

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

November, December 1999, January 2000

Copyright 2003 John W. Robbins Post Office Box 68, Unicoi, Tennessee 37692

Email: Jrob1517@aol.com

Website: www.trinityfoundation.org

Telephone: 423.743.0199

Fax: 423.743.2005

Why Does Rome Teach What It Does About Justification and Salvation?

Robert L. Reymond

After informing my Sunday School class at Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, Fort Lauderdale, Florida (9/19/99) about the teachings of the Council of Trent on justification, one of the members of the class asked me: "Since its teachings are so obviously non-Pauline, why does Rome teach what it does about justification and salvation?" My answer that morning was somewhat sparse: *Rome has followed its Tradition, and that Tradition has been bad Tradition.* But thinking that many Protestant Christians might have the same question, I have expanded upon my answer here.

From the vantage point of the great sixteenth-century magisterial Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church's problems in the area of soteriology (and there are many) begin in the arena of authority. Protestantism has one authority—the inspired Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Rome has two authorities—Scripture and Tradition—and Protestantism disagrees with Rome's understanding of and teaching on both.

Scripture and Canon

With respect to its Scripture authority, Rome places twelve additional Apocryphal ("hidden," then "obscure," then "spurious") books within the Old Testament, namely, *Tobit*, *Judith*, the (six) Additions to the *Book of Esther*, the *Wisdom of Solomon*, the *Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach* (known also as *Ecclesiasticus*), *Baruch*, the *Letter of Jeremiah*, the *Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men* (considered one work), *Susanna*, *Bel and the Dragon*, and *1 and 2 Maccabees*. Bruce M. Metzger, in his editorial "Introduction to the Apocrypha," in *The Oxford Annotated Apocrypha*, explains how these books came to be included by Rome in its Old Testament canon: "At the end of the fourth century Pope Damasus commissioned Jerome, the most learned biblical scholar of his day, to prepare a standard Latin version of the Scriptures (the Latin Vulgate). In the Old Testament Jerome followed the Hebrew canon and by means of prefaces called the reader's attention to the separate category of the apocryphal books [In the preface to his Latin Version of the Bible Jerome, after translating the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament, says: "Anything outside of these must be placed within the Apocrypha," that is, within the non-canonical books—RLR]. Subsequent copyists of the Latin Bible, however, were not always careful to transmit Jerome's prefaces, and during the medieval period the Western Church generally regarded these books as part of the holy Scriptures. [At one of its

prolonged sessions which occurred on April 8, 1546, with only fifty-three prelates present, not one of whom was a scholar distinguished for historical learning—RLR]...the Council of Trent decreed [in its "Sacrosancta"] that the canon of the Old Testament includes them (except the *Prayer of Manasseh* and *1 and 2 Esdras*). [And, I may add, Trent went on to anathematize anyone who "does not accept these entire books, with all their parts, as they have customarily been read in the Catholic Church and are found in the ancient editions of the Latin Vulgate, as sacred and canonical." This decree was confirmed by Vatican I (1870).—RLR]. Subsequent editions of the Latin Vulgate text, officially approved by the Roman Catholic Church, contain these books incorporated within the sequence of the Old Testament books. Thus *Tobit* and *Judith* stand after *Nehemiah*; the *Wisdom of Solomon* and *Ecclesiasticus* stand after the *Song of Solomon*; *Baruch* (with the *Letter of Jeremiah* as chapter 6) stands after *Lamentations*; and *1 and 2 Maccabees* conclude the books of the Old Testament. [Metzger could have also noted that the *Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men* is placed between *Daniel* 3:23 and 3:24; *Susanna* is placed either at the beginning of *Daniel* as an introduction to chapter 1 (this placement is that of the Greek text of Theodotian and the Old Latin, Coptic, and Arabic versions) or at the end of *Daniel* as chapter 13 (this placement is that of the Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate); and *Bel and the Dragon* is placed either at the close of *Daniel* 12 in the Greek manuscripts of *Daniel* or at the end of *Daniel* as chapter 14 in the Latin Vulgate, *Susanna* being chapter 13.—RLR] An appendix after the New Testament contains the *Prayer of Manasseh* and *1 and 2 Esdras*, without implying canonical status. ...Thus Roman Catholics accept as fully canonical those books and parts of books which Protestants call the Apocrypha (except the *Prayer of Manasseh* and *1 and 2 Esdras*, which both groups regard as apocryphal)." (Emphasis supplied)¹

How shall we respond to all this? To begin, these Apocryphal books were written predominantly in Greek (*Tobit*, *Judith*, *Ecclesiasticus*, part of *Baruch*, and *1 Maccabees* are the exceptions here, having been written in Hebrew or, in part at least, in Aramaic) during the last two centuries before Christ

¹ Bruce M. Metzger, "Introduction to the Apocrypha," in *The Oxford Annotated Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford University, 1965), x-xi.

and the first century of the Christian era, *long after the Hebrew Old Testament canon was completed*. Interestingly, these books themselves, from first to last, bear testimony to the assertion of the Jewish historian Josephus (*Against Apion*, 1.8) that “the exact succession of the prophets” had been broken after the close of the Hebrew canon of the Old Testament. Nowhere in them is found the phrase, “Thus saith the Lord,” which occurs so frequently in the Old Testament. Accordingly, the Palestinian Jews never accepted these Apocryphal books as canonical, their canon being essentially the same as what the Protestant Old Testament is today (see Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1.41; *Babylonian Talmud*, Yomah 9b, Sota 48b, Sanhedrin 11a). Nor did Jesus or the New Testament writers ever cite from these books. When Paul declared then that the Jews possessed “the oracles of God” (*Romans* 3:2), he was implicitly excluding the Apocrypha from those “oracles.”

According to Gleason L. Archer, Jr., the Septuagint—the pre-Christian Alexandrian Jewish translation of the Hebrew Old Testament—was the only ancient version which included in one manuscript tradition or another the books of the Apocrypha. This has led some scholars to speak of an “Alexandrian Canon” which held equal authority among Jews along with the “Palestinian Canon.” But, writes Archer, while Philo of Alexandria “quotes frequently from the canonical books of the ‘Palestinian Canon,’ he never once quotes from any of the apocryphal books.” Furthermore, Aquila’s Greek version, even though it did not contain the Apocrypha, was accepted by Alexandrian Jews in the second century A.D. Jerome explained the presence of the Apocrypha in the Alexandrian version by saying that the Alexandrian Jews included in their edition of the Old Testament both the canonical books and the books which were “ecclesiastical” (that is, considered valuable though not inspired).² While it is true that the Septuagint served as the Greek “Bible” of the early church and of the apostles in their mission to the Gentiles, there is no evidence, as I just said, that a New Testament writer cites from any of the Apocryphal books.

These books abound in historical, geographical, and chronological inaccuracies and anachronism. Consider just two of the more apparent inaccuracies:

1. It is said in *Tobit* 1:4-5 that the division of the kingdom under Jereboam I, which occurred in 931 B.C., occurred when Tobit was a “young man.” But Tobit is also said to be a young Israelite captive living in Nineveh under Shalmaneser in the late eight century B.C. This would make him a “young man” almost 200 years old at the time of the Assyrian Captivity and he lived into the reign of Esarhaddon (680-668 B.C.). But according to *Tobit* 14:11 he died when he was 158 years old (according to the Latin text, he died when he was 102).
2. *Judith* 1:1 declares Nebuchadnezzar reigned over the Assyrians at Nineveh at the time that Arphaxad reigned over the Medes in Ecbatana. But Nebuchadnezzar did not reign over the Assyrians at Nineveh; he was the second king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire reigning at Babylon. Arphaxad is unknown.

They also teach doctrines which are at variance with the inspired Scriptures. For example, 2 *Maccabees* 12:43-45 teaches the efficacy of prayers and offerings for the dead. *Ecclesiasticus* 3:30 teaches that almsgiving makes atonement for sin and justifies cruelty to slaves (33:26, 28). The *Wisdom*

of *Solomon* teaches the doctrine of emanation (7:25) and the Platonic doctrine of the pre-existence of souls (8:18-20).

Accordingly, the Dutch Bible published by Jacob von Liesveldt at Antwerp (1526) placed the Apocryphal books after Malachi and identified the section as “the books which are not in the canon, that is to say, which one does not find among the Jews in the Hebrew.” The six-volume Swiss-German Bible (1527-1529) placed the Apocryphal books in the fifth volume, the title page of which volume reads: “These are the books which are not reckoned as biblical by the ancients, nor are found among the Hebrews.” Concerned to return to the sole authority of inspired, inerrant Scripture, Martin Luther in his German translation of the Bible (1534) placed the Apocryphal books once again between the Old and New Testaments with the title: “Apocrypha, that is, books which are not held equal to the sacred Scriptures and nevertheless are useful and good to read.” Miles Coverdale’s English translation of the Bible (1535) put them in the same position with the title: “Apocrypha. The books and treatises which among the fathers of old are not reckoned to be of like authority with the other books of the Bible, neither are they found in the Canon of the Old Testament.” The Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England (1562) state concerning the Apocrypha: “And the other books (as Jerome saith) the Church doth read for example of life, and instruction of manners; but yet doth it not apply them to establish any doctrine.” And the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1648) declares: “The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of Scripture; and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings” (1.3).³

Then, because of its views on Tradition Rome also rejects most of the great attributes of Scripture that Protestantism holds in high esteem, namely, Scripture’s canonicity, its necessity, its self-attestation, its sufficiency, its perspicuity, and its finality. So historic Protestantism and Roman Catholicism do not share the same Bible, either extensively or intensively. For Protestantism the Bible alone (*sola Scriptura*) is self-validating and absolutely authoritative in all matters of faith and practice; for Roman Catholicism its enlarged Bible (and this applies to any given statement in it) has only the authority and meaning the Roman Church has determined to give to it.

Tradition

With respect to its Tradition, which Protestantism rejects outright as its authority, Rome insists that its Tradition possesses an authority equal to that of Scripture itself and that the church should receive and venerate its Tradition with the same feeling of piety and reverence that it feels for the Old and New Testaments.⁴ Very cleverly, the *Catechism of the Catholic*

³ Merrill F. Unger, *Introductory Guide to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956), 81-114, treats the phenomena of the Apocrypha which make it evident that these books are not products of the Holy Spirit’s inspiration. See also R. Laird Harris, *The Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), chapters 6, 8; and Roger Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 338-437.

⁴ Vatican II’s *Dei Verbum*, 9 (November 1965) declares that the church “does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be *accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence*” (emphasis supplied). It is theological reaching of the worst kind when some over-zealous Roman Catholic apologists find in the statements of *John* 20:30 and 21:25 grounds for that communion’s many later traditions which contradict New Testament teaching.

² Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 75-76.

Church (1994) blurs the distinction between canonical revelation (which is indisputably authoritative) and Rome's own later traditions (which are non-canonical and therefore not authoritative) when it declares in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: "The Tradition here in question comes from the apostles and hands on what they received from Jesus' teaching and example and what they learned from the Holy Spirit. The first generation of Christians did not yet have a written New Testament, and the New Testament itself demonstrates the process of living Tradition" (paragraph 83).

It is true, of course, that the first Christians did not have a written New Testament, but they did have the Old Testament and inspired apostles living among them to give them authoritative *revelational* instruction which is referred to as "the traditions" (*tas paradoseis*, literally, "the things passed on") in 2 *Thessalonians* 2:15. But it is a giant leap in logic and theological reaching and equivocation of the worst kind simply to assert, because there was such a thing as "apostolic tradition" coming *directly* from the apostles in the New Testament age, that the fact of *that* "tradition" justifies Rome's claim to an ongoing, perpetual "process of living Tradition" within its communion throughout the present age whose authority is on a par with Scripture's authority.

The problem with this dual authority of Scripture and Tradition, of course, is that the Scriptures cannot (and in fact do not) really govern the content of Tradition, not to mention the fact that with this view of Tradition, given Rome's view of itself as a *living* organism in its capacity as the "depository of Tradition," there can never be a codification of or limitation placed upon the content of this Tradition, not even by Scripture. As Charles Elliot stated: "...so far as we are aware, there is no publication which contains a summary of what the Church believes under the head of tradition."⁵ As a result, because Rome's Tradition is ever free to include doctrines which are the very antithesis of Scripture teaching while yet claiming divine authority—becoming thereby bad tradition as recent history will verify (consider the papal dogmas of the Immaculate Conception in 1854, papal infallibility in 1870, and the Assumption of Mary in 1950)—the Church is left vulnerable to every kind of innovation. Moreover, Rome's teaching on Tradition impiously implies, since Protestantism self-consciously rejects one of the two "indispensable media of divine revelation," that Protestantism cannot possibly be the church of Christ, when in fact it is Rome with its dogmatic deliverances from the Council of Trent to the present day that is perverting Christian truth by its "traditions of men."

Papal Infallibility

Before we say anything more I must discuss Rome's doctrine of papal infallibility, which is a major aspect of its Tradition and thus contributes in a major way, for Roman Catholic belief, to the authority of Church Tradition. The Roman Catholic Church since the early Middle Ages has contended that in *Matthew* 16:18 Jesus declared that Peter was to be the first Pope (of Rome, of course) and as such the supreme leader of Christendom, and that his supremacy would be transmitted to each Bishop of Rome who would succeed him. This contention is dramatically captured by the Latin inscription around the entablature just below the great dome of Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome: *Tu es Petrus, et super hanc*

petram aedificabo Ecclesiam meam.⁶ Accordingly, the Roman Catholic *Baltimore Catechism* states: "Christ gave special powers in His Church to St. Peter by making him the head of the Apostles and the chief teacher and ruler of the entire Church. Christ did not intend that the special power of chief teacher and ruler of the entire Church should be exercised by St. Peter alone, but intended that this power should be passed down to his successor, the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, who is the Vicar of Christ on earth and the visible head of the Church."⁷

The Roman Catholic Church has employed this dogma to claim for itself the authority to bind men's consciences by its interpretation of Scripture, to add new doctrines not taught in the Scripture, and to reinterpret the plain teaching of Scripture. It has done so, as we have suggested, by first distinguishing Peter from the other apostles and then by claiming that his apostolic authority is continued in the single line of Bishops of Rome.

Now it is true that in the early years of the New Testament era Peter was a leader among the apostles. A case can even be made that he was the "first among equals" (*primus inter pares*) in some sense.⁸ Consider the following data. There are approximately 140 references to Peter in the four *Gospels*, some 30 more than all the references to the other disciples combined. He stands at the head of the list of the twelve apostles in each of the lists given in the New Testament (*Matthew* 10:2 [note Matthew's "first" here]; *Mark* 3:16; *Luke* 6:14; *Acts* 1:13), and he is included among that "inner circle" of disciples (Peter, James, and John), which alone witnessed certain miraculous events such as Jesus' transfiguration; he is the spokesman for the disciples on several occasions (*Matthew* 15:15; 17:24-25; 19:27; *John* 6:68-69); it is he who walked with Jesus on the sea (*Matthew* 14:28-29); it is he whom Jesus specifically charged to "strengthen your brothers" (*Luke* 22:32). He was in charge in the selection of the one to take Judas' place in *Acts* 1; it was he who preached the first "Christian sermon" on the Day of Pentecost in *Acts* 2,

⁶ Rome also claims that St. Peter's Basilica is built over Peter's grave site. In his Christmas message delivered on December 23, 1950, Pope Pius XII announced, as a result of excavations carried out in 1939 under St. Peter's Basilica, that "the grave of the Prince of Apostles has been found." But Oscar Cullmann, in his *Peter: Disciple—Apostle—Martyr* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), after carefully examining the written reports of this excavation, concluded: "The archaeological investigations do not permit us to answer in either a negative or an affirmative way the question as to the stay of Peter in Rome. The grave of Peter cannot be identified. The real proofs for the martyrdom of Peter in Rome must still be derived from the indirect literary witnesses..." (153).

⁷ *Baltimore Catechism. The New Confraternity Edition of the Official Revised 1949 Edition* (New York: Benzinger, 1952), xx. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) states in this same regard: "The Lord made Simon alone, whom he named Peter, the 'rock' of his Church. He gave him the keys of his Church and instituted him shepherd of the whole flock. 'The office of binding and loosing which was given to Peter was also assigned to the college of apostles united to its head.' This pastoral office of Peter and the other apostles belongs to the Church's very foundation and is continued by the bishops under the primacy of the Pope."

The Pope, Bishop of Rome and Peter's successor, "is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful." "...the Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, and as pastor of the entire Church has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered" (paragraphs 881-882).

⁸ While conceding this, we deny that Peter ever held among the apostles any "primacy of power" (*primatus potestatis*).

⁵ Charles Elliot, *Delineation of Roman Catholicism* (London: J. Mason, 1851), 40.

converting many Jews to the Way; it was his activities (along with John's) which Luke recounts in the first half of *Acts*; it was he whom God chose to be the missionary who would take the special action with regard to Cornelius' household in behalf of Gentile salvation in *Acts* 10; his was the first testimony to be recounted by Luke at the assembly in Jerusalem in *Acts* 15; his name appears first in Paul's "official list"⁹ of those to whom Christ appeared after his resurrection (*1 Corinthians* 15:5); and Paul even refers to him (along with James and John) as a "pillar" (*stulos*) in the church at Jerusalem (*Galatians* 2:9). All this is beyond dispute. But to derive Rome's understanding of Peter's priority, which goes beyond what the New Testament actually teaches about it, from *Matthew* 16:18 (Rome bolsters its position with a few related verses such as *Luke* 22:31-32 and *John* 21:16) forces the verse to say something which it does not say. For the verse to bear such heavy doctrinal weight, the Roman Catholic apologist must demonstrate the following things *exegetically* and not simply assert them dogmatically:

Proposition 1. That by his reference to "this rock" in his explanation Jesus referred to Peter personally and exclusively in his office as an apostle to the total exclusion of the other apostles;

Proposition 2. That the uniqueness that belongs to the apostolic office in the New Testament and in this case to Peter in particular *could* be transmitted, that is, was *transmissible*, to his "papal successors," and was *in fact* transmitted to his successors; and that the unique apostolic authority which the other apostles also possessed *could not* be and *in fact was not* transmitted, that is to say, was *non-transmissible*, to their successors;

Proposition 3. That Jesus intended his promise to Peter *in fact* to extend in a repetitive way to Peter's "papal successors" throughout the entire period of the church to the end of the age; and

Proposition 4. That Jesus' promise to Peter, while it could and should be *chronologically* extended to his "papal successors," cannot be *geographically* extended but must rather be restricted in its transmissibility to only one (at a time) Bishop who ministers in only *one* particular city among the many cities in which Peter doubtless ministered, namely, to the Bishop of Rome. Calvin made this point this way: "By what right do [the Roman apologists] bind to a [specific] place this dignity which has been given without mention of place?" (*Institutes*, IV. vi. 11).

The Roman Catholic apologist must also be able to demonstrate *historically* that Peter in fact became the first Bishop of Rome and not simply assert it dogmatically. But what are the facts? Irenaeus and Eusebius of Caesarea both make Linus, mentioned in *2 Timothy* 4:21, the first Bishop of Rome.¹⁰ That Peter may have died, as ancient tradition has it, in Rome is a distinct possibility (see *1 Peter* 5:13 where "Babylon" has been rather uniformly understood by commentators as a metaphor for Rome), but that he ever actually pastored the church there is a blatant fiction which the more candid scholars in the Roman communion will acknowledge. Jerome's Latin

translation of Eusebius (but not Eusebius' Greek copy) records that Peter ministered in Rome for twenty-five years, but if Philip Schaff (as well as many other church historians) is to be believed, this is "a colossal chronological mistake."¹¹

Paul wrote his letter to the church in Rome in early A.D. 57, but he did not address the letter to Peter or refer to him anywhere in it as its pastor. And in the last chapter he extended greetings to no less than twenty-six specific friends in the Imperial city but he makes no mention of Peter which would have been a major oversight, indeed an affront to Peter, if in fact Peter were "ruling" the Roman church at that time. Then later when Paul was himself in Rome, from which city he wrote both his four prison letters during his first imprisonment in A.D. 60-62 when he "was welcoming all who came to him" (*Acts* 28:30), and his last pastoral letter during his second imprisonment around A.D. 64, in which letters he extended greetings to his letters' recipients from ten specific people in Rome, again he makes no mention of Peter being there. Here is a period of time spanning about seven years (A.D. 57-64) during which time Paul related himself to the Roman church both as correspondent and as resident, but he says not a word which would suggest that he believed Peter was in Rome. What are we to make of Paul's silence? And if Peter was at Rome and was simply not mentioned by Paul in any of these letters, what are we to conclude about him when Paul declares to the Philippians: "I have no one else [besides Timothy] of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus" (*Philippians* 2:20-21); or when he writes to Timothy later and says: "Only Luke is with me.... At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me" (*2 Timothy* 4:11, 16)? And what are we to make of an alleged extended ministry on Peter's part *in Rome* in light of Paul's statement in *Galatians* 2:7-8 that the apostolate had entrusted Peter with missionary efforts to Jews? Are we to conclude that Peter had been disobedient to that trust? I think not. For just as Paul wrote several of his letters to churches he had founded, so it would appear that Peter also, writing from Babylon to dispersed Jewish Christians (see his use of *diaspora* in *1 Peter* 1:1) in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, was writing to people he had evangelized in those places. The one glimpse we have from Paul's writings concerning Peter's whereabouts and ministry is found in *1 Corinthians* 9:5 where he suggests that Cephas, his wife with him (see *Matthew* 8:14), was an itinerant evangelist carrying out the trust which the other apostles had given him. From this data we must conclude, if Peter did in fact reach Rome as tradition says, that his purpose more than likely would have been only to pay the church there not much more than a casual visit, and that he would have arrived there only shortly before his death which, according to tradition, occurred during the Neronian persecution.

The Roman Catholic apologist must also be able to address, to the satisfaction of reasonable men, the following questions:

Question 1. Why do Mark (8:27-30) and Luke (9:18-21), while they also recount the Caesarea Philippi conversation between Jesus and Peter, omit all reference to that part of Jesus' conversation which grants to Peter his alleged priority over the other apostles, the point which for Rome is the very heart and central point of our Lord's teaching ministry?

⁹ An unabridged list would have included Jesus' appearances first to the women as they hurried away from the tomb (*Matthew* 28:8-9) and then to Mary who followed Peter and John back to the tomb after informing them that the tomb was empty (see *John* 20:1-18).

¹⁰ Irenaeus does so in his *Against Heresies*, III.iii.3; Eusebius, probably following Irenaeus' lead, does so in his *Ecclesiastical History*, III. ii.

¹¹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962 reprint of the 1910 edition), I, 252.

The Trinity Review / November, December 1999, January 2000

Question 2. Why does the New Testament record more of Peter's errors after the Caesarea Philippi confession than of any of the other apostles? I am referring to

- (a) his "satanic" and "man-minding" rejection of Jesus' announcement that he would die, *Matthew* 16:22-23;
- (b) his "leveling" or "Arian" comparison of Jesus with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration, *Matthew* 17:4-5;
- (c) his ignorant and impetuous refusal to let Jesus wash his feet and then his self-willed dictating of the terms according to which Jesus would wash him, *John* 13:8-9;
- (d) his sleepiness while Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, *Matthew* 26:36-45;
- (e) his precipitous use of the sword, *Matthew* 26:51-54;
- (f) his prideful protestation of unflinching faithfulness and then his three denials of Jesus, recorded in all four *Gospels*;
- (g) his impulsive curiosity about John's future, expressed no sooner than Jesus had restored him to fellowship, which netted him Christ's stern "That's none of your business," *John* 21:21-22; and
- (h) even after Christ's resurrection, the Spirit's outpouring at Pentecost, and the role he played in the Cornelius incident, his betrayal of the truth of the Gospel of pure grace at Antioch by his compromising actions which called for Paul's public rebuke, *Galatians* 2:11-14.

Where is the infallibility and the guarantee of the purity and continuity of the Gospel in this man's actions? It will not do to respond, as Roman apologists do, that Peter was only infallible in what he taught *ex cathedra* and that these errors on his part only highlight the real oneness of the man with sinful humanity at large. For "actions speak louder than words," and surely in the last cited instance Peter's action, which more than likely was accompanied by some word of explanation from him to the church at Antioch about his action, betrayed the purity of the Gospel of grace, which action warranted Paul's public rebuke.

Question 3. Why can the disciples after the Caesarea Philippi incident still dispute among themselves concerning who was the greatest (*Matthew* 18:1; 20:20-28; *Luke* 22:24)? Apparently *they* did not understand that Jesus' statement had given Peter any priority over them. And if Christ had in fact intended by his Caesarea Philippi pronouncement that Peter was to be his vicar and the leader of all Christendom, why did he not clear up the disciples' confusion once and for all by telling them so straightforwardly?

Question 4. Why was Peter, if he was the head of the church, dispatched by the leaders of the Jerusalem church to investigate what was going on in Samaria (*Acts* 8:14) instead of sending other apostles to investigate the Samaritan revival?

Question 5. Why did the other apostles and the brotherhood in general feel they could challenge Peter's involvement in the Cornelius incident if he was in fact the undisputed and infallible head of the church (*Acts* 11:1-18)?

Question 6. Why does Paul list Peter as only one of the "pillars" in the mother church of Jerusalem, and second after James at that (*Galatians* 2:9)?

Question 7. Why at the Jerusalem Council in *Acts* 15, over which James quite obviously presided, is Peter merely the first speaker, assuming no special prerogatives in the debate that ensued, and not the president of that Council? Why was the entire matter not simply submitted to Peter rather than to the

Council, and why did not the decision go forth as a "Petrine" deliverance rather than an "apostolic" decree?

Question 8. Why can Paul say of the Jerusalem leadership (James, Peter and John) who "seemed to be something": "What they were makes no difference to me; *God shows no partiality*" (2:6)?

Question 9. Why, if Peter was the Bishop and Pastor of Rome, as the Roman Catholic Church maintains, and if it was Paul's established missionary practice "to preach the Gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation" (*Romans* 15:20; see *2 Corinthians* 10:16)—why, I ask, does Paul declare that he had longed to come to Rome and had purposed many times to come there (but had been prevented before from doing so) "so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong" and "in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles" (*Romans* 1:11-13)? Would not such activity at Rome on Paul's part have been both a denial of his own missionary policy and an affront to Peter, whom Rome alleges was pastor there at that time?

Question 10. Why does Peter describe himself as simply "an apostle of Jesus Christ," as one among many "living stones" (*lithoi zontes*), and "the fellow elder" (*ho sumpresbuteros*) with other elders (*1 Peter* 1:1; 5:1)?

Question 11. Why, if Peter was the living, earthly head of the church at that time, does he disappear completely from Luke's *Acts* after *Acts* 15, with very few references to him, apart from his own two letters, in the rest of the New Testament?

Question 12. Why does Peter, if he was the first pope, contradict Roman Catholic teaching that the purchase of indulgences will bring forgiveness of sin for oneself and will deliver one's loved ones from Purgatory when he declares that "it was not with perishable things such as silver and gold that you were redeemed...but with the precious blood of Christ" (*1 Peter* 1:18-19)?

Question 13. Why does Peter, if he was the first pope, contradict Roman Catholic teaching that the laity needs a priestly clergy to mediate between them and God when he teaches that in Christ all his readers are "a holy priesthood" (*1 Peter* 2:5, *hierateuma hagion*) and "a royal priesthood" (*1 Peter* 2:9, *basileion hierateuma*) who have direct access to God through Christ?

Question 14. Why does Peter teach, *contra* Rome's teaching, in *1 Peter* 2:13 that the authority of the emperor, not his, is "supreme" (*huperechonti*) in secular matters?

Question 15. Why does Peter teach, in *1 Peter* 3:12, *contra* Rome's teaching, that Christians do not need to go to God through the mediation of Mary or any other saint, for God gladly hears the prayers of his true children when they pray: "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are attentive to their prayers"?

Question 16. Why does Peter teach, *contra* Rome's teaching concerning the Mass as a necessary and essential *re-sacrifice* of Christ, in *1 Peter* 3:18 that Christ "died for sins *once for all* [*hapax*], the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God"?

The Trinity Review / November, December 1999, January 2000

Question 17. Why in the earliest Patristic literature is Paul venerated as often as Peter, a fact admitted by Roman Catholic scholars?

Question 18. Would John the "beloved disciple" and one of the original apostles, who apparently outlived Peter, have been subject to the Bishop of Rome (Linus or Clement?) who allegedly succeeded to Peter's "throne"?

Question 19. Why did no Roman Bishop before Callistus I (died c. A.D. 223), who by the way countenanced the heresy of modalism, use the *Matthew* 16 passage to support the primacy of the Roman bishopric; and when he did, why was he rebuked by such notable contemporaries as Tertullian who totally rejected the notion that Jesus' saying applied to later bishops at all, and Firmilian, Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, who opposed the notion that the Roman bishopric is entitled by succession to the "throne" of Peter?

Question 20. This raises the larger question, namely, while the church at Rome was no doubt influential,¹² why is there no indication in the first two centuries of the Christian era that the rest of the church recognized the Roman church as supreme or that the rest of the church acceded to Rome any claimed or recognized sovereignty over Christendom?¹³

Question 21. Why did the first four ecumenical councils, which were held—two in the fourth, and two in the fifth century (whose doctrinal decisions are generally admitted by Christians everywhere, including Protestants, to have been orthodox)—neither say nor do anything which affords the slightest endorsement of the claim of the Roman Bishop's supremacy but to the contrary in several instances actually passed decrees or canons which the Bishop of Rome (or his agents) opposed and protested against, with the first such council which explicitly asserts the Roman Bishop's supremacy being the Fourth Lateran Council held under Pope Innocent III in A.D. 1215?

Question 22. How does Roman Catholic theology in this entire matter avoid the charge of "asserting the consequent" or of "begging the question" (*petitio principii*) when it makes a highly questionable dogma (based as it is upon exegesis which has been approved by only a small minority of fathers in the church), namely, its self-serving dogma of the primacy of the Roman Bishop, the basis for its claim that it alone is justified in proclaiming any dogma whatsoever, including the Roman bishop's primacy over the entire church?

¹² John Calvin (*Institutes*, IV.vi.16) offered the following three reasons for the Roman church's early prestige: 1. The opinion became quite prevalent that Peter had founded and shepherded the church at Rome (this opinion was surely in error—RLR). (2) Because Rome was the capital city of the Empire, the church's leaders were probably more knowledgeable, skilled, and experienced than other church leaders in ecclesiastical matters (this is a *non sequitur*—RLR). (3) Because the Western half of the church was not as troubled by doctrinal controversy as the Eastern half, this added to Rome's authority as Bishops deposed from their offices in the East, Greece, and Africa often sought both haven in Rome and the Roman Bishop's endorsement of their cause.

¹³ The Roman Catholic apologist H. Burn-murdock admits as much in his *The Development of the Papacy* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), 130, when he writes: "None of the writings of the first two centuries describe St. Peter as a bishop of Rome."

Needless to say, in my opinion Rome's exegesis of *Matthew* 16 and its historically developed dogmatic claim to authoritative primacy in the Christian world simply cannot be exegetically demonstrated and sustained from Scripture itself. Rome's claim of papal infallibility is surely one of the great hoaxes foisted upon professing Christendom,¹⁴ which claim all the rest of Christendom—Orthodox and Protestant—has formally and officially rejected, upon which false base rests Rome's entire sacerdotal system of salvation which is its chief engine of revenue.¹⁵

Rome's claim of papal infallibility is also a blatant rejection of the many significant opposing testimonies in church history. While Jesus, true enough, said that upon "this rock" (*taute te petra*) he was going to build his "assembly," whether this phrase has for its antecedent Peter personally and exclusively and in what sense Jesus was going to build his "assembly" on Peter have been matters of considerable controversy in the church virtually from the beginning. Roman Catholic Archbishop Peter Richard Kenrick prepared a paper to be delivered at Vatican I (1870),¹⁶ in which he noted that five interpretations of the word "rock" were held in antiquity:

- (1) The first declared that the church was built on Peter, endorsed by seventeen fathers.
- (2) The second understood the words as referring to all the apostles, Peter being simply the Primate, the opinion of eight fathers.
- (3) The third asserted that the words applied to the faith that Peter professed, espoused by forty-four fathers, some of whom are the most important and representative.
- (4) The fourth declared that the words were to be understood of Jesus Christ, the church being built upon him, the view of sixteen fathers.
- (5) The fifth understood the term "rock" to apply to the faithful themselves who, by believing in Christ, were made the living stones in the temple of his body, an opinion held by only very few (107-108).

These statistics show that the view that eventually became normative for Rome was a minority view in the ancient church, being held by about 20 percent of the fathers consulted, and thus far from certain. Where is Rome's allegiance to *this* ancient tradition? It obviously does not suit Rome to follow its Tradition at this point.

As samplings of this divergence of ancient opinion, Origen, making his usual distinction between the letter and the spiritual intention of the text, urged that according to the letter the rock in Jesus' explanation referred to Peter while the Spirit had in mind everyone who becomes such as Peter was.¹⁷ Tertullian

¹⁴ The spurious *Donation of Constantine* also played a role in establishing this hoax. This document, purportedly from Constantine but shown by Nicholas of Cusa and Lorenzo Valla in the fifteenth century to have been drawn up in the eighth or ninth century, cedes to Sylvester I (A.D. 314-335) primacy over Antioch, Constantinople, Alexandria, and Jerusalem, and dominion over all of Italy, including Rome, and the "provinces, places, and *civitates*" of the Western half of the Roman Empire.

¹⁵ I would refer the student who is interested in reading more about this matter to William Cunningham's brilliant treatment, "The Papal Supremacy," *Historical Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1960 reprint), I, 207-226.

¹⁶ Kenrick's paper was not permitted to be delivered at the Council but was published later, along with other insights, under the title, *An Inside View of the Vatican Council*, ed. Leonard Woolsey Bacon (New York: American Tract Society, 1871). See also W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Principles of Theology* (London: Longmans, Green, 1930), 470-471.

¹⁷ Origen, on *Matthew* 16:18: "...rock means every disciple of Christ."

The Trinity Review / November, December 1999, January 2000

explicitly declared that the power to bind and to loose was given to Peter *personally* then and there and was not passed on to the Roman Bishop.¹⁸ Cyprian held that Jesus was addressing the whole body of bishops in speaking of Peter since, he says, he later endowed all the apostles "with a like partnership both of honour and power." He also contends that Jesus spoke specifically of Peter only to highlight the necessity of the *unity* of the church.¹⁹ Chrysostom, followed by Gregory of Nyssa, Isidore of Pelusium, the Latin father Hilary, and the later Greek fathers Theodoret, Theophanes, Theophylact, and John of Damascus, held that the "rock" in Jesus' explanation was the faith of Peter's confession. The later Augustine believed the rock was not Peter but Christ.²⁰

During the Middle Ages the Roman Bishop regularly employed *Matthew 16* to ground Rome's claim to ecclesiastical primacy as though no other understanding were possible. But at the time of the Reformation Luther returned to Augustine at this point ("The rock is the Son of God, Jesus Christ himself and no one else"), and urged that Peter's "rock-like" characteristic applied not to his person but only to his faith in Jesus who was the Rock.²¹ Calvin also held that the Rock was Christ and that in addressing Peter as "Rock" Christ was addressing both Peter and all other believers as well in the sense that the bond of faith in Christ is the basis on which the church grows.²² Zwingli taught that Peter is only the type of him who believes in Christ as the sole Rock.²³ It can be safely said, I think, that all of the Reformers believed that the true Rock of the church is Jesus Christ, with Peter being the "Rock" not in respect to his person but in respect to his being the type of all who trust in Jesus as Messiah and God.

Given this divergence of opinion, what did Jesus mean then by his statement? I have argued in my *Jesus, Divine Messiah: The New Testament Witness* for the authenticity of the pericope. I argued in the same work that by his confession Peter declared his conviction that Jesus was both the long-

promised Old Testament Messiah and the divine Son of God.²⁴ I pointed out there that it was in response to Peter's exclamatory declaration, "You are [*su ei*] the Messiah, the Son of the living God!" that Jesus responded to Peter as he did: "And I am saying to you that you are [*su ei*] a "peter" [literally, 'a rock']!" I think it important to note that in his exclamation Peter did not employ a proper name to designate Jesus; rather, he ascribed to him two titles, the first functional (Messiah), the second ontological (Son of the living God). I would suggest from the parallelism in the two *su ei* clauses that Jesus may have intended to respond in kind. That is to say, he may not have employed *petros* as a proper name. Rather, he may have likewise ascribed to him only a title: "You are a rock!" And by capitalizing the Greek word *petros* as it does, the Greek rendering of the Aramaic *kepha*, which latter word Jesus almost certainly used, the editors of our critical editions of the Greek New Testament may have misled us. Jesus may have intended to say, in other words, not "You are Peter," but "You are a rock!" by which exclamation I suggest he would have meant, "You are [truly] a rock [by describing me as you just did]!" If so, when Jesus continued by saying, "and upon *this rock* [note: he does not say "upon you"] I will build my 'assembly,'" I would suggest that he may have intended to say that it was upon Peter's "rock-like" *description* of him as the Messiah and the Son of the living God, *which understanding the Father had just graciously revealed to Peter*, and not upon Peter *personally* that he would ground his church. This would mean, in sum, that the "bed-rock" itself of the church is the fact of Christ's own messianic investiture and his ontological existence as the Second Person of the Godhead, just as Paul would later write: "No man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (*1 Corinthians 3:11*; see also *1 Corinthians 10:4*: "...and the rock was Christ [*he petra de en ho Christos*]"). In confessing the same Peter was himself "a rock."

It is entirely possible, of course, that Jesus did intend to say that upon Peter he would build his church in some sense (I think sometimes that our "Protestant" reluctance to admit this possibility plays into the hands of the Roman apologist), a possibility that certainly receives support from the next verse where Jesus declared to Peter: "I will give to *you* [singular] the keys of the kingdom of Heaven,²⁵ and whatever *you* [singular]

²⁴ See my *Jesus, Divine Messiah: The New Testament Witness* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1990, 50-51, 176-178.

²⁵ This phrase, "the keys of the kingdom of Heaven," of course, symbolically denotes kingdom authority, so Jesus in *Matthew 16* is granting "kingdom-building authority" to Peter. But this authority must not be interpreted one-sidedly—as is occasionally done because of the *Matthew 18* context—as having reference only to church discipline. The phrase in *Matthew 16* follows upon Jesus' positive declaration that he would "build" his church. Moreover, Jesus declares that by these keys Peter would both bind *and* loose. Therefore, the authority to open or close the doors of the kingdom of Heaven to men which Jesus grants to Peter here (and to the rest of the disciples in *Matthew 18*) must be seen to include both the authority to proclaim the liberating Gospel and the authority to take disciplinary steps to ensure that the church remains pure. By means of both Jesus would "build" his "assembly." There is a polemical side to our Lord's statement here as well, for in giving this "kingdom-building authority" to his church, he was saying not the ordained rabbis who "sit in Moses' seat," who neither had entered the kingdom themselves nor were aiding others to enter, but his confessing "assembly" possess "the keys of knowledge" (*Luke 11:52*).

Geerhardus Vos argues in his *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church* (Nutley, N. J., Presbyterian and Reformed, 1972 reprint), 81, that the authority to bind and to loose goes beyond the authority to impute and to forgive sin and refers to "the administration of the affairs of the house [of God] in general."

¹⁸ Tertullian, *On Modesty*, xxi.

¹⁹ Cyprian, *To the Lapsed*, Epistle XXVI.1; *On the Unity of the Church*, Treatise 1.4.

²⁰ Augustine, *Exposition on Psalm 61*, para. 3: "But in order that the Church might be built upon the Rock, who was made the Rock? Hear Paul saying: 'But the Rock was Christ.' On Him therefore built we have been"; *Sermon 26 on New Testament Lessons*, para. 1: "For seeing that Christ is the Rock (*Petra*), Peter is the Christian people.... [Christ said.] '...upon this Rock which thou has confessed, upon this Rock which thou hast acknowledged, saying, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,' will I build My Church, that is upon Myself, the Son of the living God, 'will I build My Church.' I will build thee upon Myself, not Myself upon thee." Para. 2: "Peter [was] built upon the Rock, not the Rock upon Peter." See also *On the Trinity*, II.17.28.

²¹ Martin Luther, *What Luther Says* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1959), II, 1070, para. 3412: "The pope is the arch-blasphemer of God in that he applies to himself the noble passage which is spoken of Christ alone. He wants to be the rock, and the church should rest on him... Therefore we must see to it that we stay with the simple meaning, namely, that Christ is the Foundation on which the church is to stand." See Luther's *Works*, 17.II.449f.

²² John Calvin, on *Matthew 16:18*; *Institutes*, IV. vi. 6.

²³ Ulrich Zwingli, "On the Lord's Supper," *Zwingli and Bullinger*, Vol. XXIV of the Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), 192-193: "The papists might complain that we do not abide by the natural sense when it is a matter of the saying: 'Thou art Peter, that is, a stone, or rock, and upon this rock I will build my church.' Does that mean that we fall into error if we do not abide by the simple or natural sense...? Not at all. For we find that Christ alone is the rock, Christ alone is the Head, Christ alone is the vine in which we are held secure. Therefore Christ himself is the rock upon which the Church is built, and that is the natural sense of the words. As applied to the papacy, the words are not natural."

The Trinity Review / November, December 1999, January 2000

bind upon Earth shall have been bound in Heaven, and whatever *you* [singular] loose upon Earth shall have been loosed in Heaven" (16:19).²⁶ But in what sense?

Peter's confession of Jesus as Messiah and Son of the living God, just revealed to him by the Father, cannot be excluded from Christ's reference to Peter as "a rock." Not Peter personally as the man but Peter as the *confessing apostle*—confessing specifically what he did, namely, the revealed truth about Jesus being the Messiah and the Son of the living God—is the foundation rock of the church: "This interpretation is demanded by the sequel in the passage which follows (*Mt.* 16:22-23). There Jesus calls Peter by another name: Satan. Just as Peter had spoken by revelation from the Father, he now becomes the mouthpiece of the devil. In confessing Jesus to be the Christ he was the rock, in tempting Jesus to refuse the cross he is Satan. He is called Satan only in direct reference to his word of seduction. Apart from that expression the designation does not apply. Jesus is not declaring that Peter the man is a Satan in terms of all his personal qualities, nor is satanicity a *character indelibilis*. Peter is Satan as he speaks for Satan. [This would require by analogy that] Peter is a rock as he speaks for God."²⁷

This shows then that Peter was a "rock" *only* in his office as a confessing apostle speaking the Word of God. When he (or any pope) spoke something authoritatively other than the Word of God, he became not a rock but a "Satan" (may we also say an "Antichrist"?).

When one takes into account that this authority was also given to the other apostles and that their doctrinal teaching became the foundation of the church (*Ephesians* 2:20), Vos' broader construction of Jesus' intent is entirely possible.

²⁶ The "shall have been bound" and the "shall have been loosed" in my translation of the Greek text of *Matthew* 16:19 (and 18:18) reflect the fact that underlying both is a verbal construction known as the future perfect passive periphrastic. Henry J. Cadbury in "The Meaning of *John* 20:23, *Matthew* 16:19, and *Matthew* 18:18," *JBL* (Vol. 58, Sept. 1939), 253, urges that "the simple future seems...as adequate as any English translation can be" for this Greek construction. But J. R. Mantey, both in "The Mistranslation of the Perfect Tense in *John* 20:23, *Mt.* 16:19, and *Mt.* 18:18" in the same journal issue and in "Evidence That the Perfect Tense in *John* 20:23 and *Matthew* 16:19 Is Mistranslated," *JETS* (Vol. 16, No 3, Summer 1973), 129-138, demonstrates that the translations I have urged above are not only warranted but also the only English translations which capture the force of the Greek. Thus if the binding and loosing about which Jesus speaks here pertain respectively to "retaining" and "forgiving" men's sins (see *John* 20:23; see *Revelation* 1:5), this can only mean that those whom the church through the proclamation of the Gospel brings to faith are those who are already God's elect and those who finally spurn the church's message or who are finally excommunicated by the church are those who are already the non-elect.

D. A. Carson in his *Matthew* in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 8, 373, agrees with my translation of the Greek construction but his understanding of the significance of this translation differs from mine: "Whatever [Peter] binds or looses will have been bound or loosed, so long as he adheres to that divinely disclosed gospel.... Those he ushers in or excludes have already been bound or loosed by God according to the gospel already revealed...." In my opinion, Carson's explanation of the meaning of the text is not very helpful.

One final comment is in order: Jesus was not instituting the priestly power of absolution in *John* 20:22, as Rome contends (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 976): (1) the verb, "he breathed," is aoristic and has no specified object, suggesting a *single* expulsion of breath upon *all* the disciples present, not just upon some individuals among them; (2) others, in addition to the apostles, were surely present; see *Luke* 24:33ff. This action on Jesus' part depicted his action on the Day of Pentecost; see *Acts* 1:5, 8; 2:2, 4, 33.

²⁷ E. P. Clowney, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Church* (unpublished classroom syllabus), II, 108-109.

Furthermore, it must be noted in this connection that to the rest of the disciples (*Matthew* 18:1) several days later Jesus gave the same kingdom authority that he had given to Peter when he said, "Truly I say to *you* [plural], whatever *you* [plural] bind upon Earth shall have been bound in Heaven, and whatever *you* [plural] loose upon Earth shall have been loosed in Heaven" (18:18). He did the same thing on the night of his resurrection when he "breathed on [the ten disciples] and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. Whoever's sins *you* [plural] forgive, they have been forgiven; whoever's *you* [plural] retain, they have been retained'" (*John* 20:22-23). What should we make of this similar promise of the keys to the other disciples? I suggest that Jesus was implying on these two latter occasions what Paul would later state explicitly, namely, that Christ's church would be "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone" (*Ephesians* 2:20; see *1 Corinthians* 10:4), and what John would later symbolically depict in *Revelation* as one aspect of the church as the "bride" of Christ: "And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (*Rev* 21:14).

In sum, the New Testament teaching grants a certain priority to Peter among the original Twelve, but this priority, to use Jack Dean Kingsbury's phrase, seems to have been "salvation-[or redemptive-] historical" in nature, that is, Peter occupied a *primus inter pares* position only during the specific time frame of the "salvation history" in which he lived.²⁸ The New Testament does not restrict the church's foundation to him alone but founds the church on the entire apostolate, not in regard to their persons as such but in regard to their office in the church as authoritative teachers of doctrine who confess the truth about Jesus. I must conclude from all of the Scripture data that there is no warrant whatever for Rome's dogma of the exclusive primacy of "Peter's chair" in these words of Jesus.

What then can we safely say about Jesus' "assembly" or "church" on the basis of his words in *Matthew* 16:18? First, the disciples did not appear to have any difficulty comprehending Jesus' talk about building his *ekklesia*.²⁹ They rather obviously did not find it a totally new or strange concept. This is surely to be traced to the fact that the concept had its roots in the Old Testament's recurring depiction of Israel as God's "congregation" or "assembly." Second, it is ultimately Jesus, not men, who "will build" his church. Like a wise master-builder who builds a house, so Jesus will build his church. Third, his "building," more specifically his "temple" (*Ephesians* 2:20-21), will be unconquerable: The very gates of Hades (the power of death?) will not prevail against it.³⁰ Fourth, he would build it

²⁸ Jack Dean Kingsbury, "The Figure of Peter in Matthew's Gospel as a Theological Problem," *JBL* 98/1 (March 1979), 67-83.

²⁹ Since Jesus almost certainly was speaking Aramaic on this occasion, he probably used *q^hhala'*, a loan word from the Hebrew, or *q^hnishla'*, the normal Aramaic equivalent for *sunagoge*. See K. L. Schmidt, *ekklesia*, *TDNT*, III, 525. Jesus, of course, knew Greek—he had been a carpenter in and around Nazareth which would have required him to conduct business in Greek; he spoke to the Syrophenician woman who was Greek, *Mark* 7:26; on one occasion when he spoke of "going to him who sent Me," the Jews wondered whether he was going to the Dispersion among the Greeks to teach the Greeks, *John* 7:35; certain Greeks felt at liberty to request to speak to him, *John* 12:20; finally, he spoke to Pilate who hardly would have known Aramaic or Hebrew and therefore could have spoken in Greek on that occasion as well.

³⁰ Whether *katischusousin* is to be construed in such a way as to make Hades the invading force ("will not conquer") or to make the church the attacking force ("will not stand against") is a matter of some

The Trinity Review / November, December 1999, January 2000

upon the "bed-rock" of his own person as the Messiah and divine Son of God as this "bedrock" comes to expression in both his and his apostles' authoritative teaching. Fifth, his *ekklesia*, made up of those who like Peter confess his

messianic role and divine Sonship, would be "the assembly [or "congregation"] of the Messiah." Sixth, his *ekklesia* would become the vehicle of authority (see "the keys of the kingdom of Heaven") throughout this age for carrying out the predetermining will of Heaven (see the "shall have been's") by "binding" (that is, "retaining") the non-elect man's sins through the "smell of death" character for him (2 *Corinthians* 2:16) of the Gospel proclamation and/or of church discipline, and "loosing" (that is, "forgiving") the elect man's sins through the "fragrance of life" character for him (2 *Corinthians* 2:16) of the same Gospel proclamation and/or of church discipline. These two activities on the church's part ("binding" and "loosing" in accordance with the predetermining will of Heaven) would become then the means through the centuries by which Jesus would "build" his, the divine Messiah's, "assembly." Seventh, Jesus' statement suggests that his "assembly" would be a *world-wide* entity for this appears to be the connotation of the word here. Finally, the fact that the "foundation stones" of his "assembly" were given the keys of the *kingdom of Heaven* indicates that there is a direct connection between his church and the kingdom of God. In other words, by entrusting oneself in saving faith to the Christ espoused in the apostles' doctrine, one enters Messiah's church which is also the present redemptive expression of the kingdom of God among men. As Paul will write later: "[The Father] delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of the Son of his love" (*Colossians* 1:13).

The Apostate Fathers

The upshot of all this—and this is the first half of my response to the original question—is that Rome bases its soteriological teaching not primarily on Scripture but primarily on its own "infallible, unamendable" Tradition that virtually from the beginning began to exhibit great error.

With this last observation we come to the second half of my response to the class member's original question, for it is one of the saddest facts of church history that, with regard to its tradition, from the post-apostolic age onward the church fell more and more into serious soteriological error, with grace and faith giving way to legalism and the doing of good works as the pronounced way of salvation. An unevangelical nomism runs virtually unabated through the writings of the church fathers. Only upon rare occasion, and not even fully in Augustine, was the voice of Paul clearly heard again before the sixteenth-century magisterial Reformation where it was heard in the preaching and writing of Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin. Kenneth Escott Kirk writes: "St. Paul's indignant wonder was evoked by the reversion of a small province of the Christian Church [Galatia] to the legalistic spirit of the Jewish religion. Had he lived half a century or a century later, his cause for amazement would have been increased a hundredfold. The example of the Galatians might be thought to have infected the entire Christian Church; writer after writer seems to have little other interest than to express the genius of

debate among commentators. Given the facts (1) that "gates," as part of a wall, are therefore stationary and not doing the advancing, and (2) that the church without question is to invade a world peopled with children of Satan and "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ," I favor the latter notion.

Christianity wholly in terms of law and obedience, reward and punishment."³¹

J. L. Neve carefully documents in the apostolic fathers how quickly after the age of Paul—doubtless due to Jewish and Hellenistic influences without and the tug of the Pelagian heart within—the emphasis in their preaching and writings on soteriology fell more and more upon human works and their merit and upon moralism.³² J. N. D. Kelly reaches similar conclusions.³³ Richard Lovelace affirms: "By the early second century it is clear that Christians had come to think of themselves as *being justified through being sanctified*, accepted as righteous according to their actual obedience to the new Law of Christ."³⁴ And Thomas F. Torrance, in his *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers*—whose entire work is an inquiry into the literature of the apostolic fathers, that is to say, into the *Didache of the Twelve Apostles*, the *First Epistle of Clement*, the *Epistles of Ignatius*, the *Epistle of Polycarp*, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, and the *Second Epistle of Clement*, in order to discern how and why such a great divergence away from the teaching of the New Testament occurred in their understanding of salvation—concludes his research by saying: "In the Apostolic Fathers grace did not have [the] radical character [that it had in the New Testament]. The great presupposition of the Christian life, for them, was not a deed of decisive significance that cut across human life and set it on a wholly new basis grounded upon the self-giving of God. What took absolute precedence was God's call to a new life in obedience to revealed truth. Grace, as far as it was grasped, was subsidiary to that. And so religion was thought of primarily in terms of man's acts toward God, *in the striving toward justification*, much less in terms of God's acts for man which put him in the right with God once and for all.

"...Salvation is wrought, they thought, certainly by divine pardon but on the ground of repentance, not apparently on the ground of the death of Christ alone.... It was not seen that the whole of salvation is centred in the person and death of Christ, for there God has Himself come into the world and wrought a final act of redemption which undercuts all our own endeavours at self-justification, and places us in an entirely new situation in which faith alone saves a man, and through which alone is a man free to do righteousness spontaneously under the constraining love of Christ. That was not understood by the apostolic fathers, and it is the primary reason for the degeneration of their Christian faith into something so different from the New Testament."³⁵

Thus the early post-apostolic church's sub-Christian soteriological deliverances launched the church on a doctrinal trajectory that moved virtually the entire church (there was always a "remnant" that put up resistance) away from the pristine Pauline teaching on salvation by pure grace and justification by faith alone, a trajectory that eventually came to expression in Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, and Semi-Semi-

³¹ Kenneth Escott Kirk, *The Vision of God: The Christian Doctrine of the Summum Bonum* 1928 Bampton Lectures (London: Longmans, Green, 1931), 111.

³² J. L. Neve, *A History of Christian Thought* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1946), I. 37-39.

³³ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1958), 163-164, 165, 168-169, 177-178, 184.

³⁴ Richard Lovelace, "A Call to Historic Roots and Continuity" in *The Orthodox Evangelicals*, edited by Robert Webber and Donald Bloesch (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 1978), 49, emphasis supplied.

³⁵ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 133, 138, emphasis supplied.

The Trinity Review / November, December 1999, January 2000

Pelagianism, that then found formal expression in the system of Thomas Aquinas, and finally became the hardened official position of the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Trent.

This naturalistic soteriological vision (for that is what it is) in its purest expression, which Benjamin B. Warfield designated "autosoterism" ("self-salvation"), the church has called "Pelagianism" named for Pelagius, the late-fourth/early-fifth-century British monk who formally taught it. This vision contends that men can save themselves, that is to say, that *their native powers are such that men are capable of doing everything that God requires of them for salvation.*

Over against this soteric plan, the supernaturalistic vision, designated "Augustinianism" after Augustine (354-430), Bishop of Hippo, who vigorously resisted Pelagius' teachings, insists that *men are incapable of saving themselves and that all the powers essential to the saving of the soul must come from God.* Augustinianism triumphed formally, if not actually, over Pelagianism in A.D. 418 when Pelagianism was condemned at the Sixteenth Council of Carthage. In this conciliar triumph, Warfield notes, "...it was once for all settled that Christianity was to remain a religion, and a religion for sinful men, and not rot down into a mere ethical system, fitted only for the righteous who need no salvation."³⁶ In other words, the church of Jesus Christ, alone among all the religions of the world in this regard, in its best creedal moments is "supernaturalistic" or "Augustinian" in its soteric conception that God must save men, and every Christian *should be* in this sense "Augustinian" in his soteric beliefs.³⁷

As I just intimated, Pelagianism did not die with its conciliar condemnation in A.D. 418, men being born as they are with Pelagian hearts, which fact makes it necessary to fight this battle in every generation. Rather, it only went underground, "meanwhile vexing the Church with modified forms of itself, modified just enough to escape the letter of the Church's condemnation."³⁸ For example, it reappeared at once in the Semi-Pelagian denial of the necessity of *prevenient* grace for salvation. This was opposed by the Second Council of

Orange—not an ecumenical council—in A.D. 529. Alister E. McGrath, after noting in his study, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, that the earlier pronouncements of the Sixteenth Council of Carthage were "vague at several points which were to prove of significance, and these were revised at what is generally regarded as being the most important council of the early church to deal with the doctrine of justification—the Second Council of Orange, convened in 529,"³⁹ then observes: "No other council was convened to discuss the doctrine of justification between [529] and 1545, when the Council of Trent assembled to debate that doctrine, among many other things. There was thus a period of over a millennium during which the teaching office of the church remained silent on the issue of justification. This silence serves to further enhance the importance of the pronouncements of Orange II on the matter, as these thus come to represent the definitive teaching of the Christian church on the doctrine of justification during the medieval period, before the Council of Trent was convened. Recent scholarship has established that no theologian of the Middle Ages ever cites the decisions of Orange II, or shows the slightest awareness of the existence of such decisions. For reasons that we simply do not understand, from the tenth century until the assembly of the Council of Trent in 1545, the theologians of the western church appear to be unaware of the existence of such a council, let alone its pronouncements. The theologians of the Middle Ages were thus obliged to base their teaching on justification on the canons of the Council of Carthage, which were simply incapable of bearing the strain which came to be placed upon them. The increasing precision of the technical terms employed within the theological schools inevitably led to the somewhat loose terms used by the Council of Carthage being interpreted in a manner quite alien to that intended by those who originally employed them."⁴⁰

So while the Second Council of Orange in A.D. 529 saved the church from Semi-Pelagianism, regrettably that same council betrayed the church into the Semi-Semi-Pelagian denial of the *irresistibility* of *prevenient* grace by human free will, which theological vision eventually came to expression in the popular medieval slogan: "God will not deny his grace to those who do what lies within their power" (see William of Occam's *facere quod in se est*, "doing what in you is"). In spite of recurring protests through the centuries by such men as Gottschalk, Bradwardine, Wycliffe, and Hus, eventually Thomas Aquinas, as we have already noted, systematized this theological vision and the Council of Trent (1545) was to declare it the official position of those churches in communion

with Counter-Reformation Rome.⁴¹ In doing so, the Council of Trent rejected the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith alone even though their own great humanist scholar Erasmus of Rotterdam and other of Rome's brightest philologists by this time had uncovered the fact that Jerome's Latin Vulgate had mistranslated the Greek word *metanoeo* ("repent") as "do penance" and the Greek word *dikaioo* ("declare righteous") as "make righteous."

³⁶ Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 36.

³⁷ I do not mean to suggest by what I just said that Augustine always held consistently to this supernaturalistic principle, for it is a matter of simple historical record that he did not. In Augustine one can find the doctrine both of salvation by grace through faith and of salvation dispensed through the church and its sacraments (see L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 559). The former may be found expressed, for example, in his *Confessions* when he writes: "You converted me to yourself so that I no longer sought...any of this world's promises" (8:12), and again, "By your gift I had come totally not to will what I had willed but to will what you willed" (9.1, emphasis supplied). Clearly, Augustine understood that his conversion was entirely the work of God's grace. But the latter may also be found in his *Confessions* when he writes: "I recognized the act of your will, and I gave praise to your name, rejoicing in faith. But this faith would not let me feel safe about my past sins, since your baptism had not yet come to remit them" (9.4). Augustine then declares that, after Ambrose baptized him, "all anxiety as to our past life fled away" (9.6). Warfield seems quite justified in observing that the Protestant Reformation, especially on the Reformed side, was the revolt of Augustine's doctrine of grace against his doctrine of the church, a revolt against seeing grace channeled through the sacraments, a revolt, in all Reformational expressions, against the notion that predestination trickled only through the narrow crevices of church ordinances. The Reformation was, by contrast, an affirmation of Augustine's grasp upon human lostness, bondage to what is dark and wrong, the indispensability of grace, and the glory of the Gospel because of him in whom the good news took and takes form.

³⁸ Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation*, 36.

³⁹ McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 11.

⁴⁰ McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 11-12.

⁴¹ Regrettably this same denial of the irresistibility of divine grace by the power of the human will was later espoused by Jacobus Arminius and his followers.

The Trinity Review / November, December 1999, January 2000

The Reformers of the sixteenth century, being Biblical scholars, rejected Rome's soteriology with all of its concomitant errors and returned to the earlier best insights of the later Augustine and before him to the inspired insights, in particular, of Paul's letters to the Galatians and to the Romans. But sadly where Protestantism placed its "either-or" or *solus* ("alone") (see its *sola Scriptura, sola gratia, solus Christus*,⁴² *sola fide, soli Deo gloria*), Roman Catholic theology has continued to place its "both-and" or *et* ("and") (see its doctrines of Scripture *and* tradition, Christ *and* Mary, grace *and* nature, faith in Christ *and* works, faith in Christ *and* indulgences,⁴³ the

sacred *and* the secular). All of these "ands" are outworkings of Rome's theologico-philosophical commitment to Aquinas' vision of the "analogy of being" (*analogia entis*) between God and creation, the latter of which Rome regards, over against Reformation theology, as being still fundamentally good in spite of the *Genesis* Fall. For myself, standing with the Reformers who contended that the first principle of all true theology is the fact that "God is there and he has spoken with finality in Holy Scripture," while I often disagree with the Swiss theologian Karl Barth, I do agree with him completely when he wrote: "I regard the *analogia entis* as the invention of Antichrist, and think that because of it one cannot become Catholic."⁴⁴ For it is indeed the invention of Antichrist when one adds anything to the great *sola*'s of the Reformation. The "and" in "grace and..." "Christ and..." or "faith and..." brings the apostolic curse and damnation (*Galatians* 1:6-9; 5:2-6; *Romans* 11:6). For they who would trust in the work of Christ *plus* their own "good works" *plus* the righteousness and intercessory work of Mary and the saints *plus* their pilgrimages and their purchases of indulgences are, according to Paul, making Christ's cross-work of no value (*Galatians* 5:2), alienating themselves from Christ (5:4a), falling away from grace (5:4b) abolishing the offence of the cross (5:11), trusting in a "different gospel which is no gospel at all" (1:6-7) at the peril of their souls and showing thereby that they have never been truly regenerated by the Holy Spirit (or they would submit to the teaching of the Holy Scripture) but are still lost in their sin.

Because Pelagianism, including all the modified forms it takes today (Judaism, Roman Catholicism, Arminianism), is always an attack on the *sola gratia, solus Christus, sola fide* soteric principle, claiming as it does that man deserves at least some measure of credit for effecting his salvation, if not in its initiation, at least in his cooperation with initiating grace, the true church of Jesus Christ must ever be on guard to ensure that the *sola gratia, solus Christus, sola fide* soteric principle of Holy Scripture and of Paul specifically continues to be proclaimed as the sole way of salvation.

Dr. Robert L. Reymond, Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology at Knox Theological Seminary, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, holds the B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. from Bob Jones University. A prolific author, Dr. Reymond recently published *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Thomas Nelson, 1998), which *The Trinity Review* reviewed earlier this year.

Announcement

One of our readers has asked us to make the following announcement:

The Christian Theological Society

Church," through the administration of the priests, the merits of Christ, Mary, and the saints in behalf of and for the benefit of the purchaser's loved ones suffering in Purgatory (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 1471-1479). This teaching points up, perhaps as plainly as any could, that Rome teaches that salvation is by Christ's merit plus the saints' good works which also have merit before God—another expression of its philosophy of the *analogia entis* in the sphere of soteriology.

⁴⁴ Karl Barth, "Foreword," *Church Dogmatics*, translated by G. T. Thomson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), I/1, x.

⁴² Protestants do not believe in *solus Christus* in an all-exclusive sense, because Paul expressly teaches that we must believe also in the Father (and by extension in the Spirit) if we would be justified (*Romans* 4:5, 23). But it is true that we do trust in Christ's preceptive and penal obedience alone for our justification. Indeed, that is why we are Protestants: We take seriously not only the "big" words of Scripture, such as "predestination," "justification," and "sanctification," but the "little" words as well, specifically, the little word "one" (which is virtually the *solus* in *solus Christus*, and by implication carries along with it the *sola*'s of *sola gratia* and *sola fide*) in the phrases, "the one man Jesus Christ" (*Romans* 5:15), "through the one, Jesus Christ" (*Romans* 5:17), "through one act of righteousness" (*Romans* 5:18), and "through the obedience of the one" (*Romans* 5:19). We add to the obedient work of this one man *nothing*—not our "righteousnesses" which are as menstrual rags (*Isaiah* 64:6; see *Titus* 3:5), not the supposed works of supererogation of the saints, not the supposed works of supererogation of Mary, *not anything!* "Jesus paid it all; all to him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain; he washed it white as snow."

⁴³ The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the great mass of Christians, who are only imperfectly sanctified (that is, justified) in this life, dying in communion with the Roman Church, go to Purgatory after death, where they "undergo purification [by suffering in the fires of Purgatory], so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 1030). This latter teaching based on 2 *Maccabees* 12:46 and a very strained exegesis of 1 *Corinthians* 3:15, 1 *Peter* 1:7 and *Jude* 22-23, may be found in seed form in Tertullian where prayers for the dead are mentioned; in Origen who speaks of a purification by fire at the end of the world by which all men and angels are to be restored to favor with God; and in Augustine who did express doubt about some aspects of it. It was specifically Gregory the Great, who "reigned" on the papal throne from 590-604, "who brought the doctrine into shape and into such connection with the discipline of the [Roman] Church, as to render it the effective engine of government and income, which it has ever since remained" (Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, III, 770). It was finally formulated into and proclaimed an article of faith at the Councils of Florence (1439-1445) and Trent (1545-1563). Protestants quite rightly view the entire dogma not only as "another one of those foreign growths that has fastened itself like a malignant tumor upon the theology of the Roman Catholic Church" (R. Laird Harris, *Fundamental Protestant Doctrines* [booklet], V, 7), but also as a doctrinal promulgation devised in the interest of sustaining the Romish priestcraft and the entire indulgence system of that church, which is its chief source of income.

Rome teaches, because "a perennial link of charity exists between the faithful who have already reached their heavenly home, those who are *expiating their sins* in purgatory and those who are still pilgrims on earth" (emphasis supplied), that Christians still living on Earth can aid sufferers in Purgatory to get to Heaven by purchasing "indulgences" (remissions of sin before God) in their behalf. An elaborate doctrinal scheme underlies this teaching. Rome teaches that the Church is in possession of a "treasury of supererogatory merit" (*thesaurus supererogationis meritorum*) consisting of the infinite worth of Christ's redemptive work, "the prayers and good works [of supererogation] of the Blessed Virgin Mary" which are "truly immense, unfathomable, and even pristine in their value before God," as well as "the prayers and good works [of supererogation] of all the saints" who by their good works "attained their own salvation and at the same time cooperated in saving their brothers in the unity of the Mystical Body" (see Pope Paul VI, *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*, 5). According to Romish dogma the pope has the authority to declare the terms of indulgences, and in exchange for the purchase of the same he dispenses out of this "treasury of the

The Christian Theological Society, "devoted to the pursuit of truth through carefully reading and applying rigorous argumentation to the Scriptures," discusses the books of Gordon Clark and the Trinity Foundation. Three years in existence, the Society currently meets on Friday evenings in the town of Methuen, Massachusetts. Anyone interested in joining the Society may contact Patrick Sciacca. Telephone: 978.685.2062; email: Psci679117@aol.com.

Publishing News from The Trinity Foundation

Two new books are now available: ***The Scripturalism of Gordon H. Clark*** by Dr. W. Gary Crampton, and ***Ecclesiastical Megalomania: The Economic and Political Thought of the Roman Catholic Church*** by Dr. John W. Robbins.

The Scripturalism of Gordon H. Clark is an introduction to the fundamental principles of Dr. Clark's theological philosophy useful to both beginning and advanced students of Dr. Clark's thought. It is available in trade paperback for \$9.95 plus shipping.

Ecclesiastical Megalomania is a detailed examination of the social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church from a Biblical point of view. **EM** relies on the official pronouncements of the Vatican and Roman Church councils to discuss such topics as the Church-State's view of private property, business, and the proper role of government, and the role the Church-State has played in fostering modern collectivism and totalitarianism. **EM** is available in both hardback (\$29.95 plus shipping) and paperback (\$19.95 plus shipping)

In the works is a new book, ***The Church Effeminate and Other Essays***, which includes essays by Charles Hodge, J. Gresham Machen, J. C. Ryle, Gordon Clark, and others on the definition, purpose, structure, and function of the church. ***The Church Effeminate*** should be available in spring 2000.

In summer 2000 ***A Different Gospel: The Theology of the Roman Catholic Church*** should be released. Based in part on the proceedings of the 1998 Trinity Foundation Conference on Christianity and Roman Catholicism, ***A Different Gospel*** will examine the false religious message of the Roman Church-State.

There are many other works in progress at The Foundation, and we intend to keep you informed as they near publication. As always, please keep us in your prayers that our publications and conferences might accurately teach the Word of God, and that we might be clear and bold in our presentation.

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

January, February 1987

Copyright 2003 John W. Robbins Post Office Box 68, Unicoi, Tennessee 37692

Email: Jrob1517@aol.com

Website: www.trinityfoundation.org

Telephone: 423.743.0199

Fax: 423.743.2005

Justification by Faith: Romanism and Protestantism

John W. Robbins, editor

Four hundred years ago the religious world was involved in one of the greatest religious conflicts that this world has ever witnessed. A tremendous number of books have recorded a blow-by-blow account of the epic Romanist-Protestant struggle. Yet, after more than four centuries have gone by, the professed sons of the Reformation generally have very little idea of the real issues of the conflict. If you ask a Protestant what Roman Catholics teach concerning justification, you will most likely be told that Catholics believe that a sinner may be justified by his own works of merit. But listen to what an authoritative Catholic catechism teaches:

Q. What is justification?

A. It is a grace which makes us friends of God.

Q. Can a sinner merit this justifying grace?

A. No, he cannot; because all the good works which the sinner performs whilst he is in a state of mortal sin, are dead works, which have no merit sufficient to justify.

Q. Is it an article of the Catholic faith, that the sinner cannot merit the grace of justification?

A. Yes, it is decreed in the seventh chap. of the sixth sess. of the Council of Trent, that neither faith, nor good works, preceding justification, can merit the grace of justification.

Q. How then is the sinner justified?

A. He is justified gratuitously by the pure mercy of God, not on account of his own or any human merit, but purely through the merits of Jesus Christ; for Jesus Christ is our only mediator of redemption, who alone, by his passion and death, has reconciled us to his Father.

Q. Why then do Protestants charge us with believing, that the sinner can merit the redemption of his sins?

A. Their ignorance of the Catholic doctrine is the cause of this, as well as many other false charges (Rev. Stephen Keenan, *Doctrinal Catechism*, 138, 139).

Many Protestants are awakening to the fact that the Roman Catholic Church does teach a doctrine of justification by faith. With surprise they are saying, "I always thought that Catholics taught that a sinner could be justified by his own works of merit. But they do not teach this. I have been subjected to some uncharitable Protestant propaganda about Catholic doctrine. Why, they believe in the saving grace of God the same as we do!" There is no question but that Catholic doctrine has always taught that a sinner is justified by a grace that comes from God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Then what was the doctrinal bone of contention between the Catholic Church and the Protestant Reformation?

Three Aspects of Redemption

There are three great aspects of salvation:

1. God the Father's choosing *of* his people—election.
2. God the Son's (Jesus Christ) work *for* his people—atonement.
3. God the Holy Spirit's work *in* his people—faith.

The Father's choosing of us. This aspect of redemption occurred before we were born, before we had done any good or evil, even before the creation of the universe. "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world.... In love he predestined us" (*Ephesians* 1:3-5).

The Son's work for us. This work of redemption, like election, was done entirely apart from us and without our assistance. Jesus Christ lived a perfect life of obedience for his people. He "died *for* our sins according to the Scriptures" (*1 Corinthians* 15:3). He "was delivered *for* our offences" (*Romans* 4:25). He entered the sanctuary, "having obtained eternal redemption *for* us" (*Hebrews* 9:12). He appears "in the presence of God *for* us" (*Hebrews* 9:24). By his obedience and satisfaction of divine justice, Christ *earned* salvation for his people and gives it to them freely, from beginning to end. "Whom he predestined, these he also called; whom he called, these he also justified; and whom he justified, these he also glorified" (*Romans* 8:30).

The Holy Spirit's work in us. The Holy Spirit gives to the elect the gifts that Christ earned for them. Some of these gifts, but not all, are done in the believer's mind: Faith is the principal work of the Spirit in the believer. But justification is not an internal work: It is an external act. It is a legal act consisting of God's pardoning of sin and his imputing of Christ's righteousness, his good works, to the believer.

The Romanist Concept of Justification

The Roman State-Church does not teach that a sinner can be justified by his own works of merit done before he is regenerated. Briefly, its position on justification is this: Christ's work for us has made the gift of the Holy Spirit available to believers. Men must receive an *infusion* of righteousness by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit must work repentance and charity (love) in the believer. God then pronounces the believer just because of the work that the Holy Spirit has done in him. If the believer continues in his belief and good works, then his justification is increased.

Or to express it another way: The Roman State-Church teaches that a man is justified before God because the Holy Spirit has given that man a just nature. God the Father merely recognizes the work which the Holy Spirit has done in the heart of the believer. Justification means to *make* just or righteous, according to Roman theology.

The Birth of Protestantism

The Reformers abandoned the idea that the Holy Spirit's work *in* them could make them righteous in the sight of God. These men knew what it was to struggle for holiness of heart. Never were there more earnest Roman Catholics than Martin Luther, John Calvin, William Farel, Philipp Melancthon, and William Tyndale. They believed that holiness came only from God, and they tried to apprehend enough holiness in their lives in order that they could be accepted before God. Yet, being honest men, they could never see enough of God's grace in their own experience to give them any confidence toward God. Indeed, as they looked deep within their poor hearts, they saw sin in the form of pride, selfishness, unbelief, unresponsiveness to God's love, and egotism. They despaired of ever being justified by virtue of God's work of grace in them.

Then came their enlightenment in the Biblical faith. They rediscovered Paul's doctrine of justification through belief alone. In the book of *Romans* the apostle sets forth the Gospel truth that the sinner is

not justified by an infused righteousness but by an *imputed* righteousness—meaning a righteousness that is found wholly in Another. A believer is not justified by virtue of what God has done *in* him but by virtue of what Jesus Christ has done *for* him.

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation by his blood, through faith, to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time his righteousness, that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law (*Romans* 3:21-28).

Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin."

Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised,

but while uncircumcised. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also (*Romans* 4:4-11).

In these words of the apostle Paul, the Reformers found a certain ground of hope. They saw that men need not look within their own experience to find something that will give them any assurance that they may stand acceptable before God. The Reformers were confronted with the great Gospel truth that Christ has already satisfied the wrath and justice of the Father, that justification—God's declaring them righteous—was evidenced by belief in Christ alone. By faith in God's perfect work, the finished work of Jesus Christ, they could now rejoice that the righteousness of Jesus was freely imputed to them.

Good Works and Justifying Merit

In returning to the Bible, the Protestant Reformers utterly rejected the idea that works wrought by the power of the Holy Spirit in us can obtain the grace of justification. Although the Roman Catholic position on good works and infused grace was clothed with the appearance of sanctity, Luther discerned that it was a diabolical doctrine devised to lead men astray from the objective Gospel. Roman Catholic doctrine teaches men to trust in God's work in them. God's work and their own works become indistinguishable. Roman Catholic theology leads them actually to depend upon their own works. Armed with the great teaching of the sinfulness of man's nature, Luther was able to show that the good works of the best saints are defiled by the sinfulness and imperfection of human nature. "For there is not a just man on Earth who does good and does not sin" (*Ecclesiastes* 7:20). "But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags" (*Isaiah* 64:6). "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (*1 John* 1:8). Good works, declared the Reformers, can only be considered good if the

merits of Jesus are added to them to make up for their deficiency and imperfection.

Wrote Luther, "No one can be certain that he is not continually committing mortal sin, because of the most secret vice of pride." The pope condemned this statement in his bull excommunicating Luther, but the Reformer responded, "Therefore I must retract this article, and I say now that no one should doubt that all our good works are mortal sins, if they are judged according to God's judgment and severity and not accepted as good by grace alone." Again he declared, "Every good work is sin unless it is forgiven by the mercy of God." In *A Commentary on St Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (176, 177), Luther thundered that the merits of all works, "before grace and after," should be thrown down to Hell. Thus did this man of God teach that we can never look within us for any work of justifying merit.

Contrary to Roman Catholicism, the Protestants taught that while sanctifying grace within a believer enables him to do good works, only the merits of Christ can make those good works acceptable to God. Sanctifying grace does not make us the friends of God, they said, but is rather the result of Christ's work done wholly outside of us. The most thorough and Biblical of the Reformed confessions of faith, the *Westminster Confession*, describes justification in these words:

Those whom God effectually calls, he also freely justifies: not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.

The Gospel

Before his enlightenment, Luther vainly looked within his own heart for enough repentance or conversion to assure him of his acceptance with God.

"How dare I believe in the favor of God, while there is nothing in me like true conversion? I must be changed before He can receive me." Such was the Roman darkness that enveloped his soul. He dreaded those Scriptures which speak of repentance. But after his enlightenment in the Gospel, the passages so much dreaded became his delight—to use his own words, "an agreeable sport, and the most delightful recreation." All the passages of Scripture which frightened him seemed now to rise up from all sides, smiling, and leaping, and sporting with him. (J. H. Merle D'Aubigne, *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*, Vol. 1, 130, 131).

Luther contemplated with great joy the words of Paul, "[Christ] loved me, and gave Himself for me" (*Galatians* 2:29). Luther perceived that the Lord of glory had chosen him in Jesus Christ and bestowed upon him all the treasures of eternity. Luther understood that he could receive justification solely by believing in what God had done for sinners, and that this belief itself was a gift of God.

God justifies the ungodly through faith, without works. "By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (*Galatians* 2:16). To the Reformers who had struggled for years to find favor with God through the work of the Holy Spirit in them, justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ was a message of unspeakable joy. God in eternity chose those whom he would save; Christ actually saved them; and no man can pluck them out of God's hand. The Holy Spirit applied the salvation that Christ earned for his people to those whom the Father had chosen. All three persons of the Godhead work together in saving God's people. Those who believe are justified, declared righteous, because of what *Christ did* at Calvary 2,000 years

ago, not because of what the Holy Spirit is doing in their lives today. Believers are justified *through* faith (and faith itself is a gift of God earned by Christ for his people), but not *because of* faith or any other work that the Holy Spirit does in them.

Christ came to save sinners, and he actually saved them. There is no better news under Heaven than that. The message of the Gospel is that God loves his people so much that he sent his Son to die on the Cross for their sins so that whoever believes that Jesus is God and rose from the dead will be saved. In the Gospel of the imputed righteousness of Christ, Christians can see the smiling face of the heavenly Father. The Gospel is the good news of what God has already done to save sinners.

The Reformers did not deny the necessity of God's work in the hearts of men by the power of the Holy Spirit; in fact, they insisted upon the absolute necessity of belief in the truth of the Gospel, a belief that can only be caused by God. Nor did they make light of good works. One need only compare the lives of the Puritans with the lives of the Jesuits. What they did was to get their theology straight. They understood that Christ's work for his people earned the benefits of the Holy Spirit's work in us, and other benefits besides, including the forgiveness of sins and our justification before God. The result is the Biblical answer to the question, What must one do to be saved? "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved"(Romans 10:9).

The rediscovery of this truth during the Reformations took Europe to its foundations and changed the course of world history. Through the preaching of justification by faith alone, the Roman State-Church received a deadly wound. If we again believe and teach that one can be justified only through faith in the righteousness of Christ, and that God will grant the gift of faith and forgiveness to all who ask for it, the course of world history will be changed again.

Are You Romanist or Protestant?

The meaning of justification by faith alone has been largely forgotten in the professing Christian Church. The meaning of *justification* has been forgotten, and so has the meaning of *faith*. But mere forgetting is not the whole issue. In addition to our sinful tendency to forget God's truth (a tendency that the writers of the New Testament were well aware of, for they repeatedly said that they were writing to *remind* believers), false teachers, wolves in sheep's clothing, have worked diligently to twist the Scriptural doctrine of justification. The teaching of the Roman State-Church is a prime example of this. The following ten questions are designed to test your knowledge of justification by faith. After you have taken the quiz, perhaps you could ask a teacher in your church to take it as well. You might be surprised to find that many more than you expected are confused on this cardinal doctrine of Christianity. In each of the following 10 choices, mark either (a) or (b), whichever is correct.

1. (a) God gives a sinner right standing with himself by mercifully accounting him innocent or virtuous.
- (b) God gives a sinner right standing with himself by actually making him into an innocent and virtuous person.
2. (a) God gives a sinner right standing with himself by placing Christ's goodness and virtue to his credit.
- (b) God gives a sinner right standing with himself by putting Christ's goodness and virtue into his heart.
3. (a) God accepts the believer because of the righteousness found in Jesus Christ.
- (b) God makes the believer acceptable by infusing Christ's righteousness into his life.
4. (a) If a person is "born again" (regenerate), he will receive right standing with God on the basis of his new birth.
- (b) If a person is "born again" he receives right standing with God on the basis of Christ's work alone.

5. (a) We receive right standing with God by faith alone.

(b) We receive right standing with God by faith which has become active by love.

6. (a) We achieve right standing with God by having Christ live out his life of obedience in us.

(b) We receive right standing with God by accepting the fact that Christ obeyed the law perfectly for us.

7. (a) We achieve right standing with God by following Christ's example by the help of his enabling grace.

(b) We follow Christ's example because his death has given us right standing with God.

8. (a) In justification, God pronounces that we are good in his sight.

(b) In justification, God sends his Spirit to make us good.

9. (a) Christ's intercession at God's right hand gives us favor in the sight of God.

(b) It is the indwelling Christ that gives us favor in God's sight.

10. (a) Only by faith in the doing and dying of Christ can we satisfy the claims of the Ten commandments.

(b) By the power of the Holy Spirit living in us, we can satisfy the claims of the Ten Commandments.

Answers: 1a; 2a; 3a; 4b; 5a; 6b; 7b; 8a; 9a; 10a.

Revised and adapted from a pamphlet published in 1972 by the Australian Forum, an apparently defunct organization.