

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

## What Think Ye of Rome—Part 2

### An Evangelical Appraisal of Contemporary Catholicism

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#### SYNOPSIS

Catholicism possesses a foundational orthodoxy reflected in its affirmation of the crucial doctrines expressed in the ancient ecumenical creeds. Nevertheless, Protestants detect serious problems in Catholic theology in that the church affirms teachings that are extraneous and inconsistent with its orthodox (Christian) foundation. These doctrinal errors are of such a serious nature that aspects of orthodoxy are undermined, thus warranting the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century and the continued separation of present-day Protestantism from Catholicism. These divergent views, however, do not warrant classifying Catholicism as a non-Christian religion or cult. The doctrinal disputes of the Reformation era remain substantially unchanged today, extending to: (1) religious authority, (2) the doctrine of justification, (3) beliefs concerning the Virgin Mary, and (4) sacramentalism and the Mass. The twentieth century trend toward religious pluralism has also become a serious concern.

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A prominent evangelical theologian was asked the pointed question, “What separates Catholics from evangelical Protestants?” The theologian retorted, “Nothing and everything!” This response, though paradoxical, is actually keenly insightful. When one examines the common doctrinal ground between the two camps, it seems *nothing*

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separates Catholics from evangelicals. When one explores the areas of difference, however, it seems that virtually *everything* separates Catholics from evangelicals.

In Part One of this series, we gained some appreciation and understanding of contemporary Catholicism by exploring some of its unique sociological features. We also began our theological appraisal by probing the common areas of doctrinal agreement between classical Catholicism and historic Protestantism—especially those crucial doctrines succinctly summarized in the ancient ecumenical creeds.

In the present article we will extend our appraisal of Catholicism by, first, discussing to what extent evangelical Protestants consider the Catholic church to be an authentic Christian church. Second, we will respond to the charge made primarily by popular fundamentalists that Catholicism is a completely invalid expression of Christianity, and therefore a “non-Christian” or “anti-Christian” cult or religion. In this connection we will also address the common errors in reasoning and methodology made by those who insist that Catholicism should be classified as nothing more than an apostate, non-Christian cult. Third, we will begin our own critical evaluation of Catholicism by outlining the central doctrinal issues that sharply separate evangelical Protestants from Roman Catholics.

## IS THE CATHOLIC CHURCH A CHRISTIAN CHURCH?

My research convinces me that the majority of evangelical Protestant theologians and scholars who are knowledgeable concerning Catholicism would be perplexed to hear Catholicism classified *simply* as a “non-Christian religion” or an “anti-Christian cult.”<sup>1</sup> This perplexity would stem from the fact that no matter how theologically deviant Catholicism might be—even if in some respects apostate—it certainly does possess a structural or foundational orthodoxy, reflected in its adherence to the ancient ecumenical creeds (see Part One).<sup>2</sup> As such, it should be considered at least provisionally a Christian church body. Certainly, most evangelical Protestant scholars would also insist that the

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<sup>1</sup> I have personally interviewed many of Protestant evangelicalism’s finest theologians (Reformed, Lutheran, Baptist, Episcopal, Evangelical Free, Dispensational, etc.), virtually all of whom thought the classification of Catholicism as a non-Christian religion or cult was misguided and inaccurate. Most were extremely critical of Catholicism at numerous points, but still rejected the above classification.

<sup>2</sup> Orthodoxy refers to the body of essential biblical teachings, especially (but not completely) reflected in the ancient ecumenical creeds. The doctrines summarized in the creeds are the foundation of Christian orthodoxy.

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unfortunate unbiblical elements found in Catholicism mitigate against, or in some instances tend to undermine, aspects of that foundational orthodoxy.

Recognizing and understanding this *tension* in Catholic theology of the *right hand giving* (foundational orthodoxy) and yet the *left hand taking away* (affirming teaching that is inconsistent with that orthodoxy) is, in this writer's opinion, a key to formulating a sound Protestant evaluation of Catholicism. Despite this tension, however, most evangelical scholars believe that the core orthodoxy is never entirely eclipsed. For example, though very critical of Catholicism at numerous points, evangelical theologian John Jefferson Davis of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary stated that "conservative evangelicals could affirm about 85 percent of what Catholics believe."<sup>3</sup>

Even the Protestant Reformers<sup>4</sup> themselves clearly acknowledged that Catholicism as a system affirmed the basic articles of the historic Christian faith. The Reformers simply charged that in both belief and practice the medieval Catholic church compromised its formal adherence to orthodoxy—specifically as related to its obscuring and undermining the gospel message.

Because the Catholic church would not itself reform, the Reformation became an unavoidable though tragic necessity. However, while the Reformers called into question the Catholic church's right to be called a "true church" (because it was failing to preach the true gospel), they did not think it had lost all the qualities of a true church. For example, they did not require the rebaptizing of those who had once been baptized as Roman Catholics.<sup>5</sup> In a book discussing the relationship of heretical doctrine to historic Christian orthodoxy, theologian Harold O. J. Brown of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School made this insightful comment concerning Catholicism:

The strongest accusation that can be made against Roman Catholicism from this perspective is not that it is heretical in structure, but that it is heretical in effect, in that it effectively undercuts its own formal adherence to the major Christological stands of its official creeds. In other words, Reformation Protestantism acknowledges that Catholicism possesses the fundamental articles of the faith, but

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<sup>3</sup> Davis expressed this to me during a private interview regarding Catholicism.

<sup>4</sup> When I speak of the Reformers, in this context I am speaking of the magisterial or classical Reformers, including Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Knox. I am specifically excluding those who would be part of the radical reformation.

<sup>5</sup> See John M. Frame, *Evangelical Reunion* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 37. If the Catholic church were a completely false church, then its sacraments would be completely invalid.

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claims that it so overlays them with extraneous and sometimes false doctrines that the foundations are no longer accessible to the majority of Catholic believers.<sup>6</sup>

While Catholicism is foundationally or structurally an orthodox Christian church (affirming the creeds), Reformed theologian Roger Nicole is nevertheless correct in stating: “Reformation Protestants believe that much in Catholic theology tends to undermine and compromise that orthodox Christian confession—especially as it relates to the crucial issue of the gospel message.”<sup>7</sup> In agreement with most evangelical scholars, then, the Christian Research Institute regards Roman Catholicism as neither a cult (non-Christian religious system) nor a biblically sound church, but a historically Christian church which is in desperate need of biblical reform.<sup>8</sup>

The compromises in Catholic theology are so serious as to warrant the sixteenth century Reformation and the continued separation on the part of present-day Protestantism. At the same time, however, these compromises are *not serious enough* to warrant the extreme classification of Catholicism as a non-Christian religion or anti-Christian cult. Some have criticized this position for not being more definite; however, rarely does one find simple black and white answers to complex theological issues. As theologian Desmond Ford has articulately stated: “Theological truths are seldom pure, and almost never simple.” The task of correctly understanding and evaluating the long history, intricate doctrine, and diverse practices of Roman Catholicism is no simple chore.

## IS THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AN ANTI-CHRISTIAN CULT?

Even with the significant areas of doctrinal agreement between Catholics and Protestants (*see* Part One), a notable number of Protestant fundamentalists insist that Catholicism is an anti-Christian cult. Organizations and individuals (some of them quite popular) who classify Catholicism as a cult include: Chick Publications, Alberto Rivera’s Anti-Christ Information Center, Tony Alamo’s Christian Foundation, Bill Jackson’s Christians Evangelizing Catholics, Albert James Dager’s *Media Spotlight*, and Dave Hunt’s *The Berean Call*. (This is not to say that all of these people belong in the same category—the latter three are more respectable than the former three.) Actually, this is just a few of many individuals and organizations that classify Catholicism as an anti-Christian cult. Because

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<sup>6</sup> Harold O. J. Brown, *Heresies* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1984), 310.

<sup>7</sup> Nicole expressed this to me during a private interview regarding Catholicism.

<sup>8</sup> Some people have charged that this view of Catholicism does not reflect the view held by CRI’s founder Walter R. Martin. This is a false charge. This writer has been CRI’s specialist on Roman Catholicism for the past seven years, and I came to embrace this view, at least in part, from interacting with Martin himself.

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their position receives a wide hearing in some evangelical circles, we must address their claim.

## Ten Reasons Why Catholicism Is Not a Cult

What those who label Catholicism a cult do not seem to understand is that even if one considers Catholicism to be unscriptural and greatly mistaken on many important doctrinal issues (certainly this writer does), it is simply misplaced and erroneous—for a variety of reasons—to classify Roman Catholicism as an anti-Christian cult. Let me give ten reasons why I say this.<sup>9</sup>

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(1) Cults, generally speaking, are small splinter groups with a fairly recent origin. Most American-based cults, for example, have to a greater or lesser degree splintered off from other Christian groups, and emerged in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries. Catholicism, on the other hand, is the largest body within Christendom, having almost a two-thousand-year history (it has historical continuity with apostolic, first century Christianity), and is the ecclesiastical tree from which Protestantism originally splintered.

(2) Cults are usually formed, molded, and controlled by a single individual or small group. The Catholic church, by contrast, has been molded by an incalculable number of people throughout its long history. Catholicism is governed by creeds, councils, and the ongoing magisterium.

(3) Cults typically exercise rigid control over their members and demand unquestioning submission, with disobedience punished by shunning and/or excommunication. While Catholicism has exercised a triumphalism and an unhealthy control over its members in times past, this is far less true today, especially since the Second Vatican Council. Contemporary Catholicism's broad diversity as illustrated in Part One of this series certainly proves this point.

(4) An appropriate description of a cult is "a religious group originating as a heretical sect and maintaining fervent commitment to heresy."<sup>10</sup> Regardless of one's criticism of Catholicism, even if it *is* heretical at certain points, it does not fit this description. It does not *originate* in heresy, and, as was mentioned before, it possesses a structural orthodoxy that other cults simply do not have (*see* comparison chart).

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Kreeft offers five good reasons why Catholicism is not a cult. All five, to some extent, are included in my list. ("The Catholic Market," *Bookstore Journal*, February 1992, 28.)

<sup>10</sup> Robert Bowman, Jr., *Orthodoxy and Heresy* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 115.



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(5) Cults (when defined as heretical sects) are classified as such because of their outright denial or rejection of essential Christian doctrine. Historically, this has principally been a denial of the nature of God (the Trinity), the nature of the incarnate Christ (divine-human), and of the absolute necessity of divine grace in salvation (the Pelagian controversy).<sup>11</sup> While Protestants have accused Catholicism of having an illegitimate authority and of confusing the gospel (two serious charges to be examined later), Catholicism *does* affirm the Trinity, the two natures of Christ, and that salvation is ultimately a gift of God's grace (a rejection of Pelagianism).<sup>12</sup> I challenge anyone to name a recognized cult that affirms the Trinity or the full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ (*see* comparison chart).

(6) Cults frequently have a low view of the Bible, replacing or supplementing it with their own so-called "sacred writings." In fact, cults often argue that the Bible has been, to some extent, corrupted and therefore their writings are needed to restore the truth. While Catholicism's acceptance of noncanonical writings (the Apocrypha) and placing of apostolic tradition on par with Scripture are fundamental problems to the Protestant, Catholics nevertheless retain a high view of the Bible (inspired and infallible) and see it as their central source of revelation.

(7) Cults usually have some kind of authoritarian, totalistic leader or prophet. While some feel that the pope fits this category, in reality the pope governs the church with heavy dependence upon the bishops (college of cardinals), and within the restrictions of the official teaching of the church. Protestants clearly disagree with the authority and exalted titles given the pope, but he still does not fit the category of a cult leader.

(8) A frequent characteristic of cults is their emphasis on a "remnant identity" — that is, they claim to be God's exclusive agent or people who restore "authentic Christianity," which has been corrupted or lost. Usually this type of restorationism has an accompanying anticreedal and antihistorical mindset. While Catholicism

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<sup>11</sup> The primary doctrinal controversies of early church history centered on these three issues, as is reflected in the creeds. Pelagianism was a heresy that originated in the late fourth century stressing man's ability to take the initial steps toward salvation, apart from the special intervening grace of God. *See* Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), s.v. "Pelagius, Pelagianism," 833-34.

<sup>12</sup> Council of Trent (Canons on Justification no. 1): "If anyone saith that man may be justified before God by his own works, whether done through the teaching of human nature or that of the law, without the grace of God through Jesus Christ let him be anathema." *Dogmatic Canons and Decrees* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, 1977), 49. Some Reformation Protestants have nonetheless accused Catholicism of affirming semi-Pelagianism; *see* Robert C. Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of Church History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), s.v. "The Pelagian Controversy," 17.

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has at times been guilty of an unfortunate exclusivity<sup>13</sup> (some Protestant churches have also), they emphatically deny restorationism, and strongly emphasize the continuity of God's church throughout history.

(9) Those who classify Roman Catholicism as a cult (an inauthentic and invalid expression of Christianity) usually also give the Eastern Orthodox church the same classification. What they do not realize, however, is that if both of these religious bodies are non-Christian, then there was no authentic Christian church during most of the medieval period. Contrary to what some Protestants think, there was no independent, nondenominational, Bible-believing church on the corner (or in the caves) during most of the Middle Ages.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, the schismatic groups who were around at the time were grossly heretical.<sup>15</sup> So much for the gates of hell not prevailing against the church (Matt. 16:18).

Some try to sidestep this argument by reasoning that as long as there were even a few individuals who remained biblically orthodox apart from the institutional or organized church, then those select individuals constituted God's authentic church (a remnant)—thus the church was never truly overcome. This thinking, though containing an element of truth, is not completely correct. It is true that the church has an invisible<sup>16</sup> and local dimension to it, but it also has a visible and organizational dimension (John 17:21). While the church is primarily a community of believers, it also functions as an institution through which believers encounter the ministry of the Word and the sacraments (baptism and the Lord's Supper). Scripture does not allow for the sharp distinction between the spiritual and organizational dimensions of the church that some would like to draw.<sup>17</sup>

(10) Even with the serious problems evident in Roman Catholic theology from a Protestant point of view, Catholic doctrine overall does not fit the pattern of the recognized cult groups (*see* comparison chart). Catholicism affirms most of what the cults deny and possesses an orthodox foundation which all cult groups lack.

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<sup>13</sup> Statements from the Second Vatican Council concerning ecumenism reflect a new approach taken by Catholicism toward other churches (Decree on Ecumenism, no. 3). *See* Walter M. Abbott, gen. ed., *The Documents of Vatican II*, Joseph Gallagher (New York: The American Press, 1966), 345-46.

<sup>14</sup> *See* Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, 1 and 3 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971).

<sup>15</sup> *See* Walton, s.v. "Medieval Dissenters and Heretical Groups," 28.

<sup>16</sup> The "invisible church" consists of all truly regenerate believers (i.e., the elect) throughout history. The "visible church" consists of all persons (true believers and merely professing believers alike) in the current church on earth.

<sup>17</sup> Frame, 28.

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In summary, a cult generally emerges as a group that rejects orthodoxy and remains fervently committed to heresy. Catholicism's problem, by contrast, is of a different nature. It affirms teaching which is both extraneous and inconsistent with its historical affirmation of orthodoxy. From an evangelical Protestant viewpoint, Catholicism is definitely "too much" —but the cults are clearly "not enough."

Roman Catholicism is *not* a cult. The classification of Catholicism as given above is much more accurate and preferable to the overly simplistic and misguided classification of Catholicism as a non-Christian cult.

## Rome's Seduction of Evangelical Christianity?

There is certainly legitimate room for disagreement among evangelicals as to just how Catholicism should be viewed (though, as previously noted, most scholars would concur in large part with our discussion above). But the approach to Catholicism taken by some Protestant fundamentalists is simply unacceptable. This approach not only condemns Catholicism as a non-Christian religion or cult, but also suggests that anyone who disagrees with that condemnation is somehow being seduced by the allegedly all-powerful Vatican. If one dares defend Catholicism from the unfair charge of being called a cult, then one is either knowingly or unknowingly aiding and abetting the enemy, and betraying the Protestant Reformation.

While this writer derives no pleasure from singling out other Christians for criticism, in this case it is both necessary and appropriate. There are many who take this unfortunate approach to Catholicism, but one fundamentalist writer in particular consistently makes very serious charges: the popular and controversial discernment ministry author, Dave Hunt. Hunt, in an article entitled "A Cult Is a Cult," states that Catholicism is "the most seductive, dangerous and largest cult..."<sup>18</sup> He also states that major evangelical leaders, apologists, and cult experts are cooperating with, and therefore being seduced by, Catholicism as never before.<sup>19</sup>

Hunt does at points raise some legitimate doctrinal concerns regarding Catholicism. However, his overall approach in evaluating and classifying Catholicism is both logically and theologically flawed. As our previous discussion demonstrated, Catholicism simply

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<sup>18</sup> Dave Hunt, "A Cult Is a Cult," *CIB Bulletin*, June 1991, 1.

<sup>19</sup> Hunt indicts numerous ministries for their compromising cooperation with Rome, including: Campus Crusade for Christ, InterVarsity, Youth with a Mission, Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, and Chuck Colson's Prison Fellowship. In the wake of this seduction, however, Hunt asserts that "most cult experts refuse to identify this horrendous cult as such! Instead, they accept it as 'Christian.'" These cult experts and apologists include the late Walter Martin, Hank Hanegraaff, Norman Geisler, Josh McDowell, Don Stewart, Bob and Gretchen Passantino, and James Sire.



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does not fit the category of a non-Christian cult. Further, Hunt seems unwilling to take into account the vast areas of doctrinal agreement between classical Catholicism and historic Protestantism. While he rightly points to many unbiblical elements and false teachings within Catholicism (issues which, by the way, have been pointed out by the very apologists he criticizes<sup>20</sup>), he fails repeatedly to identify and draw carefully nuanced theological distinctions. Instead, he erroneously asserts that Catholics embrace a “different God, a different Jesus Christ...”<sup>21</sup> Certainly no one has been more critical of the excesses of Catholic theology than were the Reformers. However, even they affirmed that Catholicism embraced the triune nature of God and the two natures of Jesus Christ as expressed in the credal statements of Nicaea, Constantinople, and Chalcedon.

What is worse than Hunt’s assertion that Catholicism is a cult is his insistence that anyone who arrives at a different position is simply deceived — and thus at risk of compromising their gospel witness. Consequently, Hunt impugns the character of all of those individuals and ministries simply because they disagree with his theological assessment of Catholicism.<sup>22</sup>

The fact is that all of the cult experts and apologists Hunt has criticized have very strong criticisms of Catholicism at numerous points (this writer knows most of them personally). They simply do not classify the Catholic church as a non-Christian cult. They are not being seduced, nor are they compromising — they merely disagree with many of Hunt’s conclusions! Cannot evangelicals have honest areas of disagreement without being labeled compromisers?

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<sup>20</sup> The Christian Research Institute has published numerous works which have been very critical of certain areas of Catholic theology. See, for example, Elliot Miller and Kenneth R. Samples, *The Cult of the Virgin* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992). Simply because we do not classify Catholicism as a cult does not mean that we give Catholicism a clean bill of theological health, or that we are not uncompromisingly critical of Catholicism at numerous points. In fact, one Catholic apologetics organization accuses CRI of being anti-Catholic. While the accusation is false (CRI is not anti-Catholic in emphasis, but pro-Protestant), it serves to illustrate that CRI is consistently critical of the excesses of Catholic theology.

<sup>21</sup> Dave Hunt, *Global Peace* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1990), 141.

<sup>22</sup> When discussing why evangelical apologists do not list Catholicism as a cult, Hunt stated: “The current deafening silence concerning the Catholic Church may have less to do with one’s courage than with the practical concern that to oppose Rome severely limits one’s audience” (*Ibid*). Likewise, the Research and Education Foundation affirms that “it is to be feared that the desire to get money out of millions of Catholics is stronger than the desire to defend the truth by exposing error wherever it is found.” (Larry Wessels, “Lack of Discernment among Apologetic Ministries?” *The Researcher*, February 1993, 3.) This is an unconscionable ad hominem — and patently false. The anti-Catholic approach seems to sell quite well within fundamentalism — just ask Jack Chick.

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The last of Hunt's charges which should be addressed is his claim that "to deny that Roman Catholicism is a cult is to repudiate the Reformation and mock the more than 1 million martyrs who died at Rome's hands as though they gave their lives for no good reason!"<sup>23</sup> I find this charge to be personally unsettling. As a Reformed (Calvinist) Christian and apologist, I have great admiration for the sixteenth century Reformers. In fact, as a conservative Presbyterian, I adhere to the Westminster Confession of Faith (a Reformed confession of 1647). However, while I am not willing to repudiate the Reformation, neither am I willing to classify Catholicism as a non-Christian cult (though I remain staunchly critical of Catholic theology overall).

Let us examine Hunt's reasoning on this point. His argument seems to follow this pattern: Either one classifies Catholicism as a non-Christian cult, or one is guilty of repudiating the Protestant Reformation. As a Protestant, one could not possibly want to repudiate the Reformation. Catholicism must therefore be classified as a cult. This argument is a classic example of the informal logical fallacy known as the "false bifurcation" (also known as the "black-and-white," "either-or," or "false alternatives") fallacy.<sup>24</sup>

The error in Hunt's reasoning is twofold. First, he assumes *too few* alternatives. There are other possible alternative classifications for Catholicism that would not repudiate the Reformation, including other critical classifications such as the one we discussed earlier. By erroneously reducing the number of alternatives, he has oversimplified the problem and is clearly thinking in extremes. Second, he assumes (illegitimately) that one of his jointly exhaustive alternatives must be true (ergo—Catholicism is a cult). Hunt's disjunctive (either-or) premise is false, and his argument is unsound.

While some individuals unfortunately exaggerate the theological faults of Catholicism, there remain in reality some central doctrinal differences between Roman Catholics and evangelical Protestants. It is to these areas of difference that we now turn.

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<sup>23</sup> Hunt, "A Cult Is a Cult," 1.

<sup>24</sup> See Edward Damer, *Attacking Faulty Reasoning*, 2d ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1987), 56.

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## WHAT SEPARATES ROMAN CATHOLICS FROM EVANGELICAL PROTESTANTS?

There are many areas of difference between Catholicism and evangelical Protestantism.<sup>25</sup> These areas extend to both doctrines and practices, and range from very minor differences to those that can only be considered major points of contention. The following is just a brief list of the most consequential doctrinal differences between the two groups.<sup>26</sup> These are areas in which Catholicism generally differs with virtually all of the specific denominations within evangelical Protestantism. These areas obviously overlap and have significant implications for further areas of theology and religious practice. We will briefly note the general concerns expressed by Protestants.

### Authority

The question of authority is an area of central dispute between Catholics and Protestants. The Reformers referred to it as the *formal cause* of the Reformation. Catholics affirm a triad of authority: Scripture, apostolic tradition, and the teaching office of the church (magisterium). Implications of this authority system include: the Petrine doctrine (primacy of Peter), apostolic succession, papal supremacy and infallibility, and, as it relates to Scripture, the acceptance of the Apocrypha.

Protestants, by contrast, reject the Catholic system in favor of the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone as the primary and absolute norm of doctrine). *Sola Scriptura* implies the authority, clarity, and sufficiency of Scripture, and uniquely gives Scripture alone the role of final arbiter in all matters of faith and morals.<sup>27</sup>

Evangelicals charge the Catholic church with affirming an illegitimate authority system and express great concern about Catholicism's decision to: (1) place human traditions on par with God's written Word, (2) grant infallibility to the church (magisterium), (3) subordinate the individual believer's interpretation of Scripture to the magisterium, (4) affirm the primacy and infallibility of the pope, and (5) introduce noncanonical books

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<sup>25</sup> Certain differences can be attributed to the vast diversity found within evangelical Protestantism. Some Protestant denominations will have many more areas of agreement with Catholicism than others (e.g., liturgical and sacramental Protestant churches).

<sup>26</sup> For an excellent overall evaluation of Catholicism from an evangelical perspective, see "An Evangelical Perspective on Roman Catholicism I and II," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 10 (1986): 342-64, and 11 (1987): 78-94; and Tony Lane, "Evangelicalism and Roman Catholicism," *Evangelical Quarterly* 61, 4 (1989): 351-64.

<sup>27</sup> Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), s.v. "Sola Scriptura," 284.

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into the canon (the Apocrypha). Evangelicals believe that Catholicism's misguided authority structure has allowed numerous unbiblical teachings to arise in the church.

We will return for a more thorough discussion of this crucial issue of authority in Part Three of this series.

## Justification

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Also of central dispute between evangelicals and Catholics is the crucial soteriological doctrine of justification. The Reformers referred to this doctrine as the *material cause* of the Reformation. Although we can only summarize the views here, we will also return to this issue in Parts Three and Four.

Theologian and Reformation scholar Peter Toon summarizes the main features of the official Roman doctrine of justification:

1. Justification is both an event and a process. An unrighteous man becomes a righteous man. Becoming a child of God in baptism and having the remission of sins, the Christian is made righteous. (If during this process he should lose faith or fall away, he may be restored through the sacrament of penance.)
2. Justification occurs because of the "infusion" of the grace of God into the soul, whereby inherent righteousness becomes one of the soul's characteristics.
3. This imparted, "infused" righteousness is described as the "formal cause" of justification. The "meritorious cause" is Christ's passion and death.
4. The believer will only know for certain that he is justified at the end of the process. In the meantime, his constant duty is to co-operate with the grace of God given to him.<sup>28</sup>

Oxford theologian and internationally recognized authority on the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith, Alister McGrath, summarizes the Reformation Protestant position on justification:

1. Justification is the forensic [i.e., legal] declaration that the Christian is righteous, rather than the process by which he or she is made righteous. It involves a change in status rather than in nature.
2. A deliberate and systematic distinction is made between justification (the external act by which God declares the believer to be righteous) and

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<sup>28</sup> Peter Toon, *Protestants and Catholics* (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1983), 87-88.

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sanctification or regeneration (the internal process of renewal by the Holy Spirit).

3. Justifying righteousness is the alien righteousness of Christ, imputed to the believer and external to him, not a righteousness that is inherent within him, located within him, or in any way belonging to him.
4. Justification takes place *per fidem propter Christum* [by faith on account of Christ], with faith being understood as the God-given means of justification and the merits of Christ the God-given foundation of justification.<sup>29</sup>

While the Protestant Reformers were essentially unified in their understanding of justification, modern-day evangelicalism is much less so.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, today's Reformation Protestants have consistently criticized the Catholic position for: (1) failing to recognize that justification is solely a judicial act of God that changes our status but not our state; (2) not making the necessary distinction between justification (being *declared* righteous) and sanctification (being *made* righteous); (3) interpreting justifying righteousness as infused and intrinsic, rather than imputed and extrinsic; (4) failing to see that assurance is a necessary byproduct of being justified; and (5) making justification a synergistic (man cooperating with God) process rather than a monergistic (God working alone) act.

Because Reformation Protestants see the doctrine of justification by faith as the very heart of the gospel, this dispute takes on extreme significance. While it is important to understand the nuanced doctrinal points described above, the issue of how one is justified before God is more than just an academic theological debate. Reformation Protestants believe that to confuse or compromise the doctrine of justification is to run the dangerous risk of obscuring the very gospel of Christ. Following the Reformers, today's Reformation Protestants believe that the Catholic church's soteriological system has actually placed obstacles in the way of Catholics entering in to an authentically saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

## Mariology

It might rightly be said that evangelicals have a tendency to ignore Jesus' mother Mary. Catholics, on the other hand, greatly exalt her. Such dogmas as the Immaculate Conception and bodily Assumption, coupled with such titles as "Queen of Heaven,"

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<sup>29</sup> Alister McGrath, *Justification by Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 61.

<sup>30</sup> The Reformed and Arminian theological traditions have important differences in their formulation of this doctrine. In a similar way, current Dispensational theologians are sharply divided concerning the so-called "lordship salvation" controversy.



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“Queen of all Saints,” and the “Immaculate Spouse of the Holy Spirit,” make Mary in the minds of Catholics the most exalted of all God’s creatures.

While Catholics propose Mary as a point of unity with other Christians, most evangelicals see Mariology as a formidable barrier between themselves and Catholics. Even evangelicals who are for the most part sympathetic to Catholicism generally view this element of Catholic belief as grossly unbiblical. One evangelical commission on evaluating Catholic Mariology stated: “We as evangelical Christians are deeply offended by Rome’s Marian dogmas because they cast a shadow upon the sufficiency of the intercession of Jesus Christ, lack all support from Scripture and detract from the worship which Christ alone deserves.”<sup>31</sup> Although the documents of Vatican II inform us that Mary’s exalted role “neither take away from nor add anything to the dignity and efficacy of Christ the one Mediator,”<sup>32</sup> most evangelicals believe Catholic Mariology actually undermines the foundation of orthodox Catholic Christology.

## Sacramentalism and the Mass

Sacramentalism is a central and vital component within Catholic theology. For Catholics, sacraments are “effective signs” of grace instituted by Christ. Catholicism’s seven sacraments (baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, extreme unction [last rites], holy orders[ordination into the priesthood], and matrimony) both signify grace and cause it to happen *ex opere operato* (“they work by their own working”).

While various evangelical denominations differ in their acceptance and approach to sacraments (or ordinances), generally speaking evangelicals differ with the Catholic view in number, nature, and operation of the sacraments. The Eucharist and the sacrificial nature of the mass in particular engender great dispute between Catholics and evangelicals. Both of these areas of concern have direct Christological implications.

## Religious Pluralism

From the time of Cyprian until modern times, the Catholic church has affirmed the slogan *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (no salvation outside the [visible body of the one institutional] church). Vatican II affirms, however, that salvation is “not only for Christians, but for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way.”<sup>33</sup> These statements of Vatican II clearly opened the door for German theologian Karl Rahner’s “anonymous

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<sup>31</sup> “An Evangelical Perspective on Roman Catholicism I,” 356-57.

<sup>32</sup> “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” chapter 8, *see* Abbott, 92.

<sup>33</sup> As cited in Lane, 353.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Christianity" —the belief in the possibility of salvation without explicit Christian faith, even through non-Christian religions.

While Catholic theology assures us that all the redeemed are ultimately saved through Christ alone, evangelicals are greatly concerned that these pluralistic trends greatly detract from the uniqueness of Christianity and open the Pandora's box of universalism. In light of this pluralism, is there any necessary reason to consider becoming Catholic, or even Christian?

In Part Three of this series we will examine the issues of authority and justification in more detail.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

A DOCTRINAL COMPARISON OF CATHOLICISM AND THE CULTS							
DOCTRINES	RC	JW	LDS	CS	WCG*	TWI	UPC
All theistic attributes of God	affirm	deny	deny	deny	deny	deny	distort
Triune nature of God	affirm	deny	deny	deny	deny	deny	deny
Personality of the Holy Spirit	affirm	deny	distort	deny	deny	deny	distort
Two natures of Christ (God-human)	affirm	deny	distort	deny	deny	deny	distort
Virgin birth	affirm	affirm	deny	deny	affirm	distort	affirm
Justification by faith	compro.	deny	deny	deny	deny	distort	compro.
Sufficiency of Christ's atonement	compro.	deny	deny	deny	deny	distort	distort
Christ's bodily resurrection	affirm	deny	affirm	deny	deny	compro.	affirm
Eternal conscious punishment	affirm	deny	distort	deny	deny	deny	affirm
Literal return of Christ	affirm	distort	distort	deny	deny	affirm	affirm
Immortal soul	affirm	deny	distort	distort	deny	deny	affirm
Infallible/Inerrant Bible	affirm	distort	deny	deny	distort	distort	distort
Authority of the Bible	compro.	compro.	compro.	distort	compro.	compro.	compro.
Continuity of the church	affirm	deny	deny	deny	deny	deny	deny
Predestination	affirm	deny	deny	deny	deny	deny	deny
Salvation outside their ranks	compro.	deny	compro.	compro.	compro.	compro.	compro.
Total depravity	compro.	deny	deny	deny	deny	deny	deny
Eternal life in heaven	affirm	distort	distort	deny	deny	deny	affirm
Consciousness in the intermediate state	affirm	deny	affirm	deny	deny	deny	affirm
Final judgment	affirm	distort	distort	deny	distort	distort	affirm

\* These positions more rightly reflect Armstrongism. The current Worldwide Church of God seems to have moved somewhat toward orthodoxy, but has yet to accept the Trinity and remains in a state of flux.

**Identifications:**  
**RC:** Roman Catholicism  
**JW:** Jehovah's Witnesses  
**LDS:** Latter-day Saints  
**CS:** Christian Science  
**WCG:** Worldwide Church of God  
**TWI:** The Way International  
**UPC:** United Pentecostal Church

**Definitions:**  
 CRI distinguishes between teaching that is **aberrational** (a serious confusion or compromise of essential biblical truth) and teaching that is **heretical** (a continued outright denial or rejection of essential biblical truth).  
**affirm:** declare to be true  
**deny:** declare to be untrue  
**distort:** a serious change or negative alteration  
**compromise:** (compro.) an unacceptable blending, settlement, or concession

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

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