

Comparing and Contrasting Catholicism with Protestantism: Exposing Roman Catholic Theological Errors

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Abstract

Catholicism has not repented from its deviations from the Scriptures despite the Reformation in 1516 to correct their heresies, the errors of yesterday have been popping up today creating a lacuna of faith. The historic rot in the 16th-century Catholic Church which undermined the very heart of Christianity and the core Christian values triggered immorality, simony and abuse of office threw the Church into centuries of bleakness and prolonged darkness. Godliness became a means of financial gain as Tetzels sold indulgence in the name of salvation. Persisting heresies regarding the basic aspects of Roman Catholic doctrine such as Mariology, authority in the Church, the Papacy and infallibility, justification by faith and works, sacramentalism and the Eucharist dissuade the nature of the gospel of Christ. Celibacy moreover engrained the barricade between clergy and laity. Even though Catholicism grasps core orthodox beliefs of the faith, the Catholics overlap them with superfluous and sometimes false doctrines drawn from tradition which underscores a fundamental divide between Evangelicals and Catholicism. Despite efforts to bridge these gaps, the differences persist and are currently noticeable as were visible during the Protestant Reformation. Contemporary Roman Catholicism is undergoing a new interpretive chapter of its uniqueness however the result of such a development is somewhat volatile. The thrust of this paper is to examine significant distinctions between Catholics

and Protestants to ascertain the genuineness of Christian dogmas. This study employed historical and analytical methods of inquiry to examine these most interesting phenomena to get the desired outcome. Luther's rediscovery of the Bible had huge implications for a whole array of doctrinal beliefs and church practices. This timely study recommends a rethink of a total overhaul of Catholicism to return to sola Scriptura as an absolute, infallible, and inerrant Christian authority.

Keywords: Catholicism, Protestantism, Dogma, Luther and Errors

Introduction

A forthright polarisation between Protestantism¹ and Roman Catholicism is the gulf prevailing beyond imaginable reconceptualization. It is complicated to articulate whether Roman Catholics and Evangelicals will definitely share a mutual viewpoint. Too many basic issues are still indeterminate for such a prospect to be measured as practicable or even conceivable. After Jesus Christ was at the cross and He had finished His work, shedding His blood for the forgiveness of sins, He said. "It is finished: and He bowed his head, and gave up His spirit" (John 19:30). If His work was accomplished, why do Catholics hold that praiseworthy acts are indispensable to achieve salvation? If they believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and died for the sins of humanity, and rose from the dead, why is this not sufficient? This study is a comparative contrast between Catholicism and Protestantism on the basis of doctrinal teachings to determine the true gospel message of

¹ Protestants trail the theological doctrines of the Protestant Reformation, a drive that began in the 16th century with the aim of reforming the Catholic Church from apparent blunders, cruelties and divergences. Protestantism is synonymous with Evangelicalism as a section of Christianity that underlines justification of sinners through faith alone, the teaching that salvation comes by unmerited divine grace, the priesthood of all believers, and the Bible as the sole infallible cradle of authority for Christian faith and practice. The five solae abridge the rudimentary theological dogmas of mainstream Protestantism.

Christ. The gospel according to Rome is not the same as the gospel of Jesus Christ. The fundamental teachings of the contemporary Roman Catholic Church on important dogmas in light of Scripture demonstrate how the Catholic faith deviates from the Bible and transmits heresies in Christendom.

Catholicism² has many orthodox beliefs that rhyme with Protestantism, such as belief in the doctrine of the Trinity, and the full theistic attributes of God as Creator, Sustainer of all things, the Divinity of Jesus Christ, His virgin birth, incarnation, resurrection, ascension into heaven, and second coming. In addition, Catholics believe in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, His personality and divinity and partaking in the regeneration of the soul. Still, there are other doctrines thought by Roman Catholicism that deter the nature of the gospel message³.

Divergences in Dogmatic Teachings between Catholicism and Protestantism

There are many noteworthy discrepancies between Catholics and Protestants. Notwithstanding struggles to bridge these gaps, the variances continue and are still ongoing now as during the Protestant Reformation. In this work, a succinct synopsis of some key discrepancies will be examined alongside the Scriptures to ascertain reality.

² Catholicism is a tradition that places great emphasis on tradition. It recognizes that the Bible itself is the product of tradition or, more precisely, of many traditions. Jesus Christ gives access to God, so, for Catholicism, the Church gives access to Jesus Christ. The Roman Catholic Church had by Luther's day created a spiritual hierarchy that mediated God's grace from above to the people below, through the pope, bishops, and priests.

³ For example, see Protestant theologian Brown Harold O. J. alerted that even though Catholicism clutches to vital orthodox beliefs of the faith, the Catholic Church so overlaps them with peripheral and sometimes deceitful doctrines that the nitty-gritties are no longer available to the mainstream of Catholic believers. *Heresies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 310. Cf. Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with Catholics* (Eugene, Or.: Harvest House Publishers, 2000), 19.

Indulgences

Martin Luther⁴ was a German priest, theologian, author, professor and Augustinian monk. He is considered one of the most prominent characters in Western Christian history. He was an ordained priest in 1507 but later quizzed and overruled the Catholic teachings chiefly on indulgences. In the expedition for truth and peace for his distressed soul, Luther explored the scriptures, especially the books of Romans and Galatians as well as the works of Paul and Augustine. He experienced divine peace and was exposed to see even more clearly that the just shall live by faith and not by works of righteousness as opposed to salvation by indulgence. At Rome, Luther witnessed first-hand iniquitous calamity, debauchery, repulsive indecency and awful profanity rather than sanctity among all classes of the clergy. Against the profane and blasphemous sale of indulgence, Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Theses titled “Disputatio pro declaratione Virtutis indulgentiarum”, on the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg, Germany on All Saints Day, October 31, 1517, as the agenda and basis for debate. He proposed to amicably resolve the issues. In 1520, Pope Leo X demanded that Luther renounce his writings and when he refused, was declared a heretic and excommunicated in 1521. In that same year at the Diet of Worms, Emperor Charles V condemned Martin Luther as an outlaw.

Johann Tetzel’s coffer, now on display at St. Nicholas church in Juterbog, Germany Martin Luther, professor of moral theology at the University of Wittenberg and town

⁴ Luther’s 95 theses contain 95 revolutionary opinions that ignited the Protestant Reformation. There, Luther condemned the avalanche of excesses, immorality and corruption that abound in the Catholic Church. The First two parts of the theses contained Luther’s central contention that God intended all believers to seek repentance by faith alone (*solo fidei*) which leads to salvation and not by works or human efforts apart from divine grace. The rest of the theses were direct criticisms of the obnoxious practice of the sale of indulgence and other unscriptural traditions of the Catholic Church. He attached purgatory, the system and practice of the pope’s power and authority over purgatory and insisted that the doctrine of the merits of the saints had no biblical foundation.

preacher⁵, wrote the Ninety-five Theses against the contemporary practice of the church with respect to indulgences. In the Roman Catholic Church, which was practically the only Christian church in Western Europe at the time, indulgences were part of the economy of salvation. In this system, when Christians sin and confess, they are forgiven and no longer stand to receive eternal punishment in hell, but may still be liable to temporal punishment⁶. This punishment could be satisfied by the penitent's performing works of mercy⁷. If the temporal punishment is not satisfied during life, it needs to be satisfied in Purgatory, a place believed by Catholics to exist between Heaven and Hell. By indulgence, as may be understood in the sense of kindness, this temporal punishment could be lessened. Under abuses of the system of indulgences, clergy benefited by selling indulgences and the pope gave official sanction in exchange for a fee⁸.

Popes are empowered to grant plenary indulgences, which provide complete satisfaction for any remaining temporal punishment due to sins, and these were purchased on behalf of people believed to be in purgatory. This led to the popular saying that as soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs. Theologians at the University of Paris criticized this saying late in the 15th century⁹. Earlier critics of indulgences included John Wycliffe, who denied that the pope had jurisdiction over Purgatory. Jan Hus and his followers had advocated a more severe system of penance, in

⁵ Helmar Junghans, "Luther's Wittenberg". In MCKin Donald K (ed.). *Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003), 25.

⁶ Martin Brecht, *Sein Weg zur Reformation 1483–1521 [Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation 1483–1521]* (in German). Translated by James L. Schaff. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1985), 176.

⁷ Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses: With Introduction, Commentary, and Study Guide*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2015), xvi.

⁸ Mark A. Noll, *In the Beginning Was the Word: The Bible in American Public Life, 1492–1783* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 31.

⁹ Brecht, *Sein Weg zur Reformation*, 182.

which indulgences were not available¹⁰. Johannes Von Wesel had also attacked indulgences late in the 15th century¹¹. Political rulers had an interest in controlling indulgences because local economies suffered when the money for indulgences left a given territory. Rulers often sought to receive a portion of the proceeds or prohibited indulgences altogether, as Duke George did in Luther's Electoral Saxony¹².

In 1515, Pope Leo X granted a plenary indulgence intended to finance the construction of St Peter's Basilica in Roma¹³. It would apply to almost any sin, including adultery and theft. All other indulgence preaching was to cease for the eight years in which it was offered. Indulgence preachers were given strict instructions on how the indulgence was to be preached, and they were much more laudatory of the indulgence than those of earlier indulgences¹⁴. Johann Tetzel was commissioned to preach and offer indulgence in 1517, and his campaign in cities near Wittenberg drew many Wittenbergers to travel to these cities and purchase them since sales had been prohibited in Wittenberg and other Saxon cities¹⁵. The practice of granting indulgence for absolution of sin became increasingly corrupt. Though this practice was banned in Germany, it continued and by 1517, Johann Tetzel began its ruthless merchandize in order to raise funds for building St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Martin Luther seized the opportunity to oppose these at a moment in history whose time was ripe for religious and cultural reformation in Europe that impacted the entire global firmament.

¹⁰ Brecht, *Sein Weg zur Reformation*, 177.

¹¹ Paul R. Waibel, *Martin Luther: A Brief Introduction to His Life and Works* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan avidson.2005), 47.

¹² Brecht, *Sein Weg zur Reformation*, 169, 420.

¹³ Brecht, *Sein Weg zur Reformation*, 178.

¹⁴ Brecht, *Sein Weg zur Reformation*, 180.

¹⁵ Brecht, *Sein Weg zur Reformation*, 183.

Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony, guaranteed Martin Luther's safety against the sentence of Diet of Worms and took him away to the Castle of Warburg from where he translated the whole of the New Testament and other pamphlets and writings that fueled reformation efforts across Europe during his one-year refuge. Thus like his forebears, John Wycliffe and John Hus, Martin Luther pointed further generations of men back to the Bible (*sola scriptura*) and to their Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ¹⁶.

Authority of the Scripture

One major difference is the stance on the sufficiency and authority of Scripture. Protestants assert that the Bible alone is the divine revelation and the sole guide to salvation, a concept known as "*sola scriptura*." They believe Scripture is inspired by God and sufficient for teaching and guidance, as stated in 2 Timothy 3:16.

In contrast, Catholics reject *sola scriptura*, affirming instead the authority of both the Bible and sacred tradition. Many Catholic doctrines, such as purgatory and veneration of saints, draw from tradition rather than Scripture, which underscores a fundamental divide between the two groups.

Roman Catholicism accepts "Sacred Scripture" as being inspired by God and authoritative¹⁷. This collection of writings includes the 66 books that are accepted as Scripture by Protestants. However, this collection also includes the Apocrypha (which Catholics call the Deuterocanonical Books) which includes seven additional books (Tobit, Judith, the Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus [also called the Wisdom of Sirach], Baruch, and 1 and 2 Maccabees) and additional

¹⁶ Harry R. Boer, *A short History of the Early Church* (Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1983), 14-15.

¹⁷ Catholic Church. *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC): Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II*. 2d ed. (Vatican City, Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), 81.

sections to the books of Esther (six additional chapters) and Daniel (three additional chapters). Arguments for its inclusion include: These books were contained in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint (often abbreviated LXX, the Roman numeral for “70” based on the tradition that the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek by 72 translators, 6 Jewish elders from each of the 12 tribes, working together).¹⁸

Several church fathers, notably Augustine of Hippo (354-430), argued that the Septuagint was an inspired translation and so the characteristic of inspiration must extend to all books in the collection—which happened to include the books of the Apocrypha¹⁹. Due to Augustine’s influence, the Apocrypha was ratified in several regional councils over which he presided: the Council of Hippo (393), the Third Council of Carthage (397), and the Fourth Council of Carthage (419). Some distinctively Catholic doctrines are derived from and supported by the Apocrypha (e.g. purgatory and indulgences, in 2 Maccabees 12:40-45).

Was Peter the First Pope? (The Role of the Pope)

Catholics view the Pope as the Vicar of Christ with infallible authority on matters of faith, citing apostolic succession as validation. Protestants, however, assert that only Christ is the head of the Church and that authority derives from Scripture rather than lineage. The Roman Catholic Church believes they

¹⁸ Ron. Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with Catholics* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 2000). See Catholic Church. *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II*. 2d ed. (Vatican City, Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997). This is the most recent edition of the fundamental doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church, and is the best source for a definitive answer as to what official Roman Catholic teaching is. Both Allison and Rhodes interact with this work extensively.

¹⁹ Although the Apocrypha was ratified in three regional councils due to the influence of Augustine, it was not officially canonized for the entire Church until the Council of Trent (1545–1563), which was largely a reaction to the Protestant Reformation.

are the one true visible church. The “infallibility of the Pope” was pronounced dogma in 1870 at Vatican I. Considers the Pope infallible when speaking *ex-cathedra* (lit. “from the chair”) on matters of faith and practice. Apostolic succession Peter was appointed by Christ to be the visible head (pope) of the church. The present bishop of Rome (Pope Francis) is Peter’s successor.

Catholics believe that Peter was the first Pope, and Jesus appointed Peter as the first pope to be the visible head of the church (Mt. 16:18; Jn. 21:15-17). This is also called the primacy of Peter. Vatican I: The Apostolic See and the Roman Pontiff hold primacy over the whole world, and the Pontiff of Rome himself is the successor of the blessed Peter, the chief of the apostles, and is the true vicar of Christ and head of the whole Church and faith, and teacher of all Christians; and that to him was handed down in blessed Peter, by our Lord Jesus Christ, full power to feed, rule, and guide the universal Church, just as is also contained in the records of the ecumenical Councils and the sacred canons.²⁰

Another issue relates to the afterlife. Catholics believe in purgatory, a state where souls undergo purification before entering heaven, based on non-canonical teachings. Protestants hold that believers enter heaven directly upon death through faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice.

Jesus said you are Peter, “Rock”, and on this rock, ‘I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it’. “Upon this rock” means Peter’s confession; Peter had just made a statement that, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (v. 16), Jesus would be saying it’s upon this statement that his church would be built. “this rock” is feminine while “Peter” “rock” is masculine. Some Church Fathers like Augustine and John Chrysostom held this view that ‘upon this rock’ means Christ, Jesus could have been pointing at himself while he said

²⁰ Matthew 16:15-18; John 21 :15-17.

that. But it's quite a stretch to say Jesus was giving Peter infallible authority from this passage.

The Protestant view of John 21:15–17 demonstrates Peter's weakness and need for restoration after denying Christ three times. So there's no indication Jesus is giving Peter primacy or infallible authority. Peter would later need to be rebuked by Paul (Gal. 2:11-14). The Bible says no apostle was superior to another (Gal. 2:6,9). Peter was only one church pillar mentioned with James and John (Gal. 2:9), Paul put himself at the same level as Peter, James and John (Galatians 2:9). James, not Peter led the Jerusalem council (Acts 15). Peter seems to vanish entirely after this council (Acts 15). Peter called himself a fellow elder and "an (not the) apostle" (1 Pet. 1:1; 5:1-2). Paul's ministry was greater in scope (to Gentiles) than Peter's (to the Jews) (Gal. 2:8). Acts pays more attention to Paul's ministry than Peter's. It was Paul, not Peter who went on three missionary journeys and founded many churches.

Is Ongoing Confession Necessary? (Penance)

Penance is required for salvation; Penance is an ongoing confession to a priest for forgiveness of sins. Must merit the forgiveness by showing contrition. Following Roman Catholicism, during the first justification at the moment of baptism, individuals received sanctifying grace, a gift of the Holy Spirit. But, though sanctifying grace is a continuous influence, it is not perpetual. Catholics enlighten that just as Adam lost life in his soul, an individual can lose sanctifying grace in his soul through thoughtful sin. If this materializes, the individual can restore it through sacrament of penance, and confession of sin to a priest. Penance is one of the seven sacraments in Catholic theology²¹. It is not shocking that there is no assurance of salvation in Catholic theology. It all hinges on if the person has sanctifying grace in his soul at the moment

²¹ James G. McCarthy, *The Gospel according to Rome* (Eugene, Or: Harvest House, 2007), 56.

of death. Even if Catholic does penance, a temporal punishment for the sins still lingers and needs to be remediated through works²².

For Protestants,²³ believers are completely forgiven at justification; a person is immediately acquitted of all sin when they trust in Christ's salvation. Righteousness is transferred or imputed to believers by this initial faith alone (Rom. 5:1; Acts 13:38). Ongoing confession can be useful when it hampers a person's walk or for making restitutions, but it does not merit more forgiveness. Penance is based on the defective translation of the Bible; The Latin Vulgate translated "repent" as "do penance." This mistake was discovered in the 15th century by the humanists. For instance, in Acts 2:38, When he asked how to be saved, "Peter said to them: 'Do penance: and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of your sins.'" No mention of confession to priests, we're supposed to confess to other Christians, not priests: James 5:16 says, "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another..."

The Magisterium and Tradition

Magisterium denotes the official teaching of the body of the Roman Catholic Church. Generally, it's associated with the large house of cardinals and the leading theologians in the movement; but to end with, that all comes under, of course, the pope himself." Besides providing a trusted, unified voice to guide Catholics, this body also permits the church to make official decrees on contemporary issues which Scripture might not unswervingly address. While there is no correspondence to the magisterium for Protestants, it's thinkable to compare

²² Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures*, 129.

²³ Luther realised that penance has no backing of a concrete sign given by the Lord Himself, and so he joined the other Reformers in admitting only baptism and the Eucharist ("The Babylonian Captivity of the Church" in Martin Luther, *Three Treatises*, 2nd rev. ed. {Philadelphia, Pa: Fortress Press, 1970}, 258.

Catholic and Protestant views of the role of tradition. This is the official interpreter of faith and practice (denial of articulacy of scripture). Infused righteousness, protestants believe in imputed righteousness. A person is professed righteous by faith.

Roman Catholicism accepts “Sacred Tradition²⁴” on an equal status with and in addition to Scripture. “As a result, the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, “does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honoured with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence”²⁵. Tradition is interpreted to denote the beliefs and practices delegated by Christ to the apostles, who then entrusted them to succeeding bishops and popes in a perpetual chain through church history²⁶.

Roman Catholicism teaches that the pope exercises the supreme authority in the Roman Catholic Church, and both he and the Magisterium, the teaching ministry of the church, involving bishops in communion with the pope, have been given the task of authentically and infallibly interpreting both the Bible and Tradition. Catholics believe that Jesus appointed the apostles with Peter as their head to lead the church in His absence. The pope is considered to be Peter’s successor, and bishops are considered to be the successors of the apostles²⁷. The primary biblical support for this is Matthew 16:18-19 “And

²⁴ Catholic arguments for the acceptance of Tradition in addition to Scripture include 2 Thessalonians 2:15 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6. The Bible cannot be properly construed without tradition, Catholics argue that the rejection of Tradition in Protestantism is what has led to the divisions and multiple denominations in Protestantism.

²⁵ CCC, 82.

²⁶ CCC, 75-78.

²⁷ CCC 880

I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.....”

The Roman Pontiff, by the goal 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 continually exercise unimpeded”²⁸. The duty of interpreting the Word of God realistically has been entrusted solely to the Magisterium of the Church, that is, to the Pope and the bishops in communion with him²⁹. The Roman Pontiff, head of the college of bishops, delights in this infallibility in virtue of his office, when, as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful who confirms his brethren in the faith, he proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine about faith or morals....³⁰. This is what it means for the pope to speak *ex-cathedra*. The infallibility promised to the Church is also present in the body of bishops when, together with Peter’s successor, they exercise the supreme Magisterium, above all in an Ecumenical Council. When the Church through its supreme Magisterium proposes a doctrine ‘for belief as being divinely revealed,’ and as the teaching of Christ, the definitions ‘must be adhered to with the obedience of faith’³¹.

Protestantism does not admit Tradition in addition to Scripture. The idea of Tradition as an appendage to written Scripture is based on weak biblical backing. There is no reason to think that the apostles, whom the Holy Spirit would “guide into all the truth” (John 16:13) and for whom the Spirit would “teach all things and bring to remembrance all that [Jesus] has said” (John 14:26) would leave out anything that God wanted the church to have in inspired Scripture. Rather, we see repeated commands to “not to go beyond what is written” (1 Corinthians 4:6) and to “not add to the word that I command you, nor take

²⁸ CCC 882

²⁹ CCC, 100.

³⁰ CCC, 891.

³¹ CCC 891.

from it” (Deuteronomy 4:2) which shows the Jewish and Christian emphasis on what was written, as opposed to oral tradition.

The Catholic understanding of Tradition did not arise until the 14th century³², if this was such a vital body of knowledge, what took so long for it to be acknowledged? The Catholic Church’s claim to be the maintainer and advocate of divine revelation in Tradition essentially amounts to a claim of being infallibly led by the Holy Spirit apart from Scripture, which likewise was a new claim, prior to the 14th century³³. The history of the church at large displays all too evidently that church leaders and church councils can and do make errors, some of them serious.

A Scripture in addition to the Tradition structure contradicts statements in Scripture that argue that Scripture contains everything one needs to be saved and to live in a way that fully pleases God³⁴. Jesus warned about that very possibility in Matthew 15:2-3, 6 and Mark 7:8-9, 13.

The actual history of the popes does not support Catholic apostolic succession: Irenaeus’s list of the 12 bishops of Rome did not include Peter’s name (since he lived from 130-200, he certainly would have been aware of all the bishops who lived in the first century). Pope Honorius I (625-638) was soundly condemned by the Sixth General Council for teaching the heresy that Christ only had one will, how can an infallible pope teach fallible heresy? Galileo was tried and pronounced “vehemently suspected of heresy” by a pope and the Roman Catholic Church which held that the earth was the centre of the solar system. At several points in history, there has been more

³² See Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2011), 82-87.

³³ Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology*, Kindle Location, 1758.

³⁴ Psalm 19:7 “The law of the LORD is perfect” and 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

than one pope at a time, there have been about thirty-five antipopes in the history of the church³⁵.

Justification by Grace or Works

The Roman Catholic Church views justification as a process, dependent on the grace you receive by participating in the Church which is seen as a repository of saving grace. Good works are required for salvation, Roman Catholic Church says works are necessary for salvation: “by his good works the justified man really acquires a claim to supernatural reward from God.”³⁶

Catholic soteriology begins with God’s grace; meritorious works are required to obtain final salvation. This part will show that salvation in the Catholic view involves God’s grace and faith, but it is not by sola gratia (grace alone) or sola fide (by faith alone), but with works that man gets saved³⁷. The Roman Catholic view of justification starts with the first actual grace. It is termed the first actual grace because per Catholic theology, God seeks individuals first and provides them with this initial grace that will prepare the individual heart to respond to God and have faith (from the Catholic point of view, faith involves recognition of the Catholic major doctrines and creeds), and be prepared to receive “initial” justification through baptism. Per the Catholic view, this grace does not inevitably lead a person

³⁵ *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1983), 66.

³⁶ Trent in Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (Rockford, Ill.: Tan Books and Publishers, 1960), 264.

³⁷ Rhodes, 121-122. Roman Catholicism teaches that anyone “all who die in God’s grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven” (CCC 291). If the necessary purification is not accomplished on earth, it will be accomplished “after death in the state called Purgatory” (CCC 1472).

Thus, the Christian “should strive by works of mercy and charity, as well as by prayer and the various practices of penance, to put off completely the ‘old man’ and to put on the ‘new man’” (CCC 1473)

to answer, but the individual is required to cooperate and respond. If the individual responds, the grace moves from first actual grace to effectual grace³⁸.

Per the Council of Trent, if someone is determined to take baptism, they are moved to start a new life and obey God's commandments³⁹. Per Catholic theology, if someone discards this first actual grace and does not move to effectual grace, the individual is lost. But if the individual responds and moves to effectual grace and gets baptized, per Catholicism, original sin is removed. Presently per Catholic soteriology, the individual receives sanctifying grace and initial justification⁴⁰.

In January 1547 the Council of Trent articulated a final formula of justification that became a Catholic dogma. Trent beheld justification in two ways, initial and progressive justification. Initial justification per Catholic theology occurs at the moment of baptism when original sin is removed. Per Catholic theology, as the new believer participates in the sacraments of penance, and the Eucharist, he or she moves to progressive justification (amplified of righteousness). Trent clarified that the initial justification is only by God's grace, and it is in the progressive justification that man collaborates with God towards infusing righteousness. So when Catholic scholars cite James 2:24 which talks about being justified by works, they do not refer to the initial justification that comes only through grace, but to progressive justification (growth in righteousness) which Protestants referred to as sanctification. Nevertheless, Trent does assert that works are essential to attain salvation⁴¹. It is "by his good works the justified man obtains a claim to

³⁸ Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures*, 122.

³⁹ HJ. Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (Rockford: Tan Books, 1978), 32.

⁴⁰ Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures*, 122-23.

⁴¹ Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. Mackenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), page 225-226.

supernatural reward from God.”⁴² This is where Catholics and Protestants pathways. Also, in Catholic dogma baptism is not a symbol of faith but an act indispensable step towards salvation. The Council of Trent specified that if baptism were to be considered optional, not required for salvation, he or she would be anathema⁴³.

In contrast, Protestants repeatedly express the notion that salvation is by faith alone, through grace alone, in Christ alone⁴⁴. This declaration views justification as a specific point upon which God declares that you are righteous a point where you enter into the Christian life. Opposing to the Catholic faith of justification, the Protestant credence roots in justification by faith in Christ alone (Rom. 3:26; 3:28; 4:3; 5:1). Good works originate on account of the believer's appreciation of his redemption. The believer does not do good works to achieve redemption, he previously has it, but because of redemption to delight God⁴⁵.

Justification is a forensic pronouncement uttered by God regarding sinners who believe in Jesus. Luther asserts that as a righteous God, he does not only chastise and denounce the

⁴² Ludwig Ott and James Canon, *Fundamentals of Catholic dogma* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 1974), 264.

⁴³ Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, 32.

⁴⁴ The Five Solas of the Reformation also summarize important differences; Sola Scriptura, The Bible alone. The Bible alone has supreme authority, this is a rejection of the authority of the pope, tradition, etc. Sola Fide, Faith alone, Salvation is based on the finished work of Christ alone. Carries idea of forensic or imputed righteousness. Sola Gratia, Grace alone. A rejection of the idea that people also need works to be saved. Sola Christus, Christ alone, Christ is the only mediator between God and man. This is a rejection of the sacerdotalism (priestly class between people and God). Sola Deo Gloria – The Glory of God alone, a rejection of the special veneration given to saints, the pope, etc. See Geisler, Norman L. *Systematic Theology: Volume Four: Church, Last Things*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House, 2002; Geisler, Norman L., and Joshua M. Betancourt. *Is Rome the True Church? A Consideration of the Roman Catholic Claim*. Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 2008.

⁴⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 2007), 722; Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures*, 136.

unrighteous, but likewise He justifies the sinners by declaring them righteous⁴⁶. Again, Luther maintains that it is through faith alone that sinners are professed righteous so faith alone justifies⁴⁷. The doctrine of justification by faith alone is the dominant dogma of the Reformed Church⁴⁸. John Calvin articulated that, it is the foremost ground on which religion must be supported⁴⁹. In an elaboration in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, Justification is the work of God's free grace, in which he forgave all our sins, acknowledged us as righteous in his presence, only for the righteousness of Christ attributed to us, and took possession of faith alone⁵⁰.

There are many Biblical injunctions that back up the notion that believers are saved by faith alone⁵¹. Contrary to the

⁴⁶ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955), 25: 205.

⁴⁷ Luther's Works, 141. See Herman Ridderbos who clarifies that Righteousness by the law is not synonymous with righteousness by faith. Righteousness by the law is on account of the works or labors of man to get salvation. Righteousness by faith is salvation in Christ. God justifies sinners due to "righteousness" in Christ. This is because of what Christ has accomplished in his death and resurrection along with the unification of God's people in Christ (*Paulus: Pemikiran Utama Theologianya* [Surabaya: Momentum, 2010], 178).

⁴⁸ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Vol. 2, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994), XVI.i.1.

⁴⁹ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), trans. Henry Beveridge, 2 vols. (Repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), III.xi.1.

⁵⁰ G. I. Williamson, *The Shorter Catechism*. Volume 1. (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1970), 130.

⁵¹ Romans 1:16-17, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'" Titus 3:5-7 says "he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Romans 5:1; "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" Bible says we cannot work for a gift (and salvation is a gift); Ephesians 2:8-9; "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." Romans 4:4-5; "Now to the one who works, his wages are not

Catholic belief of justification, Protestants view it as a one-time prompt event where God affirms the believer to be just (right) in his sight as if he or she had never sinned. It does not involve good work. It is a gift from God at the moment an individual places his faith in Christ for his salvation (Rom. 3:26, 28). It includes God's pardon of sinners and their declaration to be right before His sight (Rom. 3:25, 28,30; 8:33,34; Gal. 4:21-5:12; 1 Jn. 1:7-2:2). The very righteousness of Christ is conveyed to the believer (Rom. 3:22). This view of justification is termed forensic justification. It derives from the Latin forum. In the past, Romans had forums (courts) to decide on judicial or legal declarations. Accordingly, the Protestant view of justification is likened to a forensic legal or judicial pronouncement where the person is declared to be right with God, and pardon of all guilt. This declaration is completely external and does not encompass man's personal level of righteousness⁵².

Per the Protestant assessment, God declares individuals to be in good standing with Him, not on the basis of good works, but their faith (Rom 3:26)⁵³. It is essential to understand that a crucial part of this view of justification is that God declares the believer to be just not on his own righteousness but on Christ righteousness imputed on the believer at the moment of trusting in Christ for his salvation⁵⁴.

An important aspect of the Protestant view of justification is that comes completely by God's grace, and not at the account

counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness." Bible says it's irrational to combine grace and works; Romans 11:6 "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace." Galatians articulates against mixing grace and works. The whole book of Galatians voices against the Judaizers who thought works were obligatory in addition to faith. Galatians 3:24. "So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

⁵² Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures*, 134.

⁵³ Grudem, *Systematic*, 722.

⁵⁴ Grudem, *Systematic*, 727.

of merit. After the apostle Paul explains that no one can ever make himself right before God on his own accord, he then explains that because all have sinned and fall short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23), the only manner the ungodly could be right with God is by grace, His unmerited favour (Eph. 2:8-9).

This is distinct from the Catholic view where the individual is justified by God's grace plus merit on his own. The whole chapter four of Romans is a defence on the justification by faith alone and not by merit⁵⁵. Contrary to the Catholic belief of justification, the Protestant belief stands in justification by faith in Christ alone (Rom. 3:26; 3:28; 4:3; 5:1). Good works come as a result of the believer's gratitude for his salvation. In Ephesians 2:8-9, the Bible teaches that the believer is saved by grace through faith, but in 2:10 it indicates the purpose, to do good works. Thus, the believer does not do good works to attain salvation, he already has it, but as a result of salvation to please God⁵⁶. The fact that works is part of the process of salvation, makes Catholicism's soteriology work-oriented⁵⁷. When the jailer asked the apostle Paul how to be saved, Paul did not say: "Well, you better write all this down. You need to be a member of the Roman Catholic Church, get baptized, never commit a mortal sin, participate in seven sacraments throughout life, recite the rosary, perform lots of meritorious works, and when you die, spend some time in the flames of purgatory and they will be saved." Rather, Paul answered simply: "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved" (Acts 16:31)⁵⁸.

Evangelicals are aware that Roman Catholicism⁵⁹ has not renounced the canons of the Council of Trent about

⁵⁵ Grudem, *Systematic*, 729-30.

⁵⁶ Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures*, 136.

⁵⁷ Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures*, 140.

⁵⁸ Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures*, 140.

⁵⁹ Additionally, a Catholic is able to draw on the "treasury of the Church," which consists of both Christ's merits before God (CCC 1476) and "the prayers and good works of the Blessed Virgin Mary. They are truly immense, unfathomable, and even pristine in their value before God. In

justification: “If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification, let him be anathema.⁶⁰” “If anyone says that a man who is justified and however perfect is not bound to observe the commandments of God and the Church, but only to believe, as if the Gospel were a bare and absolute promise of eternal life without the condition of observing the commandments, let him be anathema.”⁶¹

Sacrament

Following the definition of Augustine, Roman Catholicism teaches that sacraments are tangible or visible signs of an intangible or invisible grace. There are seven sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation or Chrismation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony. These sacraments are thought to actually “confer the grace that they signify”⁶², and they act by the very fact of the action’s being performed, i.e., under the saving work of Christ, accomplished once for all which is independent of the righteousness of either the celebrant or the recipient, as it is accomplished by the power of God⁶³. These sacraments are required for salvation⁶⁴.

Evangelicals believe that Jesus Christ only ordained two ordinances for the church: baptism and the Lord’s Supper⁶⁵.

the treasury, too, are the prayers and good works of all the saints, all those who have followed in the footsteps of Christ the Lord and by his grace have made their lives holy and carried out the mission the Father entrusted to them” (CCC 1477).

⁶⁰ *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, (Trans. H. J. Schroeder; Rockford, Ill.: Tan Books, 1978), 43.

⁶¹ *The Canons and Decrees*, 44.

⁶² CCC, 1127.

⁶³ CCC, 1128.

⁶⁴ CCC, 1129.

⁶⁵ Luther in his ‘Babylonian Captivity of the Church’, which Luther published in October 1520, He condemns the traditional number of the sacraments and permits only two sacraments in the Church of God, Baptism and Eucharist. He disallowed the other seven Roman sacraments since they can never be verified from Scripture, and are not decreed by Christ. See

Evangelicals typically take a symbolic view of these two ordinances and do not believe that any special grace is conveyed or that these ordinances are necessary for salvation.

Because of inherited original sin, Roman Catholicism teaches that baptism is necessary to remove original sin and infuse sanctifying grace: By Baptism, all sins are forgiven, original sin and all personal sins, as well as all punishment for sin. In those who have been reborn nothing remains that would obstruct their entrance into the Kingdom of God, neither Adam's sin, nor personal sin nor the penalties of sin, the gravest of which is a departure from God (CCC 1263). Since every infant child is likewise born with a fallen human nature and adulterated by original sin, Roman Catholicism practices infant baptism, to cleanse from original sin, shortly after birth⁶⁶.

Evangelicals believe that baptism is a public or outward symbol of one's decision to put their faith in Christ for salvation (which is why the thief on the cross would be with Jesus "in Paradise" without being baptized in Luke 23:43, and why salvation came to all who believed in Cornelius' household apart from baptism in Acts 10:44-46. Though some evangelicals perform baptism on infants as a sign of their participation in the New Covenant, complemented by a later confirmation, no evangelical believes that baptism removes original sin. Most evangelicals believe in a believer's baptism position: baptism is rightly performed on those who have already heard the gospel and appropriated it through repentance and faith. On every occasion of baptism in the New Testament, the individuals being baptized are designated as having put their faith in Christ. This is dependable on Jesus' command to baptize those who had been made disciples⁶⁷.

Martin Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church" in Martin Luther, *Three Treatises*, 2nd rev. ed. (Philadelphia, Pa: Fortress Press, 1970).

⁶⁶ CCC, 1250

⁶⁷ Matthew 28:18– 20.

Eucharist: Does the Bread Turn into Christ?

The bread and wine are transformed into the physical body of Christ. Christ is essentially sacrificed again; can even worship the elements. Roman Catholicism imparts that a miracle occurs during the celebration of the Eucharist: by the blessing of the bread and wine, there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has appropriately and properly called transubstantiation⁶⁸. Consequently, since Christ gives us the very body which he gave up for us on the cross, the very blood which he poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins, the Eucharist is hence a sacrifice because it re-presents (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross⁶⁹. In terms of practice, the holiness of the elements requires that anyone cognizant of a grave sin must receive the sacrament of Penance before coming to communion.⁷⁰

The sacramental understanding of the Lord's Supper is stuck on a misinterpretation of Christ's words as He spoke of the bread when he instituted the Lord's Supper: "This is my body" (Matt. 26: 26). Just as it was not his physical body when the disciples and he ate it during Christ's Last Supper, how could it be, given that he was not yet crucified? Neither is it his physical body now when the faithful eat the wafer during the Eucharistic celebration.⁷¹ The Lord's Supper is done "in remembrance" of Jesus (1 Cor. 11:23-26), which indicates a "memorial view" of communion, not a sacramental one. This perspective has a defective view of the ascension of Christ (He ascended to heaven and is now seated at the right hand of the Father, Acts 1:9-11, Romans 8:34), His sending of the Holy Spirit to take his place (John 14:26; 16:7), and His future return

⁶⁸ CCC, 1376.

⁶⁹ CCC, 1366.

⁷⁰ CCC, 1385.

⁷¹ Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology*, Kindle Location, 5208-5211.

(Acts 1:11).⁷² Historically, the doctrine of transubstantiation was proclaimed as the authoritative position of the Catholic Church at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215).

Penance (Confession)

Roman Catholicism teaches that sins are assessed in line with their gravity. Mortal sin rescinds charity in the mind of humans by a serious desecration of God's law⁷³ and results in the loss of charity and the privation of sanctifying grace, that is, of the state of grace. If it is not redeemed by repentance and God's forgiveness, it causes elimination from Christ's kingdom and the eternal death of hell⁷⁴. Venial sin, on the other hand, does not break the covenant with God. With God's grace, it is humanly reparable⁷⁵. Roman Catholicism teaches that confession to a priest is an indispensable part of the sacrament of Penance: All mortal sins of which penitents after a meticulous self-analysis are conscious must be recounted by them in confession⁷⁶. All Catholics are required to participate in the sacrament of Penance once a year as a minimum⁷⁷. Even after confession, the sinner must still recover his full spiritual health by doing something more to make amends for the sin: he must 'make satisfaction for' or "expiate" his sins. This satisfaction is moreover termed penance⁷⁸. Classic acts of penance can consist of praying a certain number of "Our Fathers" or "Hail Marys."

Evangelicals⁷⁹ throw away Penance as a sacrament because there is no biblical proof that Jesus ordained it as a rite to be

⁷² Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology*, Kindle Location, 6925-6928.

⁷³ CCC, 1854, 1855.

⁷⁴ CCC, 1861.

⁷⁵ CCC, 1863.

⁷⁶ CCC, 1456.

⁷⁷ CCC, 1457.

⁷⁸ CCC, 1459.

⁷⁹ Protestants reject that a priest-confessor is necessary for forgiveness of sins, each believer can approach God through Christ in 1 Timothy 2:5-6; No matter the severity of one's sins, all sins are covered by Christ's death

administered by the church. While Scripture seems to indicate that some sins are more grievous in the sign of God than others (e.g. Exodus 32:30; Leviticus 20:10-16; Numbers 15:27-31; Ezekiel 8:1-18; Matthew 5:19; 23:23-24; Mark 3:29-30; Luke 10:13-14; John 19:11; 1 John 5:16-17), all sin involves a violation of God's law for which we need Christ's atonement (Romans 3:23; 6:23). Thus, division of sin into "mortal" and "venial" categories is not supported by Scripture and can be very dangerous: If a person grows up thinking that most of his sins have been venial sins, then he may see himself as basically a good person. He may not see himself as being in dire requisite of a Savior.⁸⁰

Anointing the Sick (Extreme Unction)

Pre-Vatican II, it referred to the anointing of the faithful at the point of their death, but now is employed much more widely as a special sacrament in cases of sickness, old age, prior to a serious operation, etc.⁸¹ Only priests and bishops can give this sacrament, using oil blessed by the bishop⁸². Evangelicals reject anointing the sick as a sacrament because there is no biblical evidence that Jesus ordained it as a rite to be administered by the church⁸³. Nevertheless, evangelicals would agree that Christians should frequently be involved in prayer for the sick, infirm, elderly, etc.

on the cross (1 Peter 3:18). He has completely paid the penalty and no guilt remains before God.

⁸⁰ Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures*, 217.

⁸¹ CCC, 1514-1515

⁸² CCC, 1527.

⁸³ Protestants did not subscribe to the practice of anointing the sick since Luther the father of Reformation believe in only two sacraments which are biblical, because Christ instituted unswervingly baptism and the Lord's Supper. The other five sacraments that Roman Catholics rely on are prohibited. See Jan S. Aritonang, *Various Sects in and Around the Church*, (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2008), 44-45.

The Holy Orders

In the Catholic Church, three degrees of Holy Orders are present which are *ordo episcoporum* (the episcopate, for bishops), *ordo presbyterorum* (the presbyterate, for priests), and *ordo diaconorum* (the diaconate, for deacons). Only men can receive this ordination, in keeping with Jesus' choosing of men to be his apostles, and there is an expectation for them to live a celibate life "for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:12). Those who take on holy orders receive sacred power for service, which, in the case of bishops and priests, empowers the ordained one to "act in the person of Christ the Head, such that Christ himself is present to his Church"⁸⁴.

Evangelicals are inclined to sight the intermediary nature of Catholic priests and bishops as an ill-fated throwback to the Old Covenant priests, which serve as a "replica and shadow of the heavenly things" (Heb. 8:5). In its place, evangelicals grip one of the key doctrines of the Protestant Reformation: the priesthood of all believers, which identifies that all believers "like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5) and are called to be "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may declare the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

Consequently, no difference of nature distinguishes laypeople from clergy; rather, the distinction is one of office, with the latter being charged with the responsibilities of preaching or teaching sound doctrine, leading and shepherding the church, and more.⁸⁵ Evangelicals disagree with the demand for priestly celibacy concerning Scriptures that consent for marriage for elders/bishops (1 Tim. 3:2; and Peter was married 1 Cor. 9:5). God gives the gift of celibacy to some (1 Cor. 7:7-9). It is worth

⁸⁴ CCC 1577, CCC 1579, CCC 1592, CCC 1548.

⁸⁵ Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology*, Kindle Location, 8144-8145.

asking, is it realistic to expect that all the men who commit themselves to be celibate for the rest of their lives so that they may enter the priesthood have the obligatory gift? If they do not, they will not succeed in controlling their sexual desires but will express them in God- and Church-dishonoring ways. The history of sexual immorality of both heterosexual and homosexual multiplicities among Catholic clergy attests to tragic letdown in this regard.⁸⁶

Purgatory

Roman Catholic teaching on purgatory was pronounced as Church dogma in 1438 which suggests that the doctrine developed over time rather than being given by Jesus to the apostles and handed down by tradition. Roman Catholicism has expressed an openness to the position of theological inclusivism, which would allow non-Christians to find salvation in that which is good and true in their religions. Believers who have been properly baptized i.e., in the name of the triune God in water “are put in a certain, although imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church”⁸⁷. Muslims: “The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Muslims; these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us [i.e., the Catholic Church] they adore the one, merciful God, mankind’s judge on the last day”⁸⁸.

Non-Christian religions: “The Catholic Church recognizes in other religions that search, among shadows and images, for the God who is unknown yet near since he gives life and breath and all things and wants all men to be saved. Thus, the Church considers all goodness and truth found in these religions as a

⁸⁶ Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology*, Kindle Location, 8218-8222.

⁸⁷ CCC, 838.

⁸⁸ CCC 841.

preparation for the Gospel and given by him who enlightens all men that they may at length have life⁸⁹.

Almost all forms of evangelicalism object to inclusivism because there is no biblical support for the idea. Rather, Scripture emphasizes that faith in Christ through the gospel is needed for salvation⁹⁰. When Jesus died on the cross He said, “It is finished” (John 19:30), thereby indicating that He had completed the work of redemption at the cross. Scripture indicates that Christ’s work is complete when applied to believers⁹¹. Several passages teach that Christians go to the presence of God in the temporary period between their physical death and the resurrection (Eccl. 12:7, Lk. 16:19-31, 23:43, Acts 7:59, 2 Cor. 5:1-8, 12:1-4, Phil. 1:19-26, Rev. 6:9-11) not to purgatory.

Veneration of the Saints and Mariology

Roman Catholicism teaches the immaculate conception of Mary, the belief that in order for Mary to be an appropriate dwelling for Christ, God had to preserve her from the corruption of original sin (Adam’s sin). Therefore, she was never subject to the curse, being immune from all sin, personal or inherited. This teaching converted official doctrine in 1854. Roman Catholicism teaches the Perpetual Virginity of Mary that she never engaged in marital relations with Joseph⁹², so the “brothers” of Jesus are basically “close relations...according to Old Testament expression”⁹³. Some Catholic scholars even teach that Mary miraculously gave birth without opening of the

⁸⁹ CCC 843

⁹⁰ Romans 10:13-17

⁹¹ Romans 8:1 states “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”; Hebrews 10:12-14 “But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, 13 waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. 14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified”

⁹² CCC, 499.

⁹³ CCC, 500.

womb and injury to the hymen, and consequently similarly without pains.⁹⁴

Catholics venerate Mary with a type of praise called hyperdulia, which is less than the adoration they give God (called latria), but is higher than that rendered to angels and other saints (called dulia)⁹⁵. The most common way Catholics venerate Mary today is by saying the rosary: these beads are arranged in groups of ten small beads separated by one large bead. There are five sets of these so-called “decades.” On the large bead, the “Our Father” is said. On each of the ten small beads, Catholics pray, “Hail Marys.” Roman Catholics consider Mary a Co-redeemer and Mediatrix because her agreement to bear the Messiah in her womb shows cooperation with and taking part in the divine plan of humankind’s redemption and her intercession in heaven⁹⁶.

Roman Catholicism teaches that Mary was bodily assumed into heaven, as proclaimed by Pope Pius XII on November 1, 1950: “The Immaculate Mother of God, Mary ever Virgin Mary, when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into the glory of heaven.”

Roman Catholics see veneration, not as praying to the Saints and the Virgin Mary, but as praying through them. This is seen as similar to asking a brother or sister in Christ to pray for you. Departed saints are also able to spill over their overabundance of grace to us. The Virgin Mary is seen as the mother of our Lord, and therefore she is the mother of his body, and his body is the church, so she is the mother of the church. He is the creator of all things. So she is the mother of angels. She is the mother of humanity, as is sometimes said. Moreover, the Catholic Church has also called her the Queen of Heaven.

⁹⁴ Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic*, 205.

⁹⁵ *The Essential Catholic Handbook: A Summary of Beliefs, Practices, and Prayers* (Liguori, Mo.: Liguori, 1997), 168.

⁹⁶ Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic*, 212-13.

Historically, Mary was given a less prominent position in Protestantism as a reaction to this emphasis in the Catholic Church. There is no equivalent to this kind of veneration in Protestantism, as Protestants emphasize direct access to God.

The biblical Mary is to be celebrated for being a “servant of the Lord” and respectfully accepting the role God chose for her “Let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). These doctrines about Mary are not Scriptural, only in (late) Church tradition. If these doctrines were really true, they would have been found on the pages of Scripture, not emerge over 1,500 years after the fact (the doctrine of Mary’s sinlessness). It is significant that Jesus who had a biblical responsibility to honor His parents (Exodus 20:12) did not exalt His mother as many Roman Catholics do. Mary herself accepted that she had a sinful nature and required a saviour: Luke 1:47 ‘my spirit rejoices in God my Savior’; Romans 3:23 tells us that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”

The statement that Joseph “knew Mary not until she had given birth to a son” (Matthew 1:27) infers that after she gave birth to Jesus they engaged in normal sexual relations. This is confirmed by the plain-sense reading of Matthew 13:55-56 “Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? 56 And are not all his sisters with us?”

Practice of the Priesthood

By this rite of Holy Orders and the “sacred power” conferred on him by the Sacrament, Jason joined the ranks of the Roman Catholic ministerial or hierarchical priesthood to which bishops and priests belong. Along with this type, the Church affirms a second type of priesthood, the baptismal or common priesthood to which all the Catholic faithful belong. While closely related, the two types are different in essence: “the ministerial

priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood”⁹⁷. Holy Orders is reserved for the first type and actualizes it by means of consecrating a priest so that he “acts in persona Christi Capitis”⁹⁸, that is, in the person of Christ the Head: It is the same priest, Christ Jesus, whose sacred person his minister represents. Now the minister ... is truly made like the high priest and has the authority to act in the power and place of the person of Christ himself.⁹⁹

Luther’s Doctrine of the Priesthood of all believers When the spark was lit for the reform of church doctrine and practice in 1517, not even Martin Luther himself could have perceived what was about to be unleashed. For Luther, his rediscovery in the Bible of the doctrine of justification by faith alone had enormous implications for a whole array of doctrinal beliefs and church practices. One key inference was the equality that it creates among those who trust Christ alone for their salvation. For Luther, the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers was an implication of the doctrine of justification by faith. While he never used the term “priesthood of all believers” (the closest he comes is the general priesthood of all baptized Christians)¹⁰⁰, he recurrently mentioned baptized believers as “priests.”¹⁰¹ The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers meant that all who have faith in Christ and are baptized are designated priests and share in Christ’s royal priesthood. This meant that every believer had equal access to the Father through Jesus. The outcome was that every believer had the obligation to act as a priest to other believers, to minister to them, predominantly through proclaiming Scripture to them. Retrieving this idea of

⁹⁷ CCC, 1547.

⁹⁸ CCC, 1548.

⁹⁹ *Pope Pius XII, Mediator Dei* (November 20, 1947), 69.

¹⁰⁰ Martin Luther, *Selected Psalms II*, in *Luther’s Works* (ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, 55 Vols (St Louis: Concordia and Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955-86), 13:332

¹⁰¹ Uche Anizor and Hank Voss, *Representing Christ: A Vision for the Priesthood of All Believers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 18.

the priesthood of every believer from Scripture, Luther held that there is no spiritual divide between priests and laity; there is simply “one estate” to which all baptized believers belong¹⁰². Because justification by faith puts all baptized believers on equal footing, there are no tiers of spirituality or hierarchy in accessing the Father.

Conclusion

While both Protestants and Catholics agree on many essentials of the historic Christian faith, there are key issues which continue to distinguish their beliefs and practices. Currently, there is substantial diversity within the Roman Catholic Church. This research work demonstrated that the Roman Catholic doctrine of salvation diverts from the Bible on the doctrine of salvation in relationship to justification. This research focused on one crucial difference, the Catholic belief that faith alone in Christ is not sufficient for salvation. This research carries out a comparison contrast between the Protestant theology of salvation with the Catholic theology of salvation and demonstrates how the Catholic faith deviates from the Bible on the doctrine of salvation regarding justification because it requires merit to attain salvation. In findings, this research established that salvation is a gift from God solely on God’s grace by faith alone, and if someone needs to earn grace, then it halts being grace because there is a payment owed. The critical delineation of the basic theological structure of Roman Catholicism has been exposed. Protestants’ systemic approach underlines the fact that building a whole system on a synthesis of the Bible and tradition is a structural fault of the Roman Catholic system, which is evident in every expression of the system itself and characterizes its whole outlook. The outcome is that the whole worldview that the Roman Catholic system represents and embodies is construed on a flawed theological basis which heavily distorts the teaching

¹⁰² Luther differentiated between two estates and one estate in “To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation,” in *Luther’s Works*, 44:129

of the Bible. Deducing from the premise of the core discussion, the research outcome calls on Catholicism to rethink and return to the true teaching of Christ anchored on sola scriptura.