

SEDUCED BY ERROR
A Protestant Response to
Patrick Madrid's Anthology,
Surprised by Truth

by
Greg Loren Durand

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INTRODUCTION

*Surprised by Truth*¹ is the latest effort by the new school of Roman apologists to offer “Catholic answers”² to the many doctrinal issues that separate the Catholic church from historic Protestantism. This book consists of eleven testimonial essays from former “anti-Catholics” that are said to “give *all* the reasons for becoming Catholic” (emphasis in original).³ Though space does not permit me to address every one of the essays or every argument raised by the writers, what I have attempted to do in the following pages is offer the reader a general overview

1. Patrick Madrid, editor, *Surprised by Truth: 11 Converts Give Biblical and Historical Reasons For Becoming Catholic* (San Diego, California: Basilica Press, [1994] 2008).

2. Patrick Madrid served eight years (1988-1996) as Vice-President of Catholic Answers, a Catholic apologetics group located in El Cajon, California. In 1996, Madrid went on to found The Envoy Institute, of which he is currently president.

3. Madrid, *ibid.*, back cover.

and response to the more conspicuous errors presented in *Surprised by Truth*.

An important disclaimer must be made before we proceed. Though the contributors to *Surprised by Truth* will be followed here in referring to the Roman church as “Catholic,” it is the strong conviction of the author that this is an inaccurate and very misleading designation. As a Protestant, I firmly believe in the “holy catholic Church” as it is described in the Apostles’ Creed — the term “catholic” in this sense merely meaning “universal.” I believe that the true catholic Church consists of God’s people wherever they may be found, regardless of denominational affiliation. Furthermore, it is only to be found among those who adhere to the biblical Gospel message of salvation by God’s sovereign grace alone, completely apart from human works of merit. For this reason, the Roman church, which departs significantly from the biblical Gospel, has no right to call itself the “Catholic Church.” In the words of the great Reformer John Calvin: “. . . [A]lthough they exhibit a temple, a priesthood, and other similar masks, the empty glare by which they dazzle the eyes of the simple should not move us in the least to admit that there is a Church where the word of God appears not.”⁴

3. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), Book IV, Chapter II:4.

CHAPTER ONE

Marcus Grodi

The Reformation, an Unbiblical Divorce?

Ignorance of Protestant history and doctrine is one of the prominent features of *Surprised by Truth*. For example, former Presbyterian minister Marcus Grodi complains about the ecclesiastical schism supposedly championed by the Reformers:

I studied the causes of the Reformation. The Roman Catholic Church of that day was desperately in need of renewal but Martin Luther and the other Reformers chose the wrong, the *unbiblical*, method of dealing with the problems they saw in the Church. The correct route was and still is . . . don't leave the Church; don't break the unity of faith. Work for a genuine reform based on God's Plan, not man's, achieving it through prayer, penance,

and good example (emphasis in original).¹

Anyone who is familiar with the story of Luther's departure from the Roman church will know that this is precisely the route that he attempted to take. For all intents and purposes, his famous "Ninety-Five Theses" were written from a distinctly Roman Catholic perspective, containing positive references to purgatory, penance, and to the Pope as the representative of Christ on earth. It was Luther's original intention to bring out into the open for public debate his disagreements with John Tetzel's selling of indulgences to finance the renovation of St. Peter's Basilica. In "good Catholic" fashion, Luther appealed again and again in this document to the authority of the Pope and insisted that Tetzel's indulgences were contrary to the mission of the Roman church.

When his public challenge was ignored by the Roman hierarchy, Luther then proceeded to write letters to Pope Leo X himself, pleading with the pontiff to consider the matter and to rectify it. Still considering himself a "good Catholic," Luther even addressed him as "Leo my father" and "your Holiness" as late as September, 1520. The Pope eventually responded to Luther in his papal bull of June 15, 1520 by excommunicating him and his fol-

1. Madrid, *Surprised*, page 51.

lowers.² It was therefore Rome's decision that Luther leave "the Church," not Luther's. This was also the case with many of the other Reformers, such as John Calvin, John Knox, *et al.* In light of the historical record, one is left bewildered at Grodi's claim to have "studied the causes of the Reformation."

The "Anarchistic Principle" of Protestantism

Grodi speaks of the "anarchistic principle that lies at the center of Protestantism."³ Apparently, he is not aware that true Protestantism is committed to what is known as the "regulative principle." According to the Westminster Confession of Faith:

. . . [T]he acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture.⁴

Grodi's questionable theological training and his

2. Phillip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans's Publishing Company, 1994), Volume VII, pages 227-247.

3. Madrid, *Surprised*, page 42.

4. Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter XXI, Section 1.

pastorate in an apostate church (Presbyterian Church USA) offered him no stable ground upon which to stand when confronted with Roman Catholicism in all its deceptive garb. It is therefore no wonder that he fell so easily before the likes of Scott Hahn. Grodi recounts how he, on one occasion, attempted to be “relevant” to the youth in his congregation by offering soda pop and potato chips as the elements of Communion.⁵ At this point, the following question demands an answer: Was Protestantism really the problem, or was it Grodi’s ineptness as a shepherd of God’s people? Or was it his church authorities who did not immediately discipline him for such a sacrilegious mockery of the Lord’s Supper?

Grodi claims that the Reformers “had championed the notion of private interpretation of the Bible by the individual. . . .”⁶ and from there complains that other Protestant pastors were each “teaching something different from what [he, Grodi] was teaching.”⁷ Again, he has drawn faulty conclusions from an ignorance, or perhaps a deliberate misrepresentation, of what the Reformers actually believed and taught. What Grodi fails to tell his readers is that the Reformers put the Bible back into the hands of the common people, whereas the Papacy

5. Madrid, *Surprised*, page 39.

6. Madrid, *ibid.*, page 36.

7. Madrid, *ibid.*, page 38.

had placed it on the *Index of Forbidden Books* (where it remains to this day in those countries that have not been influenced by Protestantism). It is also hypocritical for Grodi to criticize the Protestant churches for their diversity (on peripheral issues), when many popes have contradicted the teachings of their predecessors on matters of doctrinal importance. These issues will be addressed in detail in a later section,⁸ since it is a recurring theme throughout *Surprised by Truth*.

On the other hand, Grodi mentions his “growing lack of confidence in the doctrines of Protestantism” (presupposing, of course, a discernible *corpus* of teaching), and then turns right around to decry the “doctrinal confusion” and “doctrinal mayhem that exists within Protestantism”⁹ (presupposing the *non-existence* of such a *corpus* of teaching). In his hatred for biblical Calvinism, Mr. Grodi is clearly a “switch-hitter” — if a right-handed swing is not sufficient to knock the Presbyterian ball out of the ecclesiastical field, then perhaps a left-handed one will do. Though such ambidexterity is a virtue when it comes to baseball, it proves to be a travesty in an honest and scholarly discussion of an opposing position.

8. See discussion on pages 37ff.

9. Madrid, *ibid.*, page 36.

The Inevitable Question of Authority

After tantalizing his readers with the above mixture of misinformation and outright absurdity, Grodi finally arrives at the crux of the matter — that of authority. He claims that “the teaching authority of the Church in the magisterium centered around the seat of Peter,”¹⁰ but fails to offer any defense whatsoever of this position. He then goes on to write:

I carefully studied Scripture and the writings of Calvin, Luther, and the other Reformers to test the Catholic arguments. Time after time I found that the Protestant arguments against the primacy of Peter simply weren't biblical or historical. It became clear that the Catholic position was the biblical one.¹¹

Again, no further defense of his claim is offered other than an implied “because I say so.” Grodi seems to want to prepare us for such a let-down in the beginning of his essay, when he writes: “By temperament and training I'm more of a pastor than a scholar, so the story of my conversion . . . may lack the technical details in which theologians traffic and in which some readers delight.”¹²

10. Madrid, *ibid.*, page 51.

11. Madrid, *ibid.*, pages 51-52.

12. Madrid, *ibid.*, page 33.

Grodi's unwillingness to give the Reformers the floor by either citing their "unbiblical" arguments or giving the sources where they can be found reveals the weakness of his position. Let us alleviate this deficiency with the following brief synopsis of John Calvin's arguments against the primacy of Peter, as presented in his monumental work, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

Calvin's rebuttal of the Roman position begins with an examination of Christ's words to Peter in Matthew 16:18-19:

. . . I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

The Roman Catholic church claims that this passage gives to Peter "the first place of honor and jurisdiction in the government of [Christ's] whole Church,"¹³ and that, as such, Peter alone was "endowed with power over death and hell."¹⁴ Furthermore, it is claimed that each Pope that has occupied

13. James C. Gibbons, *The Faith of Our Fathers* (Rockford, Illinois: TAN Books, 1980), page 78.

14. Gibbons, *ibid.*, page 82.

his seat after him has also possessed this power of binding and loosing. Thus, “any church that does not recognize Peter as its foundation stone is not the Church of Christ, and therefore cannot stand. . . .”¹⁵

Calvin stated:

Since heaven is opened to us by the doctrine of the *Gospel*, it is by an elegant metaphor distinguished by the name of *keys*. Again, the only mode in which men are bound and loosed is, in the latter case, when they are reconciled to God by faith, and in the former, more strictly bound by unbelief.

Nothing is here given to Peter that was not common to him with his colleagues. . . . [W]hat [Christ] then promised to one he elsewhere delivers, and as it were, hands over, to all the rest. If the same right, which was promised to one, is bestowed upon all, in what respect is that one superior to his colleagues? (emphasis in original)¹⁶

In other words, the “keys of the kingdom of God” are clearly metaphorical of the judicial sanctions of the Church. Generally, these sanctions are attached to the preaching of the Gospel, but more specifically they would refer to the right of the ruling elders of the Church to regulate participation in

15. Gibbons, *ibid.*

16. Calvin, *Institutes*, Book IV, Chapter VI:4.

the sacraments — baptism and the Lord's Table. Historically, the Protestant faith has regarded the Church as the normal vehicle of God's grace, and the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments as the primary and secondary means of that grace.

Although the Reformed faith would reject Rome's interpretation at this point that Peter alone was given the "keys," which were inherited by subsequent popes, it would also not embrace the Anabaptistic idea that the "keys" are held by every Christian. Matthew 16:18-19 must be viewed as the ordination of the disciples as ruling elders in the Church of Jesus Christ, complete with the judicial authority to bar the impenitent from the God-ordained means of grace. If a person is presented with the Gospel message and rejects it, he or she is not granted baptism, or entrance into the visible Church. Moreover, if a person falls into grievous sin and refuses to repent, then he or she is barred from participation in the Lord's Table. Either case judicially "shuts" the gates of Heaven to the person.

Grodi claims that this argument is not "historical." Calvin disproves this charge by quoting both Cyprian and Augustine to buttress his point:

In the person of one man he gave the keys to all, that he might denote the unity of all; the rest, therefore, were the same that Peter was, being admitted to an equal participation of honour and

power, but a beginning is made from unity that the Church of Christ may be shown to be one.¹⁷

Had not the mystery of the Church been in Peter, our Lord would not have said to him, I will give thee the keys. For if this was said to Peter, the Church has them not; but if the Church has them, then when Peter received the keys he represented the whole Church. . . .

All were asked, but Peter alone answers, Thou art the Christ; and it is said to him, I will give thee the keys; as if he alone had received the power of loosing and binding; whereas he both spoke for all, and received in common with all, being, as it were, the representative of unity. One received for all, because there is unity in all.¹⁸

But what of the fact that Christ designated Peter as “the rock”? Does this substantiate the primacy of Peter, as Catholics claim? Calvin’s response is superb:

I willingly concede to Peter the honour of being placed among the first in the building of the Church, or (if they prefer it) of being the first among the faithful; but I will not allow them to infer from this that he has a primacy over others. . . .

Run over all these passages, and the utmost

17. Cyprian, *De Unitate Ecclesiae*; in Calvin, *ibid.*

18. Augustine, *Hom.* 124 and *Hom. in Johann.*; in Calvin, *ibid.*

you will find is, that Peter was one of twelve, their equal and colleague, not their master. . . . When he writes to pastors, he does not command authoritatively as a superior, but makes them his colleagues, and courteously advises as equals are wont to do.¹⁹

It would seem rather inconsistent for Christ to designate one of the disciples as head over the others when He would so clearly rebuke them later for desiring just such a designation, and would go to such lengths to make them understand their equality as brethren (Matthew 23:8-12; Luke 22:25-26).

Calvin's arguments, which take up a total of thirty-five pages of text, cannot be brushed aside as inconsequential and frivolous, as Grodi does in his essay. They demand an answer from Rome — an answer which has not been forthcoming in five hundred years.

19. Calvin, *ibid.*, Book IV, Chapter VI:5, 7.

CHAPTER TWO

James Akin

The Effects of an Unbiblical Marriage

James Akin begins his testimony of his conversion to Roman Catholicism with his courtship and marriage to his now-deceased wife, Renee. He admits that she was, at the time, both a believer in the New Age doctrine of reincarnation and a Roman Catholic. As a “Bible-believing Evangelical,” Akin should have heeded the Scripture’s prohibition against marrying an unbeliever (2 Corinthians 6:14). Undoubtedly, this unlawful union had devastating effects upon his spiritual condition, and perhaps even left him vulnerable to deception by Rome.

Akin demonstrates a shallow understanding of the Protestant faith, primarily of its two key tenets — *sola fide* and *sola Scriptura*. After listing several biblical passages which are wrongly assumed to refute these doctrines (Romans 2:7; Galatians 6:6-10;

1 Peter 3:20-21, *etc.*), he goes on to write:

These verses do not mean we earn salvation by good works, a doctrine many Protestants mistakenly attribute to the Catholic Church, but they do mean that the simple “faith alone” formula is not an accurate description of what the Bible teaches about salvation. These and other passages reveal that, as a result of God’s grace, we are capable of doing acts of love which please God and which He freely chooses to reward. One of the rewards, in fact the primary reward, is the *gift* of eternal life (emphasis in original).¹

Akin’s view is synergistic: God co-operates with man in the process of salvation. He clearly does not comprehend the most basic definition of grace as “unmerited favor.” If eternal life is indeed given to us as a reward for “doing acts of love,” then it is something that we have in fact earned, despite Akin’s claims to the contrary. Simply put, salvation cannot be *both* a reward *and* a gift; it is either one or the other:

Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is

1. Madrid, *Surprised*, pages 60-61.

no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work (Romans 11:5-6).

Does Matthew 16 Teach Apostolic Succession?

Akin spends a considerable amount of space attempting to demonstrate the primacy of Peter from the standard Catholic proof-text: Matthew 16:17-19. He attempts to show the error of a common Protestant interpretation of this passage as Jesus stating that He would build His Church on Peter's confession, rather than on Peter himself, and cites at least one Protestant scholar to show that Catholics have not been the only ones who have historically seen Peter as "the rock."² Akin, however, fails to show how Peter's alleged primacy among the Apostles (which can just as easily be called into question by such passages as Galatians 2:11, and others) necessarily leads to the Roman Catholic belief in Apostolic Succession. In order to use Matthew 16:17-19 to support the existence of the Papacy, Roman Catholics must find proof that Peter's seeming position of leadership in the early Church was to be passed on in successive generations of popes.

One cannot but sympathize with Mr. Akin in the loss of his wife. However, as emotionally charged

2. Madrid, *ibid.*, page 65.

as such an experience may be, it nevertheless offers no substantial reason for considering his claims for Roman Catholicism. Aside from a smattering of easily answered scriptural texts, Akin for the most part fails to deliver on one of the promises of the book's subtitle: "Biblical . . . Reasons for Becoming Catholic."

CHAPTER THREE

Steve Wood

The Issue of Divorce and Remarriage

In his essay, Steve Wood gives as one of the reasons for his leaving a Protestant pulpit the realization of the indissoluble nature of the marriage covenant. It seems that several of the couples in his congregation had been unbiblically divorced and remarried, some even at his counsel. Based on the Bible's teaching on marriage, coupled with the warning given in 1 Corinthians 11:27, Wood could no longer administer the Lord's Supper to such members of his church, and thus was forced, for conscience's sake, to step down as a minister there.

Wood has brought out into the open a very important point that many modern Christians would rather ignore — namely, that remarriage (to a different person) after an unbiblical divorce is nothing less than an adulterous union. The sanctity of the marriage

covenant has been forsaken in too many churches today as Christians adopt the world's lax attitude toward "no fault divorce." A recent example comes immediately to mind of a leading Christian vocalist, whose reason for her divorce ("It just wasn't working out") has not proved to be any hindrance to her career. Another well-known Christian leader has had multiple divorces and remarriages, and yet his church is one of the largest in Southern California.

One can agree wholeheartedly with Mr. Wood that something is terribly amiss in Evangelicalism and liberal Protestantism today. This, however, does not necessarily substantiate the Roman Catholic claim to be the one true Church, simply because there are many Protestant churches that would be equally strict on this matter (as well as on birth control, which Wood also cites). He would have done much better to affiliate himself with one of these bodies of believers, rather than giving in to the entire Romish package on the basis of one biblical element.

Like Grodi before him, Wood reiterates the very same misinformed charge of schism against Luther and the Reformers:

Protestants are blind to the fact that divorce and remarriage is unlawful because Protestantism itself is an unlawful divorce from the Church. . . . There may have been several areas within the Catholic Church that needed change at the time of the Reformation, yet problems within the Church,

like problems within a marriage, do not merit a divorce.¹

Again, it was the Papacy that excommunicated Luther, despite his attempts to resolve the problems he saw in the Roman Catholic church. Thus, if Wood's accusation of an unlawful divorce is to stick to anyone, it should be to Pope Leo X. However, in his zeal to use the image of marriage to support his case against Protestantism, Wood neglects to mention that infidelity is the primary reason that Scripture gives for the dissolution of the marital bond (Matthew 5:32). Translated over into the ecclesiastical realm, infidelity is equated in the Bible with apostasy (Ezekiel 23; Mark 8:38; James 4:4). If Rome had indeed apostatized from the Gospel, then the Reformers, after seeking to bring about its repentance and restoration to the truth, were biblically *required* to "come out of her. . . ." (Revelation 18:4) Wood's point here just does not carry any weight.

An Appeal to the Early Church Fathers

Studying the apostolic fathers . . . terribly upset my Presbyterian convictions. You see, the word "presbyterian" comes from *presbuteros*, the Greek word meaning elder. The name of the Presbyterian Church reflects the belief that the Church

1. Madrid, *Surprised.*, page 90.

is to be ruled by elders, not bishops. My studies showed, however, that the early Church was ruled by bishops. Early Church history attested that the Apostles had laid hands on men and installed them as bishops.²

In typical Catholic fashion, Wood immediately turns to Church history rather than to the pages of Scripture to support his beliefs. Even if it can be shown that the rule of bishops (in the Romish sense) began to develop in the Ante-Nicene, Nicene, or Post-Nicene periods, that does not necessarily validate the system as biblical. Where in Scripture are we ever told that the Apostles, particularly Peter, transferred their authority to successors through the laying on of hands? Turning to the writings of uninspired Church fathers as the final authority is irrelevant, for they could just as easily have been wrong as they were right. For example, Justin Martyr, Ireneaus, and others espoused a premillennial eschatology, which is rejected by the Roman Catholic church. A considerable amount of the writings of Tertullian were done after he had converted to Montanism, an aberrational group which prefigured the Millerite (Adventist) movement in nineteenth-century America, following the alleged revelations of a self-proclaimed prophet and his two female disciples, and expecting the imminent return

2. Madrid, *ibid.*, pages 82-83.

of Christ and the descent of the New Jerusalem to earth. It was condemned as heretical by the Council of Constantinople in 381. And then there was Origen of Alexandria, the neo-Platonist whose frequent flights into theological speculation, such as the pre-existence of the human soul and universalism, earned him posthumous condemnation as a heretic as well. Augustine has even been canonized as a Roman Catholic saint, yet the soteriological position of the Roman Catholic church bears closer resemblance to that of his *opponent*, Pelagius. If Catholic apologists insist on treating the Church fathers as though they were infallible mouthpieces for God, then they are obliged to accept and defend *everything* they taught. This selective usage of historic Church documents is no different than what Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses have done in attempting to prove their own doctrines.

Of course, when approached from a strictly biblical perspective, the Roman system of church government does not stand a chance. Where in the Scriptures is the office of an exalted bishop established over the whole Church? According to Peter himself, it is Christ who is the "Shepherd and Overseer of [our] souls" (1 Peter 2:25). Later in his first epistle, Peter exhorted the elders of the various congregations to serve "those entrusted to [them]" in a humble manner, always keeping in mind that they would answer for their faithfulness to Christ,

the “chief Shepherd” (1 Peter 5:4). Admittedly, this is one of the few instances in which *ἐπισκοπος* (*episkopos*; bishop) is found in connection with the government of the Church. However, this does not support the Roman concept of the rule of bishops, since Peter, when speaking of the human office, equated the term *ἐπισκοπος* with *πρεσβυτερος* (*presbuteros*; elder), whom he acknowledged were given the task of “shepherd[ing] the flock of God” (1 Peter 5:2). That the terms are used interchangeably in the New Testament is also clear from Acts 20, in which the Apostle Paul “called the elders of the church” (verse 17), and then later referred to them as “overseers,” or bishops (verse 28). Even Jerome, a noted Christian scholar of the Fifth Century, admitted that “a bishop is the same as a presbyter.”³ The Scripture not only establishes presbyterianism (rule by elders) as the biblical form of Church government, but it also effectively destroys the primacy of Peter as the foundation of the Roman papacy.

3. Letter to Evangelus.

CHAPTER FOUR

Bob Sungenis

The Historical Reformed View of Baptism

Bob Sungenis continues the pattern of misinformation set by the writers before him. A graduate of Westminster Theological Seminary, Sungenis nevertheless makes several careless errors in his description of Reformed doctrine. For example, he criticizes the “Reformed Presbyterian” view of baptism for being “merely symbolic,” and favorably mentions the Boston Church of Christ (a cult which he wrongly identifies as a “Protestant denomination”) for its “correct” doctrine of baptismal regeneration.¹ In making this assertion, Sungenis betrays his ignorance of what the Reformed Presbyterian position on baptism really is. According to the Westminster Confession of Faith:

1. Madrid, *Surprised*, page 107.

Baptism is a sacrament of the new testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church; but also, to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life. . . .

The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in His appointed time.²

Thus, while the Reformed faith does not follow the various Baptist sects in viewing baptism as “merely symbolic,” as is claimed by Sungenis, neither does it go so far as to see it as possessing regenerative powers, as taught by the Roman Catholic church. In the words of R. C. Sproul:

The sacraments are real means of grace that convey the promises of God. Their power does not reside in the elements themselves, but in God, whose signs they are. Nor does their power depend upon the character or the faith of those who

2. Westminster Confession, Chapter XXVIII, Sections 1 and 6.

administer them, but on the integrity of God.

The sacraments are nonverbal forms of communication. They were never intended to stand alone without reference to the Word of God. Sacraments confirm the Word of God so that the administering of the sacraments and the preaching of the Word go together.

Salvation is not through the sacraments. Salvation is by faith in Christ. Yet where faith is present the sacraments are not ignored or neglected. They are a vital part of the worship of God and the nurture of the Christian life.³

Does the Bible Teach *Sola Scriptura*?

Sungenis also declares the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* to be the proverbial “Achilles heel” of Protestantism, and writes:

I decided to test this pet theory of the Reformers by asking numerous Protestant scholars and pastors to help me find *sola scriptura* in the Bible. By this point, I wasn’t too surprised to find that none was able to provide a convincing answer.⁴

One might immediately ask, who does Sungenis consider to be a “Protestant scholar”? Since

3. R. C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1992), pages 223-224.

4. Madrid, *Surprised*, pages 109-110.

sola Scriptura is the very foundation of Protestantism, it hardly seems likely that *not one* Protestant scholar is “able to provide a convincing answer.” Perhaps Sungenis was selective in his interviews with Protestants. Perhaps he knew that numerous Protestant scholars of the past and present have successfully defended this doctrine in writing⁵ and in debates with various Catholic apologists,⁶ but chose to ignore their arguments because his heart had already been seduced by Rome.

In reality, the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* is so plainly and abundantly taught in the Bible that it is hardly conceivable that anyone not already predisposed against it could miss seeing it. When challenged on various doctrinal issues, Jesus never once appealed to “sacred tradition,” but always directed His hearers back to the Scriptures by prefacing His remarks with the words “it is written” (Matthew

5. E.g., Loraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1962). Published several years after Sungenis’ conversion, the book *Sola Scriptura: The Protestant Position on the Bible* (Lake Mary, Florida: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2009), outlines all the standard arguments in favor of the doctrine, and is highly recommended to the reader.

6. Greg L. Bahnsen vs. Gerry Matatics; Covenant Tape Ministry, 22005 N. Venado Dr., Sun City West, Arizona 85375. The Baptist apologist, James White of Alpha and Omega Ministries, has also frequently debated Roman Catholic scholars on this subject.

4:410, 21:13, 26:31; Mark 7:6, 9:12; Luke 4:4-12, 10:26; John 8:17, 10:34). In fact, a large portion of the Sermon on the Mount was devoted to correcting the Pharisees and showing that their traditions had corrupted their understanding of the Scriptures. This theme was later continued in the writings of the Apostle Paul, who warned against going “beyond what is written” (1 Corinthians 4:6).

The Alleged “Factions” of Protestantism

Predictably, the moth-eaten straw man is again dragged out for a fresh beating by Sungenis: “[Protestantism is] a huge mass of conflicting, bickering denominations, causing, by its very nature of ‘protest’ and ‘defiance,’ an endless proliferation of chaos and controversy.”⁷ Supposedly, *sola Scriptura* (or “*sola ego*,” as Sungenis derides it⁸) is the cause of this confusion. Ironically, however, it is actually the *rejection* of *sola Scriptura* by modern Evangelicalism, rather than acceptance of the doctrine, that has resulted in the theological chaos in most churches today.

Sungenis also does not seem to grasp the fact that not all non-Catholic groups or denominations may properly be classified as Protestant, as is evidenced

6. Madrid, *Surprised*, pages 110-111.

7. Madrid, *ibid.*, page 111.

by his earlier reference to the Boston Church of Christ as a Protestant church. Technically, Protestantism gets its name from the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation which was led by certain men with a distinguishable belief system — what is now called “Calvinism.”⁹ This system includes not only the “five points” of Reformed soteriology, but also a covenantal view of redemptive history, paedobaptism, and an emphasis on sacramental church membership and a presbyterian system of church government. Modern churches that deny these aspects of biblical ecclesiology, which of course includes all Baptist sects, cannot technically be classified as Protestant.¹⁰ Sungenis’ association of modern

8. “Calvinism” is often misunderstood by its critics to have been the invention of John Calvin. However, this is not true at all. Calvin himself made it very clear throughout his *Institutes* that he was teaching nothing different than had been taught eleven centuries previously by Aurelius Augustine. Furthermore, the so-called “five points of Calvinism” were not even formulated until several years after Calvin’s death.

10. I do not wish to hereby disparage my Baptist brethren, especially those who hold to a “Calvinistic” soteriology. However, many noted Baptists over the centuries have themselves declined to identify themselves as Protestant. For example, in a sermon delivered at the Metropolitan Tabernacle on April 2, 1861, the great English preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, said:

We believe that the Baptists are the original Christians.
We did not commence our existence at the Reformation, we

groups whose doctrines more closely resemble the Anabaptists and other *enemies* of the Reformation, shows his ignorance of that which he has presumed to criticize.

He continues: “Many [Protestant churches] were formed when a group of people rallied around a prominent figure who introduced a new and “brilliant” interpretation of the Bible.”¹¹ Let us take a look at the roots of the various Protestant churches to see if this claim is true. The first are the Reformed churches, which include the Dutch Reformed, the Protestant Reformed, the Christian Reformed, the Canadian Reformed, *etc.* These churches trace their lineage directly back to the French/Swiss arm of the Reformation, particularly

were Reformers before Luther or Calvin were born; we never came from the Church of Rome, for we were never in it. We have an unbroken line up to the Apostles themselves! We have always existed from the very days of Christ, and our principles, sometimes veiled and forgotten like a river which may travel underground for a little season, have always had honest and holy adherents (*Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* [Pasadena, Texas: Pilgrim Publications, 1969], Volume VII, page 225).

Other Baptists, such as the eminent John Gill, have gone so far as to declare the Protestant churches to be in spiritual league with Rome because of their practice of infant baptism (*Infant Baptism: A Part and Pillar of Popery* [Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: American Baptist Publication Society, 1851]). Even today, many Baptists remain adamant that they are not Protestants (e.g. Daniel Camberlin, “Why We Are Not Protestants;” online at www.baptisthistoryhome-page.com).

9. Madrid, *Surprised*, page 112.

to John Calvin. Was Calvin prone to introduce “new” and “brilliant” interpretations of Scripture, as is claimed? Even a cursory reading of his writings disproves this accusation:

... [T]he office of the Spirit promised to us, is not to form new and unheard-of revelations, or to coin a new form of doctrine, by which we may be led away from the received doctrine of the gospel, but to seal on our minds the very doctrine which the gospel recommends.¹²

Secondly, the Presbyterian churches trace their roots back to the Scottish Reformer, John Knox, who studied under Calvin and spent a great deal of time at Geneva, Switzerland. Since Knox referred to Calvin’s Geneva as “the most perfect school of Christ that ever was in the earth since the days of the Apostles,”¹³ it is certainly doubtful that his interpretation of the Scriptures was at much variance to his teacher’s, or that he had a habit of introducing new doctrines. In fact, he had strong words of denunciation for the schismatic principles of the radical Anabaptist sects of his day, whose “new” interpretations of Scripture were wreaking havoc on the

10. Calvin, *Institutes*, Book I, Chapter IX:1.

11. John Knox, letter to Mrs. Anna Locke, December 1556; John T. McNeil, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1967), page 178.

stability of the churches and the purity of the Gospel in England and on the Continent.¹⁴

Sungenis has one last chance to validate his claims with Martin Luther, who was, for all intents and purposes, the “father of the Reformation.” That Luther felt himself bound by the written Word of God is clear to anyone who is familiar with his famous words at the Diet of Worms in 1521. When asked if he would retract any of his writings, Luther replied:

Unless I am refuted and convicted by testimonies of the Scriptures or by clear arguments (since I believe neither the Pope nor the councils alone; it being evident that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am conquered by the Holy Scriptures quoted by me, and my conscience is bound in the word of God: I can not and will not recant any thing, since it is unsafe and dangerous to do any thing against the conscience.¹⁵

Sungenis offers no examples to support his thesis that Protestantism is a bastion of new revelations, simply because there are none — that is, unless he intends to classify Mormonism, Jehovah’s

14. John Knox, *A Warning Against the Anabaptists* (Dallas, Texas: Texas Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1984).

12. Schaff, *History*, Volume VII, pages 304-305.

Witnesses, and other non-Christian cults as Protestant churches.”

The “Infallibility” of Rome Examined

In rejecting the Scriptures as the sole doctrinal authority of the Church, Sungenis of course finds a substitute in the alleged infallibility of the Roman Catholic church, asserting that, “she is guided by the Holy Spirit to make decisions without error (John 16:13), so Jesus Christ can ratify those decisions.”¹⁶ Sungenis’ statement is similar to that of the *Catholic Encyclopedia*:

The Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra* — that is in the exercise of his office as pastor and teacher of all Christians he defines . . . a doctrine of faith or morals to be held by the whole Church — is, by the reason of the Divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, possessed of that infallibility . . . and consequently such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable.¹⁷

Upon careful investigation, however, it becomes very difficult to reconcile this claim to infalli-

13. Madrid, *Surprised*, page 114.

14. Charles G. Herbermann, *et al* (editor), *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910), Volume VII, page 796.

bility with the obvious doctrinal errors, reversals, and just plain chaos throughout papal history. For example, Pope Victor I (A.D. 189-199) first approved of Montanism in 192, and then later condemned it. Marcellinus (296-304) entered the Temple of Vesta and offered incense to the pagan goddess. Liberius (352-366) consented to the condemnation of Athanasius, the great defender of the Deity of Christ, and made a profession of Arianism so that he might be recalled from exile and reinstated in his seat. Pope Honorius (625-638) taught the heresy of Monothelitism, which denied that Christ simultaneously possessed two distinct wills — human and divine. He was later condemned as a heretic by the Third Council of Constantinople in 680.

In 1431, Pope Eugene IV (1431-1447) declared Joan of Arc guilty of practicing witchcraft and condemned her to be burned at the stake. In 1919, however, Benedict XV (1914-1922) canonized her as a saint. In 1633, the great astronomer Galileo was brought to trial by the Jesuits for claiming that the earth and all the other planets revolved around the sun. An earlier March 5, 1619 papal bull entitled *De Revolutionibus* had denounced the heliocentric view of the universe as “utterly contrary to the Holy Scriptures.” Galileo’s position was condemned as heretical and dangerous, and he was tortured and imprisoned. The Roman Catholic church has only recently retracted this charge.

Gregory I (590)¹⁸ declared that anyone that believed that it was not necessary to take both the bread and the wine during Mass was to be excommunicated; Innocent III (1215) stated that anyone who believed that it *was* necessary was to be excommunicated. Paschal II (1099-1118) and Eugene III (1145-1153) authorized dueling; Julius II (1503-1513) and Pius VII (1800-1823) forbade it. Hadrian II (867-872) declared civil marriage to be valid; Pius VII condemned civil marriage. Sixtus V (1585-1590) published an edition of the Bible and recommended

18. Speaking of Gregory I, it was he who specifically warned against the rise of Roman supremacy in the catholic Church:

I say it without the least hesitation, whoever calls himself the universal bishop, or desires this title, is, by his pride, the precursor of Antichrist, because he thus attempts to raise himself above the others. The error into which he falls springs from pride equal to that of Antichrist; for as that Wicked One wished to be regarded as exalted above other men, like a god, so likewise whoever would be called sole bishop exalteth himself above others.... You know it, my brother; hath not the venerable Council of Chalcedon conferred the honorary title of "universal" upon the bishops of this Apostolic See [Rome], whereof I am, by God's will, the servant? And yet none of us hath permitted this title to be given to him; none hath assumed this bold title, lest by assuming a special distinction in the dignity of the episcopate, we should seem to refuse it to all the brethren (*Letters of Saint Gregory the Great*, Book VII, Epistle 31).

The irony of an "infallible pope" thus denouncing the very foundation of the Papacy cannot be understated.

it to be read; Pius VII condemned the reading of it, stating that it was full of errors. Clement XIV (1769-1774) abolished the order of the Jesuits; Pius VII reestablished it. Unfortunately, the list of such confusion goes on *ad infinitum*. It is beyond comprehension how anyone taking an honest look at the history of the Roman Papacy can claim for it infallibility.

Did the Catholic Church Give Us the Bible?

. . . Protestants are living off the borrowed capital of the Catholic Church, for it was the Catholic Church that infallibly recognized, under the divine guidance of the Holy Spirit, the canon of Scripture. Each time Protestants quote from the Bible they unwittingly acknowledge their trust in the infallible divine guidance given to the Catholic Church by Christ.¹⁹

Sungenis' claim here is simply false. Catholics argue that Christ established the Roman church in Matthew 16 and that prior to the installment of Peter as the first Pope, the Roman Catholic church as such did not exist. How then do they explain the existence of a scriptural canon hundreds of years prior to its "infallible recognition" by the Roman Catholic church beginning (according to Sungenis) at the councils of

15. Herbermann, *ibid.*, page 116.

Hippo (393) and Carthage (397, 419)? How can the writings of the New Testament be trusted, seeing that Christ and the Apostles relied so heavily upon Old Testament documents that would not receive the Catholic “*imprimatur*” for nearly 400 years? The truth is, contrary to Rome’s absurd claim, both the Church *and* a recognizable canon existed long before the Papacy ever rose to power. Virtually the entire Bible as it now exists was quoted by the ante-Nicene fathers *prior* to the Fourth Century.

Interestingly enough, the apocryphal books, which the 1545 Council of Trent infallibly included in the canon, apparently were not considered by the early fathers to be of much importance, for they were rarely quoted or even referred to in their writings. In fact, the apocryphal books were openly rejected by Origen, Tertullian, Athanasius, and even Jerome, the translator of the Latin Vulgate. Furthermore, neither Christ nor any of the writers of the New Testament quoted even *once* from the apocryphal books, even though they referenced the Old Testament hundreds of times to support their teachings. Such should firmly establish the fact that, prior to the Council of Trent, these writings were never viewed as inspired Scripture — a fact that is even supported from the apocryphal writings themselves.²⁰

16. Prologue to Ecclesiasticus; 1 Maccabees 4:46, 9:27; 2 Maccabees 15:38.

CHAPTER FIVE

Tim Staples

A Reiteration of Unproven Claims

Tim Staples begins his testimony by wrongly identifying the Assemblies of God denomination, to which he formerly belonged, as “Fundamentalist Protestantism.”¹ It should be noted that the Assemblies of God are characterized by not only a staunch Arminianism, but a commitment to neo-Pentecostalism — both of which have been condemned by historic Protestantism. Staples also cannot resist raising the by-now tiresome accusation regarding “all the conflicting opinions among Protestants on essential doctrinal issues. . . .” What “essential doctrinal issues” does he have in mind? The Trinity? The Deity of Christ? Predestination? The extent of the Atonement? The preservation of the elect? Baptism? Which Pro-

1. Madrid, *Surprised*, p. 195.

testant churches disagree on any of these issues? Staples does not tell us, because he does not really know. We have already addressed this typical Catholic ignorance of what constitutes true Protestantism, so we will not belabor the point here.

Staples' attempt to disprove *sola Scriptura* also displays a certain lack of careful reflection:

Until . . . I began to hammer away at *sola scriptural*, I hadn't noticed the Bible's positive discussion of traditions. For example, Paul commanded the first Christians to "stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught, either by an oral statement or by a letter of ours" (2 Thess. 2:15). Here Paul says that divine Revelation comes to us in both written and oral form, and both are equally binding....

Other passages dealing with tradition helped me gain an appreciation of the biblical role of divine revelation preserved in the Church's oral Tradition. For example, Paul said, "I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold fast to the traditions just as I handed them on to you" (1 Cor. 11:2; see also Luke 10:6; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 2:1-2)²

First of all, no informed Protestant who understands *sola Scriptura* will insist that oral tradition or teaching have never been placed on par with written

2. Madrid, *ibid.*, page 205.

Scripture. The very development of both Testaments attests to this. *First*, the material was spoken by the Prophet, Apostle, or even Christ Himself, and *then* it was committed to writing. Until the written record came into existence, it is rather obvious that believers were bound by the oral tradition. However, this is not an ongoing arrangement. After the death of the Apostles, it stands to reason that the only reliable apostolic tradition was that which had been written down. For example, we still receive the “handed down traditions” of the Apostle Paul through his epistles. However, no Catholic has ever proven that such Romish traditions as the Immaculate Conception, the Perpetual Virginity, and the Assumption of Mary, *etc.*, were actually held and taught by the Apostles. With all his rhetoric aside, Staples has simply failed to disprove *sola Scriptura*.

Given his covert attack on the ultimate authority of the Bible, Staples logically includes in his essay an attempt to establish the infallibility of the Roman Catholic church:

I couldn't think of a single argument that would get around the biblical evidence that the New Testament Church hierarchy had the authority to speak for Christ on doctrinal and pastoral issues. . . .

. . . [T]he Holy Spirit speaks preeminently through the Church, so that when the Church teaches officially, it is not mere human teaching

but the Holy Spirit guiding the Church.³

The Church did indeed speak for Christ in the early First Century because it was led by inspired Apostles. Since their deaths, the Church continues to speak for Christ only as it remains faithful to the teachings of the Apostles in the Scriptures. This is the basis of Protestantism's commitment to *sola Scriptura*. Again, Catholics must prove that their distinctive doctrines were held by the early Christians and that the early Church was in fact the precursor of today's Roman Catholic church. Moreover, until they can demonstrate *from the Scriptures* that the office of inspired Apostle was to be continued throughout all generations, Roman Catholics' appeal to their tradition to support their tradition is nothing more than circular reasoning.

How the Mass Undermines the Cross

In recalling how he came to accept Rome's teaching on the Eucharist, Staples admits that, as a "Protestant," his only argument against it was to insist from John 6:63 that Jesus was only speaking figuratively when referring to His body and blood.⁴ If this was indeed the case, then it is no wonder that

3. Madrid, *ibid.*, page 199.

4. Madrid, *ibid.*, page 206.

Staples was so easily lured into accepting the Mass. Actually, much stronger biblical evidence may be produced to refute this heresy than John 6:63. According to Catholic teachings, the Eucharist is:

... one and the same sacrifice with that of the Cross, in as much as Christ, who offered Himself, a bleeding victim, on the Cross to His Heavenly Father, continues to offer Himself in an unbloody manner on the altar, through the ministry of His priests.⁵

A more recent Catholic source states:

There is no surer pledge or clearer sign of this great hope in the new heavens and new earth . . . than the Eucharist. Every time this mystery is celebrated, the work of our redemption is carried on and we break the one bread that provides the medicine of immortality, the antidote for death, and the food that makes us live for ever in Jesus Christ. . . .

In addition to the Anointing of the Sick, the Church offers those who are about to leave this life the Eucharist as viaticum. Communion in the body and blood of Christ, received at this moment

5. *The Roman Catholic Catechism*, Answer #278; *Our Faith and Belief: A Carefully Selected Compilation of All the Important Subjects of Our Holy Faith and Catholic Belief* (New York: Murphy and McCarthy, 1917), page 36.

of “passing over” to the Father, has a particular significance and importance. It is the seed of eternal life and the power of resurrection, according to the words of the Lord: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”⁶

One might wonder how Staples, an ex-Assemblies of God minister, could miss the obvious attack that the Mass perpetuates upon the finished work of Christ upon the cross. When Jesus said, “It is finished” (John 19:30), He meant it; we are not free to claim that the sacrifice of Calvary was really *not* finished, but is to continue each week in an ecclesiastical ceremony. We are also not free to view an “unbloody sacrifice” as efficacious for the removal of sin, since “without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin” (Hebrews 9:22). It is indeed tragic to think of how many countless millions of souls have gone into a Christ-less eternity with the supposed “medicine of immortality” on their tongues, placing their faith in a dried piece of bread rather than in the true sacrifice of God’s Son.

It is a common Roman Catholic ploy to point out Christ’s words in Matthew 26:26-28 to support the belief that the bread and wine actually are transformed into His very body and blood during the Mass, and

6. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Ligouri, Missouri: Ligouri Publications, 1994), pages 354, 381.

that the elements are therefore to be worshipped as Christ Himself.⁷ However, the above information notwithstanding, it is a bit difficult to interpret this passage literally, since Christ was very much alive and well at the moment He spoke these words. This makes it rather impossible for the bread and the wine to have become transubstantiated into His literal body and blood, for the Last Supper would have thus been a reenactment of a sacrifice which had not yet occurred.

Do Catholics Worship the “Virgin Mary”?

. . . Catholics don't worship anyone but God, but they do honor and revere their elder brothers and sisters who have served Christ and are now with him in heaven. The Church encourages the practice of asking Mary and the Saints to pray for us, just as we would ask fellow Christians on the earth to pray for us. . . .

I came to see that Mary's role as a heavenly

7. Pope Paul III made this point clear at the Council of Trent in 1545:

If anyone shall say that Christ, the only begotten Son of God, is not to be adored in the holy sacrament of the Eucharist . . . and that He is not publicly set before the people to be adored, and that His adorers are idolators, let him be anathema (Canons of Trent, Canon VI).

“prayer warrior” is completely biblical.⁸

Staples’ remarks are very deceptive. He knows very well (or, he should) that the Roman church’s teachings about Mary involve much more than her being merely a “heavenly prayer warrior.” The following quotes from official Roman Catholic sources will demonstrate this beyond all argument:

From the moment of your Immaculate Conception, until the day in which after your Assumption into heaven, [God] crowns you Queen of the Universe. . . . Oh conqueress of evil and death, inspire in us a deep horror of sin. . . . Receive, oh most sweet Mother, our humble supplications. Above all, obtain for us that on that day, happy with you, we may repeat before your throne that hymn which is sung today around your altars. You are all beautiful, oh Mary. You are the glory, you are the joy, you are the honor of our people. Oh Mary, Gate of Heaven, no one shall enter in but through thee.⁹

All power is given to thee in Heaven and on earth . . . [so that] at the command of Mary all obey even God . . . and thus . . . God has placed the whole Church . . . under the domination of Mary. . . .

8. Madrid, *Surprised*, page 211.

9. *Roman Catholic Catechism*, quoting Pope Pius XII, November 1, 1950.

The whole Trinity, O Mary, gave thee a name which is above every other name, that at thy name, every knee should bow, of things in heaven, on earth, and under the earth.¹⁰

Staples' appeal to 1 Corinthians 12, and his insistence that prayer to Mary and the saints is not much different than asking a living Christian to pray for us¹¹ simply does not hold water. There is no biblical command to have fellowship with anyone other than *living* members of the Body of Christ. There are also no biblical grounds for believing that dead Christians can even hear the prayers of the living, much less (as in Mary's case) the multiplied millions of such prayers *simultaneously*. In fact, this belief is completely contradicted by 1 Timothy 2:5. (Staples also fails to mention that only those that have been "canonized" by the Roman Catholic church are to be the recipients of these prayers. Apparently those in Purgatory — nowhere discussed in this book — are too busy being temporarily roasted to concern themselves with the problems of those still on earth.) Staples may invent excuses for his unbiblical beliefs all he wishes, but the Scriptures nevertheless are clear in their prohibition of communication with the dead, whether they be

10. Bishop Alphonse de Ligouri, *The Glories of Mary* (New York: P.J. Kenedy and Sons, 1888), pages 180-181.

11. Madrid, *Surprised*, page 210.

saints or otherwise (Isaiah 8:19). God's judgment awaits those who continue to disobey this command — one need only ask King Saul.

The Catholic System of Grace Plus Works

According to Staples: "Many Protestants accuse the Catholic Church of teaching a system of salvation based on human works independent of God's grace."¹² In truth, the accusation leveled against Rome by Protestants is that it teaches a system of salvation based on grace *plus* works. The only salvation that the Bible knows is that which descends from the unconditional election of the Father, the substitutionary atonement and particular redemption of the Son, and the effectual calling, regeneration, and preservation of the elect by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, from start to finish, salvation is solely and wholly the sovereign work of the Triune God. This is the theme of the first two chapters of Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, as well the entire book of Romans, and a multitude of other passages.

The Reformers condemned the Roman church, not because it sought to give *all* the credit in salvation to man, but because it gave man *any at all*. In opposition to the teachings of Augustine, one of its own "saints," Rome openly denies the biblical doctrines

12. Madrid, *ibid.*, page 213.

of election, particular redemption, effectual calling, *etc.*, by presenting a synergistic system in which man cooperates with God in saving himself. In other words, God has set up the plan of salvation, and has therein offered mankind eternal life, but it is up to each man to exercise his “free will” in appropriating this “grace” to himself. In the words of Staples, “. . . [W]e must choose to allow God’s grace to work through us.”¹³

Roman Catholicism’s semi-Pelagian foundation betrays itself at this point, for if its doctrine of free will is to be accepted, then the biblical doctrine of the total depravity of human nature must be rejected. Simply stated, if fallen man’s heart is as corrupt as the Bible tells us it is in such passages as Genesis 6:5 and Jeremiah 17:9, then it is impossible for him to voluntarily counteract his own nature in order to chose righteousness. To use Arthur W. Pink’s excellent illustration:

I hold in my hand a book. I release it; what happens? It falls. In which direction? Downwards; always downwards. Why? Because, answering the law of gravity, its own weight sinks it. Suppose I desire that book to occupy a position three feet higher; then what? I must lift it; a power outside of that book must raise it. Such is the relationship which fallen man sustains toward God.

13. Madrid, *ibid.*

Whilst Divine power upholds him, he is preserved from plunging still deeper into sin; let that power be withdrawn, and he falls — his own weight (of sin) drags him down. God does not push him down, anymore than I did that book. Let all Divine restraint be removed, and every man is capable of becoming, would become, a Cain, a Pharaoh, a Judas. How then is the sinner to move heavenwards? By an act of his own will? Not so. A power outside of himself must grasp hold of him and lift him every inch of the way. The sinner *is* free, but free in one direction only — free to fall, free to sin (emphasis in original).¹⁴

If any man is to be saved at all, it is only due to the mercy and good pleasure of God, never the will of man. God must first regenerate and save an individual before he will ever see the need for salvation from sin. Once he has been saved by God's grace, he will continue in grace until he dies, again not because of anything in himself, but because of God's sovereign power and will. *This* is why Protestants reject Roman Catholicism's salvation as anti-biblical and insist upon the doctrines of *sola gratia* (grace alone) and *sola fide* (faith alone). Incidentally, this is also why no Arminian can effectively refute Rome's soteriology (which explains why Staples, a

14. Arthur W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1984), pp. 135-136.

former Arminian who enrolled in Jimmy Swaggart's Bible College, fell prey so easily to the Roman Catholic church's deception). In fact, it is the Arminians (whom Staples erroneously identifies as Protestants) who have to misrepresent Rome's system of salvation in order to hide the fact that their own is virtually identical.

CHAPTER SIX

Al Kresta

The Marks of a Protestant Church

Al Kresta, whose essay appears last in *Surprised by Truth*, had one last chance to redeem the book from complete intellectual failure. Unfortunately, Kresta merely regurgitates much of the same misinformed tripe already force-fed the reader by his fellow essayists. For example, he describes his former “Protestantism” as follows:

. . . [A] group of friends and I started an independent fellowship called Church of the Word. The Bible, expounded in the original languages, was our only authority. We didn’t have membership, our doctrine was minimal. . . . We viewed the Church as a voluntary association of spiritually like-minded Christians. The person and work of Christ, his divinity, the Atonement, Resurrection, Ascension, the Holy Spirit, and our need as

sinner to personally appropriate by faith Christ's work on the Cross, composed the core of our "creed" — everything else was secondary. The less you believed, the less you had to explain and defend.¹

What Kresta has here described much more resembles sixteenth-century Anabaptism than it does historic Protestantism. Those who have read the writings of John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, Martin Luther, and the other leading Reformers of that period, will know that "churches" to which Kresta belonged prior to his conversion to Roman Catholicism were condemned by these men as sectarian, and even heretical. True to their heritage, genuine Protestant churches today uphold the historic creeds as authoritative (though not above, or even on par with, the Scriptures) in Church doctrine, practice, discipline, *etc.* Covenantalism, which is the distinguishing mark of Protestantism, declares that the Word of God is to be applied to all areas of life, which allows these churches to speak to everyday issues with authority. Finally, Kresta would be hard-pressed to locate a Protestant church that merely views the Church as "a voluntary association of spiritually like-minded Christians," and which does not have a membership roll. Again, he is confusing Protestantism with Arminian Evangelicalism.

1. Madrid, *Surprised*, page 240.

Does Protestantism Deny the Visible Church?

Kresta's ignorant statements regarding Protestant beliefs continue with the following:

The Evangelical vision of the Church as the invisible union of all who genuinely trust in Christ seemed spectral . . . even a subtle form of Docetism. . . . By refusing to accept the visible Church Protestantism denied the extension of the Incarnation.²

Protestantism certainly does *not* "refuse to accept the visible Church." Reformed theology teaches that the Church exists in both "visible" and "invisible" form, though an important distinction is made between the two. According to Romans 9:6, "they are not all Israel who are of Israel." Both Jacob and Esau, for example, were circumcised members of "visible Israel," but it is clear that both did not enjoy the favor of God (Romans 9:13). Not all members of the "visible Church" (the earthly professors) are members of the "invisible Church" (the truly regenerate). In other words, all baptized persons are participants in the *visible* Church, while only those inwardly reborn by God's Spirit are members of the *invisible* Church. According to the Westminster Confession of Faith:

2. Madrid, *ibid.*, page 244.

The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.

Unto this catholic visible Church Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the world: and doth, by His own presence and Spirit, according to His promise, make them effectual thereunto.

This catholic Church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible. And particular Churches, which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the Gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them.³

Reformed theologian Charles Hodge elaborated further on this point:

... [I]t is not the purpose of God that the visible Church on earth should consist exclusively of true believers. This is plain because the attainment

3. Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter XXV, Sections 2-

4.

of such a result in any society or government administered by men is an impossibility. It would require that the officers of the Church or the Church itself should have the power to read the heart, and be infallible in judgments of character. . . . All attempts to make a Church consisting exclusively of the regenerate, have failed. So far as known, no such Church has ever existed on the face of the earth. This of itself is proof that its existence did not enter into the purpose of God.⁴

References and extensive dissertations on the “visibility of the Church” can be found in overabundance in Protestant literature. In making such a statement as above quoted, Kresta has demonstrated that he simply does not know what he is talking about.

4. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans’ Publishing Company, 1993), Volume III, page 548.

CONCLUSION

Neo-Catholics in Protestant Clothing

For its many words and emotional testimonies, *Surprised by Truth* offers little theological content to the biblically-minded Christian. The meat of God's Word is not there upon which to masticate; only the substance-less fluff of cotton candy, which may fill the mouth with sweetness, but leaves the stomach woefully unsatisfied. The Protestant who looks to this book for compelling scriptural arguments in favor of Roman Catholic doctrine will certainly come away disappointed.

Surprised by Truth is, however, a masterful marketing tool. The material presented in this book has been carefully formulated with a nominally Protestant audience in mind. As mentioned before, nowhere is Purgatory or the other more bizarre and blatantly unbiblical doctrines of Rome discussed. Even the veneration of the Virgin Mary is downplayed so

as to appear more Evangelical, and less obviously idolatrous.

It should also be noted that the system promoted by this book and by Scott Hahn, Patrick Madrid, Gerry Matatics, *et al*, is not historic Roman Catholicism at all, but a hybrid form of "Protestantized Catholicism." For example, the Bible for centuries was placed on the *Index of Forbidden Books*, and private ownership and reading of the Scriptures was declared to be a mortal sin by the Roman Papacy. In other words, one would *go to hell* for reading and understanding God's Word for themselves. In 1229, the Council of Toulouse declared:

We prohibit also the permitting of the laity to have the books of the Old and New Testament, unless any one should wish, from a feeling of devotion, to have a psalter or breviary for divine service, or the hours of the blessed Mary. But we strictly forbid them to have the above-mentioned books in the vulgar [common] tongue (Canon IV).

Pope Pius IV reaffirmed this prohibition in his papal bull of March 24, 1564, which was affirmed by the Council of Trent:

In as much as it is manifest, from experience, that if the Holy Bible, translated into the vulgar tongue, be indiscriminately allowed to everyone, the temerity of men will cause more evil than good to arise from it; it is, on this point, referred to the

judgment of the bishops, or inquisitors, who may, by the advice of the priest or confessor, permit the reading of the Bible translated into the vulgar tongue by Catholic authors, to those persons whose faith and piety, they apprehend, will be augmented, and not injured by it; and this permission they must have in writing (Rule IV).

This is not by any means an outdated prohibition, however. On September 8, 1713, Clement XI issued a papal bull entitled *Unigenitus Dei Filius*, which stated, "We strictly forbid [the laity] to have the books of the Old and New Testament in the vulgar tongue." On May 3, 1824, Leo XII warned in an encyclical letter:

You are aware, venerable brethren, that a certain society called the Bible society strolls with effrontery throughout the world, which society, contrary to the well-known decree of the Council of Trent, labors with all its might and by every means to translate — or rather to pervert the Scriptures into the vulgar tongue of every nation. . . . We, in conformity with our apostolic duty, exhort you to turn away your flock by all means from these poisonous pastures.

Likewise, in 1893, Leo XIII issued an encyclical letter which denounced "these cunning and infamous societies, which call themselves Bible societies, and give the Scriptures to inexperienced youth." This

position has never officially been withdrawn by Rome and indeed it cannot be, since it was pronounced by “infallible” popes.⁵

The very fact that the modern Catholic apologists have begun to use the Scriptures to lure unwary Protestants back to Rome is an indication that they are really operating from a decidedly Protestant view of the Bible, and repudiating the traditional position of their own beloved Papacy. In order to *attack* Protestantism, these men must first assume the *validity* of Protestantism’s insistence that every man must be allowed to read and understand God’s Word for himself. In essence, they must seat themselves on the lap of the Reformation before they are able to slap its face. This is precisely the tactic that Satan has always used to undermine confidence in the Bible, and it has been the favorite ploy of every heretic throughout history who has set out to destroy the true Christian faith.

5. See endnote on following page.

Endnote

The following comment, directed to the author, is typical of how the more knowledgeable Roman Catholics will respond to the above information:

In response to your statement about Pope Leo XIII and his encyclical, you're wrong. Papal encyclicals are not infallible teaching. They are authoritative and binding to a certain extent, but they are always subject to revision or clarification. The Pope has spoken *ex cathedra* twice and outside of those two times, only councils can speak infallibly once their teaching is accepted by the magisterium of the Church (Pope and Bishops).

It will be granted that this is indeed the "official" position of the Roman Catholic church. According to the Council of Trent:

We teach and affirm that it is a dogma divinely revealed that the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when in discharge of the office of pastor and doctor of all Christians, by virtue of his supreme Apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine regarding faith and morals to be held by the universal Church, by the divine assistance promised him in blessed Peter, is possessed of that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed that His Church should be endowed for defining doctrines of faith and morals, and that therefore such definitions of the Roman Pontiff of themselves and not by virtue of the consent of the Church, are irreformable.

There is a rather obvious inherent weakness in this assertion that the encyclical of Leo XIII is not considered infallible because it was not made *ex cathedra*. Was he not, in delivering the *encyclical* to the Roman Catholic people, acting “in discharge of the office of pastor and doctor of all Christians”? Was he not defining a doctrine “regarding faith and morals”? Or was he merely voicing his own opinion, which he did not really expect anyone to take seriously?

Reformed theologian Loraine Boettner raised some very important issues in his book, *Roman Catholicism*:

It is interesting to note that the popes, in issuing their decrees or pronouncements, do not label them *ex cathedra* or not *ex cathedra*. We may be sure that in fact they would find it very advantageous to do so. Surely it would be of inestimable value to know which deliverances are *ex cathedra* and which are not, which are infallible and authoritative and which are only private observations and therefore as fallible as those of anyone else. It seems impossible to secure such a list. . . .

How then is anyone to know whether any given pronouncement is *ex cathedra* and therefore infallible? The pope presumably would be the most likely person to know his own intentions. How does he distinguish between pronouncements? Can he call up this peculiar kind of inspiration at any time? Does he have a peculiar sensation or feeling of any kind when exercising it? . . . [Popes] have merely issued “encyclicals” (formal letters, in Latin, addressed to all the bishops), for which no infallibility is claimed, and which can be modified or set aside by a successor. But of what conceivable value is papal infallibility unless it be to insure clarity and certainty of statement when circumstances make

it desirable that the church should speak with authority? (pages 236, 237)

The Pope of Rome claims to be the successor of the inspired Apostles, particularly Peter. Did the early Church view the *ex cathedra* statements of Peter as infallible and inspired, but not his encyclical letters? Obviously not, since the two extant letters of Peter were included by the Church in the biblical canon. Since, as the above dissenter pointed out, the Pope has only spoken *ex cathedra* twice, does this mean that Catholics believe that he has only acted as “pastor and doctor of all Christians” twice? To make use of a cliché, Catholics cannot “have their cake and eat it too.”