

A Protestant Response to Roman Catholicism

Sunday, May 1, 2016

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I. Introduction

- There are nearly 945 million Roman Catholics in the world—about 18% of the world’s total population.
- Protestants and Roman Catholics **agree** on a number of important theological, moral, and social issues (doctrine of the Trinity and the full theistic attributes of God, God as Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, the incarnation, the resurrection, Christ’s ascension into heaven, His future return in glory, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit), but have significant **disagreement** on others.
- Many of us have Roman Catholic family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. **How should we think about their belief in Catholicism**—do they believe in a “false gospel” or are they just another Christian denomination who has some different doctrinal understandings than we do? To what extent do we legitimately feel that we can work together with Catholics for the betterment of society?

II. Roman Catholicism and Church History

- “**Catholic**” comes from the Greek word *katholikos* meaning “general, **universal**.” It harkens back to a time when the earliest church, as established by Jesus’ disciples, did not have the denominational diversity we experience today; for the first thousand years of church history, it was one, universal church.
- By the 2nd century, this universal church developed a hierarchical structure with a focus on a singular bishop (Greek *episkopos*, from where we get the English word “Episcopal”) who presided over the church in a particular city. The bishops of the major cities of **Alexandria** (Egypt), **Antioch** (Syria), **Jerusalem** (Palestine), **Rome** (Italy), and **Constantinople** (which became the new capital of the Roman Empire under Constantine in AD 330) rose to particular prominence due to the size and influence of these cities.
- During the 7th century, the armies of Islam successfully captured Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, leaving the bishops of **Rome** and **Constantinople** as the most prominent bishops in Christendom.
- In 1054, the Eastern half of the church (under the bishop of Constantinople) split from the Western half of the church (under the bishop of Rome) in an event called the **Great Schism**. One of the factors in the split was the Western church’s assertion that the bishop of Rome—the pope—had authority over the entire church. The Western half of the church became the **Roman Catholic Church**; the Eastern half of the church became the **Eastern Orthodox Church**.
- In 1517, Martin Luther nailed the 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg to “protest” the sale of indulgences by the Roman Catholic Church. This event began the **Protestant Reformation**, where an intent to reform the Roman Catholic Church resulted in a large scale exodus of Christians from the Roman Catholic Church to form a variety of new denominations.
- In 1545, the Roman Catholic Church convened the **Council of Trent** to deal with the Protestant “threat.” Clergy corruption was curtailed and sale of indulgences was banned, however the Roman Catholic Church also condemned key Protestant beliefs and pronounced a curse on those holding them.

- In 1962, the Roman Catholic Church convened the **Vatican II** council, which resulted in a number of changes in the church's relationship with Protestants and non-Christian religions: Protestants were now to be considered "separated brethren" and the Church expressed a positive view of the role of non-Christian religions.
- Today, there is considerable **diversity** within the Roman Catholic Church:¹ **Ultra-traditional Catholics** defend old time Catholicism and are critical of the changes brought about by Vatican II. **Traditionalist Catholics**, while critical of liberalism and modernism within the Church, generally accept the reforms of Vatican II. **Liberal Catholics** have replaced the Bible and Church authority with the authority of human reason and have questioned the infallibility of the pope, Church councils, and the Bible itself. **Charismatic/evangelical Catholics** are more evangelical in belief and affirm conservatively orthodox doctrines, and they emphasize the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the importance of being baptized in the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit-filled life. **Cultural Catholics** are "womb-to-tomb" Catholics— they are born, baptized, married, and buried in the Catholic Church, but are relatively unconcerned about spirituality. **Popular folk Catholics** predominate in Central and South America. They are very eclectic in their beliefs and combine elements of an animistic or nature-culture religion with a traditional medieval Catholicism.
- "Evangelicals" incorporate a diverse group of Christians from a variety of faith traditions that are characterized by **taking the Bible seriously** and **believing in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord**. Evangelicals take pains to differentiate themselves from "fundamentalists," who are characterized by elevating minor Christian beliefs and matters of opinion to the status of dogmas and defending them militantly against all compromises with what they consider to be "secular" or "liberal" thinking.

III. Roman Catholicism and Authority

- Roman Catholicism accepts "**Sacred Scripture**" as being inspired by God and authoritative (CCC 81)
 - 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 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)

¹ These categories are discussed in Rhodes, 14-15.

- 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 Apocrypha. 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 from the Apocrypha (e.g. purgatory and indulgences, in 2 Maccabees 12:40-45)
- Roman Catholicism accepts “**Sacred Tradition**” 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 honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence**” (CCC 82)
 - Tradition is interpreted to refer to the beliefs and practices entrusted by Christ to the apostles, who then entrusted them to subsequent bishops and popes in an unbroken chain through church history (CCC 75-78)
 - An important **implication** of this is that certain dogmas are to be believed because they are **taught by the Church**, though they **may not be contained in the Scriptures**
 - Arguments **for the acceptance of Tradition** in addition to Scripture include:
 - The Bible teaches about the existence of Tradition: **2 Thessalonians 2:15** “*So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter*” and **2 Thessalonians 3:6** “*Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us*”
 - The Bible cannot be correctly interpreted without tradition—Catholics argue that the rejection of Tradition in Protestantism is what has led to the divisions and multiple denominations in Protestantism
- 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 apostles. (CCC 880)
 - The primary biblical support for this is **Matthew 16:18-19** “*And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*”

- “The **Roman Pontiff**, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, and as pastor of the entire Church **has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church**, a power which he can always exercise unhindered.” (CCC 882)
- “The task of interpreting the Word of God authentically has been entrusted solely to the Magisterium of the Church, that is, to the Pope and to the bishops in communion with him.” (CCC 100)
- “The **Roman Pontiff**, head of the college of bishops, **enjoys 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 pertaining to faith or morals...**” (CCC 891). This is what it means for the pope to speak *ex cathedra* (from the Latin, meaning “from the chair”)
- “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’**” (CCC 891)

Evangelical Response

- **Evangelicals do not accept the Apocrypha/Deuterocanonical Books as Scripture:**
 - The books of the Apocrypha were **never accepted as canonical by the Jews**, who universally believed that prophecy had ceased after the time of the last OT prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi (c. 400 BC), and so no more prophetic writings could be given after that time (1 Maccabees 4:45-47, 9:27, 14:41; Josephus *Against Apion* 1.8; Babylonian Talmud, *Yoma* 9b; *Sotah* 48b; *Sanhedrin* 11a; and *Midrash Rabbah on Song of Songs* 8.9.3)
 - **None** of the books of the Apocrypha **claim to be the word of the Lord**, have been confirmed by divine miracles, or contain any predictive prophecy, unlike canonical Scripture
 - Though the books of the Apocrypha are alluded to in NT books, they are **never cited as authoritative** (“Scripture says” or “as it is written”) by Jesus or any NT writer—this is especially significant given that the New Testament writers extensively used the Septuagint, which contained these books.
 - The books of the Apocrypha contain **stories which are legendary and fanciful**, such as Bel and the Dragon
 - Some **church fathers spoke against the canonicity** of the books of the Apocrypha: e.g. Origen, Jerome, Athanasius, and Cyril of Jerusalem. And, our **two earliest Christian lists** of Old Testament books which were recognized as inspired by God—Melito, Bishop of Sardis, in 170 AD, and Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, in 367 AD—**did not include any book of the Apocrypha.**²

² Melito’s list included all the OT books except Esther; Athanasius’ list all off the books of our present OT and NT except Esther. Athanasius mentioned some of the apocryphal books—Wisdom of Solomon, the Wisdom of Sirach, Judith,

- The books of the Apocrypha **contain errors of history** (e.g. Tobit 1:15 the assumption that Sennacherib was the son of Shalmaneser instead of Sargon II, Tobit 14:5 that Nineveh was captured by Nebuchadnezzar and Ahasuerus instead of by Nabopolassar and Cyaxares, and Judith 1:1 Nebuchadnezzar reigning in Nineveh instead of Babylon), **geography** (e.g. Tobit 6:1 the Tigris River is west of Nineveh, Persia is east), and **chronology** (e.g. 1 Esdras 5:56 the 2nd year of Cyrus should be the 2nd year of Darius)
- The books of the Apocrypha **contain teachings which contradict the rest of Scripture**, such as *prayers for the dead* (2 Maccabees 12:44-45; compare to Hebrews 9:27; Luke 16:25-26), the notion that the *world was created out of preexistent matter* (Wisdom of Solomon; cf. Genesis 1 and Psalm 33:9), the idea that *giving alms and other works can make an atonement for sin* (Ecclesiasticus [Sirach] 3:3; 3:30; 5:5; 20:28; 35:1-4; 45:16; 45:23; compare with Romans 3:20), the *invocation and intercession of the saints* (2 Maccabees 15:14; Baruch 3:4; compare with Matthew 6:9), the *worship of angels* (Tobit 12:12; compare with Colossians 2:18), *purgatory and the redemption of souls after death* (2 Maccabees 12:42,45; compare with Hebrews 9:27) *salvation by works* (Tobit 12:9), and the *assistance of God in a lie* (Judith 9:10, 13; compare to Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29)
- 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.
- Evangelicals **do not accept Tradition** in addition to Scripture:
 - The idea of Tradition as a supplement to written Scripture is based on **weak biblical support**. 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 from it*” (Deuteronomy 4:2)—which shows the Jewish and Christian emphasis on what was written, instead of oral tradition.
 - The Catholic understanding of Tradition **did not arise until the 14th century**³—if this was such an important body of knowledge, what took so long for it to be recognized?
 - The Catholic Church’s claim to be the maintainer and promoter of divine revelation in Tradition essentially amounts to a **claim of being infallibly led by the Holy Spirit apart from Scripture**—which also was a novel claim, prior to the 14th century.⁴
 - The history of the church at large shows all too clearly that **church leaders and church councils can and do make mistakes**, some of them serious.

and Tobit—but said these are “not indeed included in the Canon, but appointed by the Fathers to be read by those who newly join us, and who wish for instruction in the word of godliness.”

³ This is developed in Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2011), 82-87.

⁴ Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology*, Kindle Location 1758.

- A Scripture-plus-Tradition structure is inherently unstable; in practice, **when the two are in conflict, Tradition will often trump Scripture** in terms of authority. In fact, Jesus warned about that very possibility in Matthew 15:2-3, 6 and Mark 7:8-9, 13.
- A Scripture-plus-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 God: **Psalm 19:7** “*The law of the LORD is perfect*” and **2 Timothy 3:16-17** “*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work*”
- Evangelicals **reject the Catholic doctrine of apostolic succession**, which establishes the pope as the Church’s supreme authority and grounds claims of infallibility for the pope and bishops:
 - The idea that Peter and the apostles were the first in a self-perpetuating hierarchy has **weak biblical support**. Many **non-apostles figured prominently** in the founding of the church: **Stephen**, the first Christian martyr (Acts 7); **Philip**, the evangelist to the Samaritans and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8); “**men of Cyprus and Cyrene**” who evangelized the Greeks (Acts 11:19– 22) and launched the first Gentile church, led by **Barnabas**, in Antioch (vv. 22–26); and others.
 - Additionally, the **three-tiered Catholic pattern** of leadership (office of bishop, office of elder/priest/pastor, and office of deacon) **contradicts the two-tiered pattern of leadership as set forth in Scripture**: office of teaching and oversight (interchangeably called elders, bishops, overseers, or pastors) and the office of service (deacons and deaconesses) in 1 Timothy 3:1-13
 - In Matthew 16:18-19, Jesus says to Peter, “you are *petros*, and on this *petra* I will build my church...” It is very likely that the difference in terms (*petros* vs. *petra*) and the fact that Jesus says “this *petra*” instead of “on you” means that **the “rock (*petra*)” upon which Jesus will build the church is Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Christ** (Matthew 16:16) instead of Peter himself.
 - Peter considered himself as **one among many** who shepherded the flock of God. He referred to himself as a “*fellow elder*” (1 Peter 5:1), not a pope.
 - The Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 does not reflect the Catholic apostolic scheme when it seems that **James took the lead among the apostles**, not Peter (Acts 15:13-35)
 - Paul affirmed in 2 Corinthians 12:11 that **he was not inferior to any of the other apostles**—Paul could not have said this had Peter been recognized as the chief apostle.
 - **Peter was not infallible**, for “*when [Peter] came to Antioch, [Paul] opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12 For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party*” (Galatians 2:11-12)
 - 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 Roman Catholic Church which held that the earth was the center of the solar system.
- At several points in history, there have been more than one pope at a time—there have been about thirty-five antipopes in the history of the church.⁵

IV. Roman Catholicism and the Sacraments

- 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” (CCC 1127) and they act “*ex opere operato* (literally: ‘by the very fact of the action’s being performed’), i.e., by virtue of 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 God (CCC 1128)
 - These sacraments are “*necessary for salvation*” (CCC 1129, emphasis theirs)
 - **Evangelical Response:**
 - Evangelicals believe that Jesus Christ **only ordained two ordinances** for the church: baptism and the Lord’s Supper
 - 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
- **Baptism**
 - 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 impede their entry into the Kingdom of God, neither Adam’s sin, nor personal sin, nor the consequences of sin, the gravest of which is separation from God.” (CCC 1263)
 - Since every infant child is also “born with a fallen human nature and tainted by original sin,” Roman Catholicism practices **infant baptism**, to cleanse from original sin, shortly after birth (CCC 1250).⁶

⁵ *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1983), 66.

⁶ Historically, in the case of **unbaptized infants** who died before they were baptized, “the [Church’s] traditional teaching on this topic has concentrated on the **theory of limbo**, understood as a state which includes the souls of infants who die subject to original sin and without baptism, and who, therefore, neither merit the beatific vision, nor yet are subjected to any punishment, because they are not guilty of any personal sin.” See the International Theological Commission, *The Hope*

- *ex opere operato* (“by the very fact of the action’s being performed”): the natural element of water is consecrated so that it conveys grace irrespective of the faith of the one officiating or receiving it (as in the case of an infant).
- **Evangelical Response:**
 - Evangelicals believe that **baptism is a public/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—accompanied 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**
 - In every instance of baptism in the New Testament, **the individuals being baptized are described as having put their faith in Christ**. This is consistent with Jesus’ command to baptize those who had been made disciples (Matthew 28:18– 20)
- **Confirmation**
 - Roman Catholicism teaches that **confirmation completes baptismal grace** by bringing “an increase and deepening of baptismal grace (*CCC* 1303)
 - This should be performed when a child reaches “age of discretion” (*CCC* 1307)
 - **Evangelical Response:**
 - Evangelicals reject confirmation as a sacrament because there is **no biblical evidence that Jesus ordained it** as a rite to be administered by the church
 - Evangelical denominations which do administer the rite of confirmation treat it as a public profession of the faith into which those who are confirmed were introduced at their baptism⁷
 - Evangelicals view justification as a singular and instantaneous event in which **God declares the believing sinner to be righteous**. Justification viewed in this way is a judicial term in which God makes a legal declaration. It is not based on performance or good works. It involves God’s pardoning of sinners and declaring them absolutely righteous at the moment they trust in Christ for salvation (Romans 3:25, 28, 30; 8:33, 34; Galatians 4:21–5:12; 1 John 1:7– 2:2).⁸

of Salvation for Infants Who Die without Being Baptized (January 19, 2007), opening paragraphs. Accessible at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20070419_un-baptised-infants_en.html.

⁷ Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology*, Kindle Location 6421-6423.

⁸ Rhodes, 133-134.

- A sacrament that augments a divine substance or power make no sense. If the faithful are united to Christ—identified with his death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3-5)—how can they be more united to him? If the faithful have been adopted as sons and daughters into the family of God, how can they be more adopted?⁹

- **Eucharist (Communion)**

- Roman Catholicism teaches that a miracle takes place during the celebration of the Eucharist: “by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the **bread into the substance of the body of Christ** our Lord and of the whole substance of the **wine into the substance of his blood**. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called **transubstantiation**” (CCC 1376)
- Therefore, 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 thus a **sacrifice** because it **re-presents (makes present)** the sacrifice of the cross” (CCC 1366)
- In terms of practice, the holiness of the elements demands that “anyone conscious of a grave sin must receive the sacrament of [Penance] before coming to communion.” (CCC 1385)
- **Evangelical Response:**
 - “The sacramental understanding of the Lord’s Supper is grounded 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.”¹⁰
 - The **Lord’s Supper is done “in remembrance”** of Jesus (1 Corinthians 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** (Acts 1:11).¹¹
 - Historically, the doctrine of transubstantiation was proclaimed as the authoritative position of the Catholic Church at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), and thus is of late origin

- **Penance (Confession)**

- Roman Catholicism teaches that sins are evaluated according to their seriousness (CCC 1854).

⁹ Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology*, Kindle Location 6350-6353.

¹⁰ Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology*, Kindle Location 5208-5211.

¹¹ Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology*, Kindle Location 6925-6928.

- **Mortal sin** “destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God’s law” (CCC 1855) 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 exclusion from Christ’s kingdom and the eternal death of hell**” (CCC 1861).
 - **Venial sin**, on the other hand “does not break the covenant with God. **With God’s grace it is humanly reparable**” (CCC 1863).
 - Roman Catholicism teaches that “Confession to a priest is an essential part of the sacrament of Penance: ‘All **mortal sins** of which penitents after a diligent self-examination are conscious must be recounted by them in confession’” (CCC 1456). All Catholics are required to participate in the sacrament of Penance once a year as a minimum (CCC 1457).
 - 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 also called ‘penance’” (CCC 1459). Typical acts of penance can include praying a certain number of “Our Fathers” or “Hail Marys.”
 - **Evangelical Response:**
 - Evangelicals reject Penance as a sacrament because there is **no biblical evidence that Jesus ordained it** as a rite to be 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 view himself as basically a good person. He **may not see himself as being in dire need of a Savior.**”¹²
 - Evangelicals reject that a priest-confessor is necessary for forgiveness of sins—each believer can approach God through Christ (**1 Timothy 2:5-6** “*For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time*”)
 - No matter the severity of one’s sins, **all sins are covered by Christ’s death on the cross** (1 Peter 3:18)—He has fully paid the penalty and no guilt remains before God.
- **Anointing the Sick (aka 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 special sacrament in cases of sickness, old age, prior to a serious operation, etc. (CCC 1514-1515)

¹² Rhodes, 217.

- Only priests and bishops can give this sacrament, using oil blessed by the bishop (CCC 1527)
- **Evangelical Response:**
 - 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 church
 - However, evangelicals would agree that Christians should regularly be involved in prayer for the sick, infirm, elderly, etc.
- **Holy Orders**
 - In the Catholic Church, three degrees of Holy Orders are present: *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 (CCC 1577), and there is an expectation for them to live a celibate life "for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:12) (CCC 1579)
 - Those who take on holy orders receive sacred power for service (CCC 1592), 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" (CCC 1548)
 - **Evangelical Response:**
 - Evangelicals tend to view the intermediary nature of Catholic priests and bishops as an unfortunate throwback to the Old Covenant priests, which serve as a "*copy and shadow of the heavenly things*" (Hebrews 8:5).
 - Instead, evangelicals embrace one of the key doctrines of the Protestant Reformation: the **priesthood of all believers**, which recognizes 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 Peter 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 proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light*" (1 Peter 2:9).
 - Thus, "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/ teaching sound doctrine, leading and shepherding the church, and more."¹³
 - Evangelicals disagree with the demand for priestly celibacy in connection with Scriptures that allow for marriage for elders/bishops (e.g. 1 Timothy 3:2; and Peter was married 1 Corinthians 9:5).
 - God gives the gift of celibacy to some (1 Corinthians 7:7-9)

¹³ Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology*, Kindle Location 8144-8145.

- It is worth asking, “is it realistic to expect that all the men who commit themselves to being celibate for the rest of their lives so that they may enter the priesthood, have the needed 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 varieties among Catholic clergy testifies to tragic failure in this regard.”¹⁴
- **Matrimony**
 - Roman Catholicism holds a **high view of marriage and the family**, in connection with its understanding as a sacrament.
 - Marriage between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic requires “express permission of ecclesiastical authority”; marriage between a Catholic and someone of a different religion requires an “express dispensation from this impediment” and the Catholic spouse is obligated to ensure that the children of the marriage are baptized and educated in the Catholic Church (*CCC* 1635)
 - Roman Catholicism **does not allow divorce**, but may grant an **annulment** in some cases. Divorced and remarried Catholics cannot receive the Eucharist for as long as the situation persists (*CCC* 1650)
 - Roman Catholicism teaches an openness to fertility (*CCC* 1652-1654) and forbids the use of contraceptives—only a natural family planning method is permitted
 - Roman Catholicism is a prominent and vocal advocate for the protection of life in connection with abortion and infanticide (*CCC* 2270-2275)
 - **Evangelical Response:**
 - Evangelicals find large points of agreement with the Catholic doctrine of marriage and its staunch support for a culture of life against such practices as abortion, infanticide, physician-assisted suicide, euthanasia, etc. However, evangelicals do not consider Matrimony to be a sacrament.
 - Evangelical theology also disagrees with the Catholic position on divorce—usually permitting it, at a minimum, in cases of adultery (Matthew 19:9) or abandonment (1 Corinthians 7:12-16)—and disagrees with the concept of annulment.
 - Many evangelical pastors would not permit a marriage between a Christian and non-Christian on the basis of 1 Corinthians 7:39 and 2 Corinthians 6:14-18
 - Most evangelicals would not prohibit the use of (non-abortifacient) contraceptive means as part of family planning

¹⁴ Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology*, Kindle Location 8218-8222.

V. Roman Catholicism and Salvation

- Roman Catholicism teaches that human beings have **inherited an original sin** that deprives them of their original holiness, has made them subject to the dominion of death, and has inclined them to sin.
 - Original sin “is a deprivation of original holiness and justice, but human nature has not been totally corrupted: it is wounded in the natural powers proper to it; subject to ignorance, suffering, and the dominion of death; and inclined to sin— an inclination to evil that is called “concupiscence.” (CCC 405)
 - The **solution to original sin is the sacrament of Baptism**, which infuses sanctifying grace.
 - **Evangelical Response:**
 - Roman Catholicism’s idea that human nature is not totally corrupted by sin is rejected by most versions of evangelicalism on the basis of passages like **Ephesians 2:1-3** “*And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind*”
 - Most versions of evangelicalism understand that every element of human nature—intellect reason, feelings/sentiments, will/volition, body, motivations, purposing—is affected by sin. No element escapes the corrupting influence of original sin.
 - Only salvation is able to solve humanity’s sin problem.
- Roman Catholicism teaches that “**justification** is not only the remission of sins, but **also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man**” (CCC 1989)
 - Since sanctification and renewal is a process, there is a dimension of salvation that **requires the Catholic to continue to cooperate with God’s grace** and progress in good works, thereby meriting further grace that is necessary to enter eternal life.
 - “Since the initiative belongs to God in the order of grace, *no one can merit the initial grace* of forgiveness and justification, at the beginning of conversion [through the sacrament of Baptism]. Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, ***we can then merit for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification***, for the increase of grace and charity, and for the attainment of eternal life.” (CCC 2010)
 - Over the course of one’s life, **merit is accumulated**. Some people are so good and righteous and full of merit that they end up being “canonized” as saints. However, should the Catholic commit a mortal sin, all merit and grace is forfeited until they participate in the sacrament of Penance, where they start over again.

- **Evangelical Response:**
 - Scripture is clear that Christians are saved by grace, and not by works: “*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*” (Ephesians 2:8-9)
 - Evangelicals view justification as “a singular and instantaneous event in which **God declares the believing sinner to be righteous**. Justification viewed in this way is a judicial term in which God makes a legal declaration. It is not based on performance or good works. It involves God’s pardoning of sinners and declaring them absolutely righteous at the moment they trust in Christ for salvation (Romans 3:25, 28, 30; 8:33, 34; Galatians 4: 21–5:12; 1 John 1:7– 2:2)”¹⁵
 - Evangelicals are aware that Roman Catholicism has not recanted the canons of the council of Trent concerning 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.**”¹⁶
 - “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.**”¹⁷
- 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)
 - 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 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)

¹⁵ Rhodes, 133-134.

¹⁶ *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, (Trans. H. J. Schroeder; Rockford, Ill.: Tan Books, 1978), 43.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

- Out of this treasury, the Church can apply this merit in the form of **indulgences**: “An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions through the action of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority **the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints**” (CCC 1471)
- **Evangelical Response**
 - 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.
 - When Jesus died on the cross He said, “*It is finished*” (John 19:30), thereby indicating that He had completed work of redemption at the cross.
 - Scripture indicates that Christ’s work is complete when applied to believers: **Romans 8:1** “*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*”
 - Several passages teaching that Christians go to the presence of God in the temporary time period between their physical death and the resurrection (Ecclesiastes 12:7, Luke 16:19-31, 23:43, Acts 7:59, 2 Corinthians 5:1-8, 12:1-4, Philippians 1:19-26, Revelation 6:9-11)—not to purgatory
- 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” (CCC 838)
 - 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” (CCC 841)
 - 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 preparation for the Gospel and given by him who enlightens all men that they may at length have life’**” (CCC 843)
 - **Evangelical Response**:
 - 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 salvation: **Romans 10:13-17** “*For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” 14 How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?*”

15 And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who **preach the good news!**” 16 But they have **not all obeyed the gospel**. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” 17 So **faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ**”

VI. Roman Catholicism and Mary

- Roman Catholicism teaches the **immaculate conception of Mary**—the belief that in order for Mary to be an appropriate habitation for Christ, God had to **preserve her from the corruption of original sin** (Adam’s sin). Thus, she was never subject to the curse, being “immune from all sin, personal or inherited.”¹⁸ This teaching became official doctrine in 1854.¹⁹
- Roman Catholicism teaches the **Perpetual Virginity of Mary**—that she never engaged in marital relations with Joseph (CCC 499), so the “brothers” of Jesus are simply “close relations...according to Old Testament expression” (CCC 500). Some Catholic scholars even teach that “Mary gave birth in miraculous fashion without opening of the womb and injury to the hymen, and consequently also without pains.”²⁰
- 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*).²¹ 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 as Co-redeemer and Mediatrix**, because of 1) her agreement to bear the Messiah in her womb shows cooperation with and taking part in the divine plan of humankind’s redemption, and 2) for her intercession in heaven.²²
- 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.”
- **Evangelical Response**
 - The biblical Mary is to be commended for being a “*servant of the Lord*” and humbly accepting the role God chose for her “*let it be to me according to your word*” (Luke 1:38)
 - These doctrines about Mary are **found nowhere in the pages of Scripture**, 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 (in the case of the doctrine of Mary’s sinlessness)

¹⁸ Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*.

¹⁹ Pope Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*.

²⁰ Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (Rockford, Ill.: Tan Books and Publishers, 1960), 205.

²¹ *The Essential Catholic Handbook: A Summary of Beliefs, Practices, and Prayers* (Liguori, Mo.: Liguori, 1997),

²² Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, 212-13.

- It is significant that Jesus—who had a biblical responsibility to honor His parents (Exodus 20:12)—did not exalt His mother like many Roman Catholics do
- Mary herself recognized that she had a sin nature and was in need of a savior: **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) implies 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?*”

VIII. Bibliography

Allison, Gregg R. *Roman Catholic Theology and Practice: An Evangelical Assessment*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2014. Allison is a professor of Christian Theology at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, who served on staff with Campus Crusade for Christ for a number of years at the university of Notre Dame and in Italy ministering to Roman Catholics. This assessment of Roman Catholic theology goes section by section through the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (below), summarizing Catholic teaching, identifying both agreements and disagreements with Evangelical theology, and offering arguments against the Catholic position on areas of disagreement. The book is targeted for a more “professional” audience (e.g. theology students, pastors, scholars, etc.), but it is much more comprehensive and thorough than Rhodes (below).

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. It can be read for free online at <http://ccc.usccb.org/flipbooks/catechism/index.html>, but there is not a free downloadable copy. Sections in the *Catechism* are identified in these notes by the abbreviation CCC plus a section number.

Rhodes, Ron. *Reasoning from the Scriptures with Catholics*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 2000. This is targeted toward the “average” Christian, with an emphasis on discussion of the main problems that Protestants will have with Roman Catholic theology. Accordingly, it is not as comprehensive as Allison (above), but it is much more readable and practical in orientation, and it includes helpful questions and discussion strategies to use in conversation with Catholics. If you would like to get equipped to reach out to Catholic family/friends, this is the book to read first.