now this was my kind of Christian. Mary and I decided to visit. "Big Oaks Boys Ranch" is a children's home which cares for abandoned and abused children, raising them in Christian homes. John Croyle was six foot six, wore jeans and cowboy boots, and talked about Jesus like Christ was sitting at the table with us. He started out in the late 1970's caring for three abused kids in a farm house, and by 1986 was raising over fifty boys, and refused any governmental or United Way assistance. You see, such organizations prohibited the proclamation of the Gospel, something Croyle would never agree to. Croyle also said that he would open a girl's home in the near future. Tears formed in his eyes as he explained that a judge had recently denied him custody of an abused girl because his home was for boys, and two weeks later the girl was killed by her father. For John, such a situation was unacceptable and had to be dealt with. I was amazed at this man's faith. By 1994 Big Oak Boys Ranch cared for over 100 children, with an operating girls ranch.

Croyle said that the life of Christian service was the most demanding life imaginable, and also the most rewarding. He asked if I had ever considered it - I said I didn't know. He gave me a book to read and told me to write out my testimony and send it to him. I had never seen such an uncompromising form of Christianity. When Mary and I told John we were Catholics, he looked a little puzzled and explained that he was Baptist because the Baptists were closest to authentic Biblical Christianity. I was troubled by the fact that this man of faith was uneasy with Catholicism, and also by the fact that I had never been challenged this way at the Catholic Church. In addition,

I knew that Catholic Charities received money from the government and United Way, but how could they?

One day with John Croyle had a profound affect on my life. I returned to Nashville re-committed to my faith. However, as my Christian journey proceeded a slight problem developed, my job. My boss patterned himself after Gordon Gecko in the movie "Wallstreet," and I soon found myself very uncomfortable with the greed and quasi-unethical dealings in which I participated. Life began to speed faster and faster, so Mary and I decided to call "time out," and made the decision to go to law school, both of us. If I had been Protestant I might have gone to seminary, but since I was a married Catholic law school sounded reasonable. Certainly God could use our law degrees. We quit our jobs and hit the road, and in 1988 we went back to school and Ole Miss.

Upon entering law school Mary and I again became involved in our local parish, and had our first child, Forrest. By this time Father Cosgrove had moved on and the campus Church was not the same. Student participation had dwindled, there were no more retreats. Mary and I were lectures at Mass, but again found ourselves in Protestant Bible studies, sponsored by members of the Presbyterian Church of America (hereinafter "PCA"). There were no such opportunities at our small parish. I was again presented with a dynamic form of Christianity sponsored by sincere and knowledgeable people. Instead of starting a Catholic Bible study myself, Mary and I continued on with our Protestant friends. We didn't want to leave.

While in school I also had to commute long distances to work, and began to listen to Christian radio. The station consisted of programs sponsored by Evangelical Protestant preachers and laymen, such as Dr. James Dobson, R. C. Sproul, D. James Kennedy, John McCarther, Steve Brown, Charles Stanley, Adrian Rogers, etc. They spoke of a dynamic form of Christianity and of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I knew there was more to my Christian walk than weekly attendance at Mass, and here were people explaining why. It was the kind of enthusiasm I had heard in the voice of John Croyle. And what troubled me most was that these speakers would occasionally refer to the folly of Catholicism, that we had no real doctrine of salvation, that we had abandoned Scripture for ancient tradition unsubstantiated by the Bible. I began to look forward to the drive just to listen to these people preach. I slowly began to evolve into a Protestant, specifically an Evangelical Presbyterian Protestant. I developed a growing discomfort with Catholicism and began to contemplate leaving the Church.

We graduated from law school in 1991, had a second child, Mary-Haston, and moved to Jackson, Mississippi. I began work at a local law firm. Mary and I had several close PCA friends, and we were immediately included in their Christian crowd. As our Bible studies continued we were occasionally posed with questions that we could not answer. Why are you Catholic?, why do you worship Mary?, pray to the saints?, say that the Pope is infallible?, believe information not contained within the Bible?, etc. While I had no answers, my Protestant brothers did, and they began to feed me audio tapes by Protestant theologians who were not in the least bit inhibited in explaining why Catholicism is wrong. In particular, a theological professor named R. C. Sproul explained analytically and authoritatively why the Catholic Church was grossly in error, and how Christianity was saved by a group of reformers five hundred years ago. I became addicted to his message.

I also received numerous books from my Protestant friends. While Mary was leary of the volume of information we were receiving, no pun intended, I gobbled it up. During the summer of 1991 I read a book entitled Born Again, written by Protestant author Chuck Colson. Colson admitted that the title had become a rather overused evangelical cliché, but asserted that he could find none better. The book chronicled Colson's life from the power and prestige of General Counsel to President Nixon to that of a devoted Christian. The book challenged me to come "out of the closet" and join the fellowship of the unashamed. I started by simply carrying a Bible to work and placing it my desk for everyone to see. Such a small and seemingly unauthentic gesture was an important step for me. I was soon leading a Bible study at work. To this day I have great admiration for Chuck Colson.

In addition to leading a Bible study at work, Mary and I began to attend a local PCA church. Its Sunday service was like nothing I had ever experienced. The forceful presentation of Christianity was impressive, and for me, persuasive. My discomfort with Catholicism grew, and I became more vocal about my desire to leave. My wife, however, did not share my views. She agreed that Protestantism was vibrant, but she always insisted that something was missing. The sermons were great, but their service was never over, never complete. There was no Eucharist! Mary argued that there was nothing supernatural about their faith, only great speaking and well argued dogma. I insisted that she was just bound to her Catholic culture, and that things would get better. They didn't!

After attending the PCA church for several months we entered their newcomers class, at my insistence,

which contained more authoritatively presented doctrine and occasional Catholic criticism. Sunday became the worst day of the week. We would first attend the PCA church service and then the newcomers class, and thereafter immediately go to Mass. Mary would cry all the way to the PCA service, and it got to the point that I could no longer sit through Mass.

Nevertheless, my Protestant journey was not without obstacles. For instance, I recall the first Sunday Mary and I received the Lord's Supper at the Presbyterian church. While I was indeed troubled by what just happened, Mary was livid. She was convinced that she had just participated in some uninformed attempt to re-invent the Blessed Sacrament. For her it was blasphemy. I reasserted that we were both just addicted to our Catholic upbringing. Besides, Protestant doctrine taught that the Catholic idea of transubstantiation was invented by Rome in the thirteenth century. Mary was still unpersuaded by my rational.

Mary informed her parents of our struggles, and to say her family was concerned is an understatement. Family tension peeked when my mother in law contacted our Bishop and parish priest and ordered them to stop us. Mary's aunt was a Benedictine sister, consequently every nun in Arkansas was praying for us. I, in turn, was praying for them.

By late 1991 I had an established group of Protestant friends, in which the backbone of our friendship was our common faith in Christ. With their assistance I became involved in Evangelism Explosion (hereinafter "E.E."), a Protestant evangelistic program designed to lead people to Christ. The program is based on series of questions designed to determine whether or not the person understands the Gospel message, as well as an outline to guide the messenger in the proclamation of the Gospel. E.E. includes weekly classes, prayer partners, as well as face to face evangelism. It is a sincere effort to proclaim the Good News according to Reformed Protestant Theology. I memorized the format.

While involved in E.E. I also became a sponsor in our parish RCIA class, in an undercover capacity of course. I considered myself a secret agent for Christ. RCIA classes are the process by which nonCatholic adults are initiated into the Catholic Church. In our parish, RCIA classes lasted for approximately nine months, with initiation and first Holy Communion occurring on Easter Sunday. RCIA provided a perfect format for me to evangelize my uninformed Catholic brothers and sisters. On the night the Catholic understanding of our Blessed Mother was presented, I attacked with a vengeance. I proclaimed that in the book of Hebrews Scripture teaches that we can come to Christ freely because He is our brother, we don't need Mary as some sort of an intercessor. Of course, I was blind to the fact that if Jesus is our brother, then Mary is our ... Mother? On another occasion the priest allowed me present a topic to the class, at which time I presented the entire E.E. format. My Protestant friends prayed for me in their homes as I proclaimed salvation by faith alone to the entire RCIA class.

I even invited friends to Scripture study in my home, and carefully used Galatians and Romans to teach other Catholics the reformed Protestant Gospel message; That man is saved by grace through faith alone (sola fide). I also incorporated the other pillar of the reformation into my teaching, that Scripture is a Christian's sole authority (sola Scriptura). I was convinced that Catholicism had abandoned the fundamental principles of sola fide and sola Scriptura resulting from centuries of corruption and pagan influence. I was happy to accept a Protestant explanation of Catholicism, while never attempting to discover what the Catholic Church taught on the matters.

After several years of Protestantism, in early 1992 I finally followed Mary's advice and decided to voice my concerns to a Catholic priest. I did my homework, and was convinced that no priest could answer my Evangelical objections. Father Cosgrove, my favorite priest from Ole Miss, was now in Jackson, and I drew my Protestant assertions on him like a gun. However, Father Cosgrove would never argue, only pray with me and calmly discuss my concerns. I took his refusal to debate as weakness of position, and pronounced victory. Nevertheless, Father Cosgrove did offer me some tapes by Scott Hahn, a former Protestant minister and theologian who had become Catholic. He had just received the tapes from a Presbyterian seminary professor, who taught at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, and who was converting to Catholicism. I refused to listen. I knew plenty of Catholics that had become Protestants and I was not interested in dueling audio tapes. After all, how can you defend indefensible positions.

Mary and I also consistently prayed about the issue, asking for God's guidance and will for our lives. It appeared as if we would never make any progress but then, slowly, I began to make headway with Mary. During the summer of 1992, the dam broke. After numerous meetings with Father Cosgrove, he finally ask me if there were any experiences with the sacraments that I could remember, concerning the Eucharist or perhaps the sacrament of

reconciliation, or any other. I confirmed that there were, but that such memories were not important to this decision. Father Cosgrove then, to my surprise, informed me that he feared for my soul if I left the Church. Knowing what I know, this humble priest informed me that I could not leave the Eucharist, nor force my wife to leave. I asked if he was questioning our salvation - he said yes. Speaking out of love, Father Cosgrove gave us a stern warning, and for that I will be eternally grateful. Nevertheless, at the time I was enraged. I told Mary I would never again attend a Catholic Church, and for the first time she agreed. This was not a joyful occasion, simply the culmination of a long process. We called our friends to let them know we had finally made a decision. On that Wednesday afternoon, it was finally all over - or so I thought.

I got to work on Thursday morning ready to get on with my life. It just so happened that a new partner had been hired by my law firm that week, John, from Dallas, TX. Well, after a firm meeting John approached me about going to lunch. He had heard I was Catholic and was seeking advice on which parish to attend. I agreed, and thanked God for providing another Catholic with whom I could share the Gospel. John did not know that the day before I had finalized my separation from the Church.

At lunch John told me that he had converted to Catholicism two years earlier. My response was quick and direct, "Why would someone convert to Catholicism?" I, in turn, questioned John's salvation. John smiled and asked if I wanted the long or the short version, I said I had an hour. He then quietly asked if I had ever heard of a small town in Yugoslavia called Medjugourie. I said yes and braced for a "Mary story", but I must admit I was also curious. John seemed reasonable enough, graduating at the top of his law school class and being a successful lawyer.

He stated that two years earlier he was struggling with going to seminary, when a friend gave him a book on the Blessed Virgin's alleged appearance in Medjugorje. The only reason John read the book was because it was written by a Protestant (Wayne Wieble, *The Message*). He could not put the book down. John explained that by virtue of being the mother of Christ, our first born Brother, that Mary is our own spiritual mother as well, given to us by Jesus at the cross. See John 19:26-27. Mary is simply bringing us her Son, just as she had 2000 years ago. "Do whatever He tells you." John 2:8. Her message has always been the same. Medjugorje is Our Lady's call to peace, conversion and repentance; with an emphasis on prayer, fasting, Bible study, monthly confession and daily celebration of the Eucharist.

The book spoke to his heart, and John immediately decided to go. Since at that time he was a partner in a large Dallas law firm, he could afford to take the trip. John reasoned that if it was true, if the Virgin Mary was appearing in a little town in Yugoslavia, then this was something he must see. If it was a hoax, then God would still honor his pilgrimage. John learned how to pray the rosary, and began living the messages of Medjugorje. Finally, the big day came. John loaded up and flew to New York to catch a ride on to Yugoslavia.

The plane was a day late so John had a layover. In the middle of the night before his flight to Yugoslavia, he awoke in his hotel room with an overwhelming urge to pray the rosary. Hours passed like minutes, John explained that never had he prayed like this before - it was a gift from God. With each decade of the rosary it was as if he was actually there to witness Jesus' life; the incarnation of our Lord in Mary's womb, the visitation of Mary to Elizabeth, the birth of Christ, the presentation in the temple, the agony and crucifixion, the resurrection and ascension, Pentecost. When he finished praying the sun was up, and when he turned on the light he realized his rosary had turned gold. Interesting - I had never heard of such a thing?

The plane ride over consisted primarily of Catholics on pilgrimage to Medjugorje. Nevertheless, when a dumbfounded John showed them his rosary, the passengers were skeptical to say the least. Where did you get it, is it trick medal, why would it do that for you? John said hey, y'all are the Catholics, I thought you folks knew what was going on here. On the ride back the skepticism was erased, for all but a handful of the passengers had gold rosaries. John went on to describe numerous miracles that occurred while he was in Medjugorje, he even had a picture of one. Nevertheless, he was careful to point out that this is not a story of miracles. The true miracle of Medjugorje was its fruit, conversion to Christ. People should not go to Medjugorje shopping for miracles, they should only go searching for a deeper relationship with our Lord. Miracles are just icing, validation of the messages God asked Mary to give us.

While John's sincerity was obvious and moving, his story convinced me of nothing. Nevertheless, the timing of this meeting was bothersome, pushing the "coincidence envelope" so to speak. When I told John of our decision to leave the Church, finalized just the day before, he smiled. Upon his return to Dallas from Medjugorje,

John became Catholic, and after several years of spreading the messages he realized that it was time for him to move on. John explained that the only way he had moved to Jackson, MS, was through an act of God, then quietly thanked Jesus for showing him at least one reason why he was moved to Dixie. He looked me square in the eye and said, "God sent me here to tell you that you cannot leave His Church." Nothing John said before convinced me of anything, but at that moment I was touched by the Holy Spirit. I couldn't speak, I just got up and went back to work.

When I got back to my office I closed my door and got down on my knees. I could articulate nothing in my prayer, I just knelt down next to Jesus and let His light warm me. I sat there and cried as years of turmoil melted away. At the very height of my arrogance, I was humbled. The Catholic Church was true - and I knew it. At that moment I couldn't explain why, but it didn't matter. I just sat there in joyful awe.

Even today it is difficult to articulate my experience, I was just touched by grace. Any attempt to explain only seems to lessen the reality of what God did for me. And what astounded me most was that I knew the Mother of God existed, not as some female Goddess, but as Christ's mother who had prayed to her Son especially for me. At that moment in my office I knew the Blessed Virgin was present, and it was as if she gently whispered, "Behold, my Son." I was no longer talking to Jesus, I was with Him. I knew my life would never be the same. I called Mary (my wife) and told her what happened; there was no confusion - only divine grace, acceptance and agreement. When I got home from work we rejoiced!

I got up Friday morning and went to Mass, the turmoil was truly over. For the first time in years my soul was calm. I had never before just let Jesus hold me, but I did that morning. All the statues and stained glass windows which depicted Christ's life and the life of His Church, everything that made me so angry, now comforted me. It was as if I was looking at a photo album of a family that I was now part of. And when I received Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament I believed. I never wanted to leave. Although John witnessed numerous miracles, nothing that happened to him can compare to what happened to me. I was changed, touched by Jesus in the most wonderfully unanticipated way. After years of confusion and consistent prayer, God was faithful. At the very moment I had it all figured out, I was brought to my knees and received a special grace. While I still cannot adequately explain the communion of saints, I know that I will be eternally grateful for the prayers of Our Blessed Mother. Although she faded into the background after my experience, I will always know that she is my constant companion. At the very time I denied her existence, she brought me to her Son and to His Church. Do whatever He tells you, the message is still the same.

People may think that John somehow persuaded me to stay in the Church. Not true! I want to make clear that John convinced me of nothing. This mild-mannered business lawyer did not hypnotize me, trick me, or brainwash me. In fact, John is one of the most unassuming people I know. God was just happy to use one of His servants to further His plan.

The next week I was sent out of town on business, and I took those Scott Hahn tapes that I had previously rejected. Praise the Lord! Due to my background, I longed for a Biblical appreciation of the Church. Though I had never met the man, Hahn became the teacher I so badly needed - someone who explained Catholicism with fervor and intellectual honesty. Heck, Hahn belonged on those Protestant radio shows that I listened to. Remarkably, almost instantaneously Christ surrounded me with numerous "born again" Catholic friends and teachers of the faith. I found them at daily Mass.

During my Protestant days I thought of myself as a pseudo-expert on the errors of Catholicism. However, I had never read a book about Catholicism written by a Catholic author. My knowledge of the Church came solely from Protestants writing about Catholicism. If I had researched my faith like I research the law, my questions would have been answered much sooner. In addition, by this time in my life I had read and outlined the New Testament several times. But after my conversion, when I went back and read [John 6:48-71](#), I noticed that I had not even highlighted the text. It was as if I was reading the Bible with blinders on. Here Christ repeated over and over again, "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you," and I ignored Him. I remember Scott Hahn saying that after his conversion to Catholicism he went back and read his old Bible, and there between the highlighted portions was the Catholic Church. It was the same for me.

Through my studies I fell in love with Christ's Church. Much to my surprise I discovered that the earliest Christians were the same in faith and practice as the Roman Catholic Church of today. They believed in the Real Presence, baptismal regeneration, had a structured hierarchy and liturgical worship. Heck, they even called themselves Catholics. My evangelical days gave me a sincere appreciation of Scripture, and I was astonished to see

that over and over again if Catholicism was guilty of anything, it was taking Scripture at face value. Whether it was the Real Presence in [John 6:48-71](#) and [1 Corinthians 10:16-17, 11:23-30](#), the sacrament of confession in [John 20:22](#) and [1 John 1:9](#), the Papacy in [Matthew 16:17-19](#), baptismal regeneration in [John 3:5-8](#) and [1 Pet. 3:20-22](#), the authority of the Church in [Matthew 18:18](#) and [1 Timothy 3:15](#), Jesus communing with the saints on the Mount of Transfiguration, or the recognition of Mary as blessed from generation to generation, the Church is loyal to the very word of Scripture.

The world teaches that the Catholic Church is obsessed with sex, seeking to ensure that no one enjoys sexual expression. In reality, the Church is obsessed with marriage. Being Herself a bride, the Church is forever linked to marriage. The Catholic Church teaches that marriage is not the chance product of evolution, but created by God to give us some idea of the relationship He wishes to have with us. A husband's love for his wife is to be as Christ's love for His Church. [Eph. 5:21-33](#). The Church's concern for marital sexuality arises not from a rigid preoccupation with moral norms, but because sex is the door that seals the marital covenant. Through the Church, I was able to understand that the sexual embrace within a Christian marriage is in reality an act of profound worship. You see sex isn't just good, sex is HOLY!

When I realized that what we do with our bodies inside the marriage covenant is as much a religious question as sex outside the marriage covenant, I began to understand the Church's refusal to legitimize divorce or contraception/sterilization. This realization had a profound and tangible effect within my marriage. Prior to our conversion, Mary and I planned on having three children. After three, she would be tied or I would be snipped. Then after our return, we began to study the Church's explanation for its opposition to contraception. I began to see that the holy and spiritual aspect of sex should not be separated from the gratification of sex, the procreative should not be separated from the unitive. The two dimensions of conjugal union cannot be artificially separated without damaging the deepest truth of the conjugal act itself.

This truth is even born out by Scripture, specifically the Onan account in [Gen. 38:6-10](#). Here the Lord expressed His displeasure with contraceptive behavior, and Onan was slain for practicing withdrawal. For two thousand years Christians, including Luther, Calvin and Wesley, recognized this teaching as a condemnation of contraception. It was not until the 1920's that Protestantism broke ranks, beginning with the Anglican church at the Lambeth Conference.

The Church protected Mary and I from a terrible decision, and by the grace of God we avoided sterilization after the birth of our third child, Elizabeth. *[For a more thorough explanation of the Leary's journey away from artificial contraception, see Exhibit "C"]*. Which leads to the most wonderful result of our return to the Catholic Church, his name is Luke. Our fourth child was born six weeks early on July 4, 1995. He stayed in intensive care for two weeks. As I sat beside Luke's incubator, thanking God for my son and praying for his health, it began to make sense. While the Christian walk may be at times difficult, God is always faithful. In addition to Luke, Mary and I now have Kolbe and Nate, filling our quiver with six arrows.

By God's grace my faith continues to grow - sometimes in exuberant leaps and sometimes step by painful step. Growing in Christ has also resulted in fear and confusion, as my professional ambition is continually redirected to the cause of Christ. I no longer have a five-step plan for financial security and success, but in the most marvelous way that's OK. My selfish ambition is being replaced by something much more precious, a glimpse of reality. Jesus lives and my life is but a snap-shot of eternity! While I am often confused as to where I am going, the Holy Spirit will be my faithful guide. By His grace I will follow, sometimes complaining and doubting, but by His grace always following.

It may appear that I am now as anti-Protestant as I once was anti-Catholic. That is not true. I have a deep appreciation for the faith of my Protestant brothers and sisters. One of the saddest things in my life is the fact that many of my friendships suffered due to my conversion. This was mostly my fault. I wanted everyone to receive the same gift I received, feel what I felt, understand what I finally understood. In my zeal to explain Catholicism, I alienated many of the people I felt closest to. It's just that the Church sorely needs the devotion, enthusiasm and knowledge of Protestant converts. Hopefully I can play some role in that endeavor.

VII. CONCLUSION:

Patrick Madrid explains that conversion is a form of martyrdom. It involves the surrender of oneself - body, mind, intellect, and faith to Christ. It requires being led to "where you do not want to go." Jn. 21:18-19. Martyrdom does not necessarily mean death, and generally does not. Martyrdom means walking the way of Christ; for some it may mean joining the Catholic Church. But martyrdom is also joyful. Christ promised us that:

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also; if anyone serves me, the Father will honor him. Jn. 12:24-26.

EXHIBIT "A" - A LISTING OF EARLY CHURCH HERESIES

Marcionism rejected the Old Testament and its God, said to be different from the God of love in the New Testament, and made a complete dichotomy between law and grace. Marcion (d.c.160) came from northeastern Turkey and migrated to Rome but was promptly excommunicated in 144. The heresy was checked by 200 in Rome but lasted for several centuries in the East.

Montanism was an apocalyptic sect which denied the divinely-established nature of the Church. Montanus, who began prophesying in 172, came from central Turkey (which became the heresy's center of operations). Opposition to Montanism was spearheaded by Pope Eleutherus (175-89), and it was condemned by Pope Zephyrinus (199-217).

Docetism was the belief that Jesus Christ was not a real man, but only appeared to be so. Serapion, bishop of Antioch (190-203) was the first to use the name. The origins of Docetism derive from Hellenistic, Gnostic, and oriental notions that matter is essentially evil, which came out of Alexandria. Later christological heresies emanating from this school (such as Apollinarianism, Eutychianism, and Monophysitism) were influenced by Docetism.

Modalism (also known as *Sabellianism*) denied the full Personhood of all three Persons of the Trinity, and believed that God operated through mere "modes" or the transferal of power. Theodotus (2nd cent.) came from Byzantium to Rome, only to be excommunicated by Pope Victor (c.189-98). His disciple, also named Theodotus (early 3rd century) was condemned by Pope Zephyrinus (198-217). Artemon (3rd century) was teaching in Rome, c.235, but was excommunicated. Sabellius (fl.. 215) was excommunicated by Pope Callistus I.

Novatianism was a rigorist schism, stating that persons who fell away under persecution or who were guilty of serious sin could not be absolved. Its theology was otherwise orthodox. Novatian (d.258), a Roman presbyter, started the schism in 250. In 251 it was condemned by a Roman Synod and Pope Cornelius, and Novatian became an "antiPope". His views were approved at Antioch.

Donatism held that sacraments administered by unworthy priests were invalid, and practiced re-baptism. The sect flourished in Africa, around Carthage. It began in 311 and was condemned by Pope Miltiades (311-14), who also came from Africa, in 313.

Arianism held that Jesus was created by the Father. In trinitarian Christianity, Christ and the Holy Spirit are both equal to, uncreated, and co-eternal with God the Father. Arius (c.256-336), the heresiarch, was based in Alexandria and died in Constantinople. In a Council at Antioch in 341, the majority of 97 Eastern bishops subscribed to a form of semi-Arianism, whereas in a Council at Rome in the same year, under Pope Julius I, the trinitarian St. Athanasius was vindicated by over 50 Italian bishops. The western-dominated Council of Sardica (Sofia) in 343 again upheld Athanasius' orthodoxy, whereas the eastern Council of Sirmium in 351 espoused Arianism, which in turn was rejected by the western Councils of Arles (353) and Milan (355).

Pelagianism is the heretical doctrine that man can make steps toward salvation by his own efforts, without Divine Grace. Pelagius cleared himself at a Synod at Jerusalem around 416, but was condemned at Carthage and Milevis in 416 and excommunicated by Pope Innocent I in the same year. Pope Zosimus reaffirmed this judgment in 418, as did the ecumenical Council at Ephesus in 431.

Nestorianism contends that there are two persons in Christ (Divine and human) and the denies that Mary is the Mother of God incarnate. Orthodox, Catholic Christianity holds to one Divine Person - a God-man. Nestorius (d.c.451) studied at a monastery at Antioch and became Patriarch of Constantinople from 428 to 431, having been condemned by Pope Celestine I in the Council at Rome in 430 (after both sides of the controversy appealed to Rome). The ecumenical Council at Ephesus in 431 repeated the Roman condemnation, after which Eastern bishops predominantly from Syria, Persia and Assyria withdrew from the Catholic Church.

Monophysitism was a heresy which held that Christ had one Divine Nature, as opposed to the orthodox and Catholic belief in two Natures (Divine and human). The *Henoticon*, a semi-Monophysite document was widely acknowledged in the East, but never at Rome. The co-writers of the *Henoticon* are thought to be Acacius, Patriarch of Constantinople (471-89), and Peter Mongo, Patriarch of Alexandria (477-90). Both were Monophysites who rejected the Council of Chalcedon. Monophysitism was an advanced type of Alexandrian theology. Pope Leo the Great dominated the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451, which repudiated Monophysitism.

Monothelitism is the heretical belief that Christ had one will (Divine), whereas in orthodox, Catholic Christian

dogma, Christ has both Divine and human wills. Sergius (d.638), Patriarch of Constantinople from 610 to 638, was the most influential exponent of Monothelitism. The *Ecthesis*, a Monothelite statement issued by Emperor Heraclius, was accepted by Councils at Constantinople in 638 and 639, but was finally rejected at the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 680, which confirmed the decisions of Pope Agatho and the Synod at Rome in 679.

The Iconoclastic Controversy, a great upheaval of the 8th and 9th centuries, was spurred on notably by Monophysitism and influenced by Islam. This heresy held that images in worship were idolatrous and evil. It was initiated by Eastern Emperors Leo II (717-41), who deposed Germanus (c.634-c.733), Patriarch of Constantinople (715-30) - who appealed to Pope Gregory III. Gregory held two Synods at Rome condemning Leo's supporters in 731. In 784 Tarasius, Patriarch of Constantinople, initiated negotiations with Pope Hadrian I. The Ecumenical Council at Nicaea in 787 condemned the Iconoclasts. The Iconoclast Controversy was a major contributor towards the enduring schism between East and West.

EXHIBIT "B"

A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE HISTORY OF THE PAPACY

by Warren H. Carroll

The authority claimed and exercised by the Bishop of Rome has been essentially the same from the beginning. A careful reading of the first known papal document (excepting the two letters of St. Peter in the New Testament), the letter of the fourth Pope, St. Clement I, to the Corinthians about 95 A.D., shows the most remarkable similarities in tone and content to today's public statements by Pope John Paul II. To appreciate the full force of this historical continuity, it should be contrasted with the enormous differences — the result of sweeping changes in culture — separating almost any other document of that period, whether political, literary or philosophical, from a document in the same field today.

What other historical institution anywhere in the world may be compared to the papacy? The titles and public ceremonial surrounding the offices of Pharaoh of Egypt and Emperor of China did endure for a longer period of years than the papacy has so far, in much slower-moving times: but where are they now? As an old prophecy of the Mongols of the steppes of Asia foretold, "the Son of Heaven has vanished, and the white Tsar is no more." The titles and ceremonials of Pharaoh and Son of Heaven were intimately bound up with the single long-lasting culture which sustained them; they did not survive its fall. The papacy survived one of the greatest catastrophes of history, the fall of the Western Roman Empire; it survived the breakaway of the Greek church of the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire; it endured essentially unchanged from one civilization (classical Graeco-Roman) to another, that of the modern West. And its authority is accepted by millions in lands which historically were not part of Western civilization at all, notably the Philippines, Korea, Vietnam, and central Africa.

Do other religions offer a parallel? There are not nearly so many of them as people tend to think. Universal religions — those with a substantial following in more than one culture — are the rarest of all historical phenomena. Excluding the special case of Judaism, mostly confined to one ethnic group though geographically widespread, there are only three: Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism.

Islam, in this as in many other ways a distorted echo of Christianity, had its partial counterpart to the Pope in the Khalif — the Commander of the Faithful — who was originally the supreme temporal head of the followers of Muhammad, and remained their spiritual leader for some time after losing temporal power. But where is the Khalif today? The office no longer exists.

Buddhism, which began as a world-denying nonreligious philosophy and developed into a complex mystical pantheism, has never had an international organization despite its international and intercultural spread in Asia, and never a single leader of its faithful.

Within Christianity itself there have been many churches which at various times have broken away from Catholic unity and denied the authority of the Pope. Some have had no head and wanted none. Others have made a secular ruler their head. Others have attempted to maintain a patriarchal succession from early Christian times. But there are breaks in every chain, some lasting for centuries. *The Russian Orthodox church, for example, has been trying to discover who its rightful head is, ever since the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453.*

By contrast with these other Christian religious institutions which might seem to have points in common with it, the papacy has grown stronger and its followers more united with the passing years. The last antiPope with any significant following abandoned his claims no less than 549 years ago. The moral character and personal courage of every Pope for the past two centuries, beginning with Pius VI who heroically resisted the efforts of the French Revolution to destroy the Church, has been beyond reproach. These last fifteen Popes have not only taught truth as Catholics know they must, but also have been shining examples of the Christian life in their own persons, which by no means all Popes have been. Our present Pope is, by any rational standard, the greatest man alive today.

In the 1968 years since the birthday of the Church on Pentecost Sunday, 264 men have sat in the Chair of Peter (the complete list of Popes used as a basis of this article appears in Newman G. Eberhardt, *A Summary of Catholic History* (1962) I, 824-830 and II, 815-816, with Popes after 1962 added). Out of this unique and fascinating historical record, several points deserve special comment. First of all is the record of doctrinal orthodoxy, so extraordinary as to be wholly inexplicable without the intervention of the Holy Spirit. That 264 men with the full power to define Christian

doctrine should do so in such perfect harmony with each other over two thousand years, with only four instances in which their orthodoxy was even seriously questioned, is plainly and simply miraculous. Even the antiPopes were rarely heretical. *By contrast, the occupants of the patriarchal see of Alexandria during little more than two centuries (440-660) included eleven orthodox Catholics, thirteen Monophysite heretics, and two Monothelite heretics. The histories of the patriarchal sees of Antioch and Constantinople are similar. In the seventeenth century there was even a Patriarch of Constantinople (Cyril I Lucaris, 1620-35 and 1637-38) who was a Calvinist!*

Nevertheless, if one were to analyze the Popes critically, of the 264 Popes there are but four Popes whose doctrinal orthodoxy was ever challenged from within the Church. The four were: (I) the 16th Pope, St. Callistus I (217-222); (II) the 36th Pope, Liberius (352-366); (III) the 71st Pope, Honorius I (625-638); and (IV) the 196th Pope, John XXII (1316-1334).

(I) According to his critic and rival, the first antiPope, St. Hippolytus, Pope St. Callistus I favored the Monarchian heresy which in his time was circulating a profession of faith stating that as man Jesus is the Son, but as God he is the Father. Before becoming Pope, St. Callistus was closely associated with Sabellius, the leading promoter of this heresy. But after becoming Pope, St. Callistus condemned Sabellius for heresy and excommunicated him. St. Hippolytus was finally reconciled with the Church and papal authority, and died a martyr during one of the Roman imperial persecutions of the Church, along with Pope St. Pontian.

(II) Liberius was Pope at the height of the Arian heresy, when at one point all the bishops in the Roman world who were allowed to function as such by the Emperor Constantius had been compelled to condemn St. Athanasius, who was upholding the orthodox faith almost alone except for the common people. Liberius was imprisoned, certainly ill-treated, probably tortured. He agreed to condemn Athanasius — unjustly, as he later admitted. (Popes are not infallible in individual disciplinary decisions.) He agreed to sign an ambiguous confession of faith, the Third Formulary of Sirmium, which was capable of an Arian interpretation subordinating the Son to the Father — yet he added to the document, even from his prison, anathema on all who said "the Son is not like the Father in substance and in all things." And he steadfastly refused to sign the Second Formulary of Sirmium, an undoubtedly heretical document proclaiming that "the Father is greater than the Son." Though many people at the time had the impression that Pope Liberius had endorsed Arianism, the documents show that he never did.

(III) A similar situation arose in the pontificate of Honorius I. The Emperor Heraclius at Constantinople gave his support to a Christology intended as a compromise with the Monophysite heretics who denied Christ's human nature, which in fact was a heresy itself — Monothelitism, the doctrine that Christ has two natures but only one will, which is divine rather than human. (A man without a human will is not a man.) *Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople accepted the new heresy and wrote to Pope Honorius I explaining Monothelite teachings in a carefully expurgated and toned-down manner, and asked the Pope's opinion. Honorius replied that he thought it would be vain to dispute the issue as Sergius had explained it, and refused to give an opinion. Sergius then distributed the Pope's letter all over the East as proof that Monothelitism was not heretical, though actually the letter said nothing of the kind.* No real difficulty regarding papal infallibility would ever have arisen from this — since obviously teaching heresy and refusing to denounce a heresy at a particular time are wholly different things — were it not for the fact that the Third Ecumenical Council of Constantinople, which condemned the Monothelite heresy in 681, forty-three years after Pope Honorius I died, also condemned him as a heretic because of his letter to Sergius. However even the decrees of an ecumenical council are not binding on the whole Church unless and until, and to the extent that, they are confirmed by the Pope. Pope St. Leo II (681-683) did confirm the acts of the council, but he also noted explicitly that Pope Honorius was being condemned for tardiness and negligence in not denouncing the Monothelite heresy sooner. Pope St. Leo II said nothing to indicate that he believed Pope Honorius had taught heresy or that he had assented to any condemnation of him for that reason.

(IV) The only other Pope thought to be a heretic was John XXII, one of the Avignon Popes of the fourteenth century, who in three sermons toward the end of his life argued for the proposition that the souls of the just do not enjoy the Beatific Vision immediately after their personal Judgment, but only after the general Judgment. But he also declared that he was not sure of this opinion, and invited comment by theologians upon it. Although the Church had not yet formally defined the present enjoyment of the Beatific Vision by saints as an article of faith, it was generally held to be the truth, and is affirmed today. Pope John XXII was soon persuaded by theologians at the University of Paris that his theology was incorrect, and retracted his erroneous opinion on his deathbed. In this case it is apparent that the Pope was speaking (with extraordinary imprudence) as a private theologian, rather than exercising the magisterium of his office, since he invited dissent and objections, which no Pope ever does when teaching *ex cathedra*.

As for the other 260 Popes, no serious charge of unorthodoxy in doctrine was ever made against any of them. Probably the most spectacular instance of fidelity under enormous pressure from the most unlikely human material was provided by the 60th Pope, Vigilius (537-555), one of the three men in the history of the Church who were antiPopes during the lifetime of a legitimate Pope but recognized as the legitimate Pope after the death of the prior Pope. Vigilius, a man of weak character and great personal ambition, apparently intrigued with Monophysite heretics (notably the Empress Theodora) in the court at Constantinople to bring about the arrest, exile and martyrdom of his Predecessor, Pope St. Silverius. Evidently he was expected to approve the Monophysite heresy once he became true Pope. But he stunned the Monophysites with this statement to Empress Theodora: "Far be this from me, Lady Augusta; formerly I spoke wrongly and foolishly, but now I assuredly refuse to restore a man who is a heretic and under anathema [the deposed Monophysite Patriarch of Constantinople, Anthimus]. Though unworthy, I am vicar of Blessed Peter the Apostle, as were my predecessors, the most holy Agapitus and Silverius, who condemned him." Vigilius was arrested while saying Mass in Rome, taken away as a prisoner to Constantinople for ten years, and died in exile, but he never taught, endorsed, or supported heresy.

On what basis, then, has the tenure of papal office been historically contested, since except in the single case of Pope St. Callistus I, doctrinal unorthodoxy was never the charge? Most frequently the issue has been the validity and regularity of the Pope's election. A critical analysis of Church History reveals that 49 individuals wrongfully claimed the title of Pope (i.e., the antiPopes). Of the 49 antiPopes, 24 were rival candidates who based their claims on alleged irregularities which denied the election to them. An additional eleven succeeded to the claims of one or more of the twenty-four. Therefore, in the whole history of the Church, only fourteen men have directly challenged the legitimacy of the incumbent Pope on grounds other than the circumstances of his or a predecessor's election; and in four other cases, action of some kind was taken which could be regarded as attempting to depose a Pope whose valid election was not contested.

That a Pope may resign his office is clear. It has happened seven times, all but one of which reflected great credit on the Pope involved. The first two resignations (of the 18th Pope, St. Pontian, in 235, and the 75th Pope, St. Martin I, in 655) were by Popes imprisoned, exiled and facing martyrdom, who resigned to enable a worthy successor to minister from Rome to the Church's needs. Three of the five later resignations (the 133rd Pope, Benedict V, in 964; the 149th Pope, Gregory VI, in 1046; and the 205th Pope, Gregory XII, in 1415) were cases where the Pope laid down his office voluntarily to end schism and bring peace to the Church. The case of the 192nd Pope, St. Celestine V, who resigned because he recognized his own incapacity to carry out the duties of the office, is well known. The other resignation, by the 148th Pope, Benedict IX, at a low point in papal history (1045) was apparently for personal and not very honorable reasons.

No Pope has ever resigned for reasons of health, though several of them (notably Pope Leo XIII at the beginning of this century) have lived into their nineties, and one (Clement XII, the 246th Pope) was totally blind for the last eight years of his pontificate (1732-40).

There has never been a clearly valid deposition of a Pope. There were 18 attempted depositions, mostly undertaken by secular rulers and politicians for obviously political reasons. In eight cases, the challenger who brought forward the antiPope and sought to remove the existing Pope was the Emperor — Roman, Byzantine or German (Holy Roman). In four other cases, the "deposition" was simply a popular rebellion in Rome during the political nadir of the papacy in the tenth and early eleventh centuries, when Rome was in a state of virtual anarchy and the Pope had little if any help from the rest of Christendom. No pretense was made of canonical or other formal jurisdiction.

Two of the imperialist antiPopes were put forward by synods assembled at the emperor's command which pretended to have the authority to depose a Pope, but in neither case was their verdict accepted by the Church or by Christendom. Both Popes retained their office and their authority and ultimately prevailed. They were the 157th Pope, the famous St. Gregory VII or Hildebrand (1073-85) and the 170th Pope, Alexander III (1159-81). Much earlier, a synod convened by King Theodoric the Ostrogoth in 501 was ordered by him to depose the 51st Pope, St. Symmachus; they refused, declaring they had no power to judge a Pope. The great Charlemagne, asked to depose the 98th Pope, St. Leo III, in 799 and 800, responded with the memorable words: "We dare not judge the Apostolic See, which is the head of all the churches of God; we are all judged by Him and His Vicar, who is judged by none, this has been the custom since the earliest ages. As the supreme pontiff decides, so shall we obey." The imperially sponsored Council of Sutri in 1046 persuaded Pope Gregory VI to resign, but doubted its authority to depose him, which in any case was not attempted because of his resignation. The Council of Sutri also went through a charade of "deposing" the preceding Pope, Benedict IX, who had resigned the year before. It would appear that a papal resignation is irrevocable, since when Benedict IX

later attempted to resume the papacy he was deemed an antiPope and refused election.

Finally, and probably most significant, are the two instances of attempted deposition of a Pope by an ecumenical council, which surely should have the power to depose a Pope if anyone does. Both these grew out of the Great Western Schism, which split Christendom among rival papal claimants for half a century. Pope Urban VI was validly elected and generally recognized as Pope in 1378 but was betrayed later that year by his entire College of Cardinals, which claimed against all the evidence that his election was invalid, and named Cardinal Robert of Geneva to take his place as Clement VII. When the schism had lasted more than thirty years with no end in sight, an unauthorized council met at Pisa, declared both the true Pope and the antiPope deposed, and elected a third Pope, Peter Philargis called Alexander

V. Philargis' successor convened a new council at Constance five years later which shortly proceeded to depose *him*. The true Pope, Gregory XII, then officially recognized this council on the condition that they acknowledge him as true Pope, and immediately resigned after they had done so, in order to bring the schism to an end. The Council of Constance then selected Martin V as the 206th Pope. However, a faction of the council sought to retain supra-papal authority and, reconvening later at Basel, declared Martin's successor Eugenius IV deposed in 1439 and set up an antiPope, Felix. He is the last antiPope in history. Within four years he had lost all his support in Europe, while Eugenius IV still gloriously reigned.

Since then, papal elections have been more carefully regulated and the influence of secular rulers and governments almost totally eliminated. The likelihood of a genuine doubt about the validity of any Pope's election has therefore receded almost to the vanishing point. Since the lessons of history and the mind of the Church show that a Pope in office cannot be removed against his will, no way remains for his enemies to avoid the choice of recognizing or defying his authority.

Though some sheep may stray, there remains one flock and one shepherd. Death may take the shepherd, or on rare occasions he may hand over his staff to another while he still lives; but there is no other way to be rid of him. Otherwise he will stay with us, fulfilling the promises of Christ — as Pope John Paul II is fulfilling them today.

"Upon this rock" Christ built to last.

This is an abridged and slightly revised version of an article which appeared in TRIUMPH, December 1973.

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Catholic Dossier - March/April '98 - Table of Contents

EXHIBIT “C”

NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING

We live in a culture that views contraception as one of the greatest inventions of the modern age. Today if couples had to choose between their car, computer or contraception, it would be a hard decision. But has the advent of the contraceptive era been a blessing? While society says yes, the Catholic Church has consistently stated the contrary, that contraception is one of the worst inventions of the modern age. The differing viewpoints have resulted in much conflict and polarization within the Church. Is the Catholic Church simply archaic in its viewpoints, or is there a deeper truth behind the Church’s position?

Like most people of our generation, the “baby boomers”, when Scott and I got married our decisions revolved around selecting china and planning our honeymoon. The thought of birth control never entered our mind other than “I gotta get on the Pill.” We were vaguely aware of the Catholic Church’s position on birth control, but really did not think that what the Church had to say about our sex life applied to us. It wasn’t until several years of marriage and two babies that we ever really heard of Natural Family Planning. Two factors, and a lot of prayer, convinced us that Natural Family Planning (“NFP”) was in accordance with God’s plan. First, a lady spoke at our church and shared how NFP had improved her faith and her family. Her explanation was wonderful. Second, we finally realized that we were Catholic because we believe that the Catholic Church was founded by Jesus Christ, and that the Church has been granted the grace to speak authoritatively on issues of faith and morals. If we didn’t believe in what the Church taught, we might as well be Protestant. So we made the tough decision to follow the Church’s teachings on birth control – even if we didn’t quite understand why. Of course, we eventually felt compelled to find out “why”. Below, Scott explains our wonderful discovery.

Before addressing this issue, it is important to remember that contraception was unanimously condemned by *all* Christian denominations until 1930. That’s right, all denominations! Catholics and Protestants were united in their condemnation of contraception as a violation of God’s law, and coined the phrase “Onanism.” See Gen. 38:9. Such notable Protestant “saints” as Martin Luther (the founder of the Protestant Reformation), John Calvin (the father of reformed theology and Presbyterianism), and John Wesley (the founder of the Methodist Church) all viewed contraception as a sin. Then, in 1930, the Anglican (Episcopal) church broke ranks and validated contraception at the Lambeth Conference. Initially in only limited circumstances, the Anglican church soon gave contraception “on demand” status. In the ensuing decades, most of Protestantism followed the Anglican church’s lead, at least as it relates to artificial birth control.

In response to the questions raised by the Lambeth Conference, in 1931 Pope Pius XI promulgated the encyclical “*Casti Connubii*,” in which the Catholic position against contraception was again reiterated. The encyclical was accepted with no great debate. Even in 1960 a majority of Catholics followed the Church’s teaching on birth control. Three decades later, 80% of Catholic couples practice contraception, 30% are sterilized, and only 4% practice Natural Family Planning. Sixty-five years after the Lambeth Conference, contraception has evolved from being a sin into being perceived as an affirmative good. How did this happen? How did such an immense moral about-face occur in such a short period of time? The main reason is answered in just two simple words, “The Pill.”

During the mid-1960’s the pill made contraception available to the masses. Now, I must admit that in 1965 the arguments in favor of contraception were very persuasive. Those in favor of contraception promised that it would: (1) promote better marriages, (2) decrease the number of unwanted pregnancies, (3) decrease the number of abortions, (4) free women from the burden of childbearing, (5) solve the growing population crisis, etc. Thirty-five years ago such promises had merit, today they are no longer credible. Empirical evidence proves the opposite, that the alleged blessings of artificial birth control are a fiction. In fact, every society that has adopted the contraceptive lifestyle has suffered from a drastic increase in the rate of divorce, unwed mothers, abortion, pornography, sex crimes, etc. Our nation provides the perfect example; just look at what has happened since 1965. Are these statistics just a coincidence?

In 1968, while the Western world embraced the contraceptive lifestyle and all the ramifications of childfree

sex, the Catholic Church again reiterated its condemnation of contraception in the encyclical “Humane Vitae”. However, the response to “Humane Vitae” was much different than the response to “Casti Connubii”. This time the Catholic Church was attacked, from inside and out, for not following the world’s theological reversal. But not only did the Catholic Church refuse to condone contraception, it also stated that if a society embraced the contraceptive lifestyle then such a society (1) would experience a general lowering of sexual morality (fornication and adultery), (2) that females would be viewed as mere sex objects and their well-being disregarded by males (pornography, sexual crimes, etc.), (3) that humans would begin to treat their bodies as machines rather than as temples of the Holy Spirit, (4) that marriages would be damaged, (5) that wealthy governments would use contraception for coercive purposes against weaker nations (e.g., current U.N. policies). Again, statistical evidence proves that the Catholic Church was correct in its prognostication, but why? Just a lucky guess ...

Catholics are taught to believe that the Church was created by Jesus Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit, and that it is a dependable source of truth in matters of faith and morals. As stated by Matthew:

Blessed are you Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by mere man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hell will not overcome it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Matthew 16:17-19.

Today, however, arguments based on Scripture and Church authority carry very little weight. I wonder how many Catholics who are opposed to the Church’s position have actually taken the time to read “Humane Vitae.” We sure didn’t when we were first married. We just followed our unformed consciences and contracepted like everyone else. But we discovered that the Catholic Church never relies on authority alone, there is always a reason - a wonderful reason. In the case of contraception, the basis is found in natural law. In a nutshell, natural law teaches that if life is to prosper then it must exist and be used in accordance with the way God designed. One can’t grow oranges in Alaska, it just doesn’t work. The same is true with marriage and the covenant act of sexual intercourse. The Church understands that God designed the sexual act as containing two components: the procreative aspect of sex and the unitive aspect of sex (i.e., babies and bonding). Both aspects of sex are wonderful, but today our society focuses on only one aspect (bonding), while attempting to immunize itself against the other (babies). The Church teaches that such emphasis is not consistent with God’s design.

God created sexual intercourse and is intimately involved in the marital act. A sperm does not have a soul. An ovum does not have a soul. But when a sperm and an ovum are joined **God creates**, and this new soul will exist for all eternity - the entire universe will never be the same. God designed creation with the intent of allowing husbands and wives to participate in His creation of new souls. The book of Genesis says that God created man and woman in His own image. Gen. 1:27. Together, male and female reflect the complete image of God. And when the two of them become one, that unity is so incredibly marvelous that two uniting as one may result in a third. We must understand that the Catholic Church is not anti-sex, it’s pro-marriage! This is God’s domain, not just ours. Contraception says, “My terms God, not yours. I enjoy the unitive aspect of sex, but let’s keep babies out of this.” I recently saw a Christian book on sex entitled “Intended for Pleasure.” Here lies the problem. While sex is definitely pleasurable, it was not intended for pleasure. Eating and sleeping are pleasurable, but they were also not “intended for pleasure.” Sex within the marital covenant is wonderful, but it’s more than wonderful, it is HOLY. And because the marital act is so sacred, a couple may be deciding on a new name in nine months.

Natural Family Planning is not contraception; it says something completely different. There is a certain time between menstrual cycles when a wife can get pregnant. This time period can be pinpointed accurately. God created this time of the month, and if a couple has sex during this period then they must be open to God creating a new soul within their family. However, God also created a period of time before and after this period when a woman is not fertile. Sex within this time frame will not result in a pregnancy. Natural Family Planning cooperates with God’s design. Today we treat a wife’s fertility as a sickness that must be treated. We immunize ourselves against children as if they were the plague, pumping our wives’ bodies full of artificial drugs and hormones. Natural Family Planning recognizes that a woman’s fertility is not bad, but a wonderful gift from God. When a woman gets pregnant it does not mean that something went wrong with the sexual act, it means that something went right! Though circumstances may be difficult, very difficult, the Catholic Church understands that we cannot artificially separate babies from the marital act without damaging the marital covenant itself.

If pregnancy free sex was the key to marital bliss and societal happiness, then the United States would have

the lowest divorce rate in the world, but instead we have one of the highest. And this has all occurred since 1965. Again, is this just a coincidence? Those couples that practice Natural Family Planning have virtually a non-existent divorce rate, just another coincidence? You see, with Natural Family Planning the husband and wife must communicate and discuss these matters each month. A couple's faith is not just practiced in the church, but in the home and in the bedroom. Natural Family Planning is not just the wife's responsibility; it is truly a joint endeavor. The husband is intimately involved with his wife, and not just physically. In matters of sex, husbands can no longer treat their wives as mere sex objects, they are truly partners. Don't act offended men; you know what we are talking about.

By the way, Natural Family Planning works! People like to hide behind the issue of reliability, but today this is no longer an excuse. The real issue is abstinence, because Natural Family Planning requires a period of abstinence during the month. But God's grace is always there when we cooperate with His plan and dedicate our lives to following Him. Our Lord will provide the grace to "fast" for approximately a week and a half. There is one more thing to consider. The pill is abortifacient. That's right, the pill can cause abortion. The Physician's Desk Reference, as well as the insert in the pill container, states that the pill works in two different ways: 1) by prohibiting ovulation, and 2) by preventing a fertilized ovum from implanting itself in its mother's womb. So as you can see, we as Catholics, and our society as a whole, have a lot to consider.

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