And You Will Know The Truth

How to Explain and Defend The Catholic Faith

Sebastian R. Fama



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Updated August 29, 2026

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About the Essays

Catholics accept Protestants as their fellow Christians. But Protestants do not always think of Catholics in the same way. They say the teachings of the Church are opposed to the teachings of the Bible. But Scripture, read in context, fully supports Catholic teaching. Some will claim they have no need of a church. They say, all they require is Jesus. However, Jesus established a church. And by the way, He established one church, not thousands. But thousands do exist. And that is because some men prefer their view of God to His. Others, though well-meaning, simply are not fully aware of what God requires of them. Nevertheless, it should be obvious to all that division was not a part of God's plan. For a God of truth and justice, is not a God of multiple choice. As we read in Ephesians 4:5, there is: "One Lord, one faith, one baptism."

We hear a lot about the need to accept Jesus. And of course, this is good. But if you reject Him on one point, you have rejected His authority (James 2:10). And if you reject His authority, you have rejected Him. And if you have rejected Him, you have not accepted Him.

The essays address the most common objections to Catholicism. In them is contained the biblical evidence for the Church's teachings. Quotes from the Early Church Fathers are also provided to show that the early Church and the Catholic Church of today are one and the same.

When it comes to Christian doctrine, our views should be based on the evidence and not the prejudice of others. In the movie, "To Kill a Mockingbird," Tom Robinson, a black man, is accused of a crime that he did not commit. The story takes place in the American South during the early 1930s. The jury was composed of local townspeople, all of whom were white. Despite clear evidence that indicated his innocence, the jury found Tom guilty. The verdict was not based on facts, but on the bigotry of the jury. If you were on that jury, would you have stood up for the truth, or would you have succumbed to peer pressure and gone along with the others? You are in such a position now. There is a great deal of prejudice against the Catholic Church. Can you examine the evidence without that prejudice affecting your opinion?

If we are to be honest with ourselves and others, we need to consider all the evidence before drawing any conclusions. Case in point: my wife and I attended a four-day parish mission. On the final day, the speaker offered to pray with anyone who needed it. My wife and I got in line. The process was simple. You tell the man what you required prayer for, and then he would pray for you. My wife went first. When she was done, she started to walk away. Then it was my turn. Because of the nature of my prayer request, the process changed a bit. I told him my problem, he asked me a question, and I answered.

As my wife was walking away, she happened to hear the question and the answer, but she never heard me say what my prayer request was. Here is how it went.

> **Me:** I am pre-diabetic.
> **Speaker:** Do you cheat?
> **Me:** Yes.

Obviously, the man wanted to know if I was cheating on my diet. But not hearing my petition, my wife imagined some other type of cheating was being discussed. Her head spun around so fast I believe the earth wobbled on its axis. Luckily, I saw this out of the corner of my eye and called her back. I asked the man to tell her what we were talking about. Once he stopped laughing, he did. Obviously, having all the facts in this situation was important. Logically, then, how much more important would it be to have all the facts when we are talking about eternal truths.

Some see apologetics as a rejection of those who believe differently. And that would be false. Catholic apologetics rejects false ideas, not the individuals who hold those ideas. If you saw a friend attempt to drink a cup of bleach that he thought was a fruit drink, you would say something. The same principle applies to our faith. With eternity at stake, it would be foolish to ignore our differences. Pope Benedict XVI told the American bishops in 2008: "The Church needs to promote at every level of her teaching – in catechesis, preaching, seminary, and university instruction – an apologetics aimed at affirming the truth of Christian revelation, the harmony of faith and reason, and a sound understanding of freedom" (*The Urgency of a New Apologetics for the Church in the 21st Century*).

Jude makes it clear that we are to “contend for the faith” (Jude 1:3). That is, to fight for It and defend it against false teaching. Paul tells Titus to "Rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the Faith, instead of giving heed to Jewish myths or to commands of men whom reject the truth" (Titus 1:13-14). Finally, Peter tells us to "Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence" (1 Peter 3:15).

Vatican II was in full agreement in its "Declaration on Religious Freedom." It reads in part: "The Disciple is bound by a grave obligation toward Christ, his Master, ever more fully to understand the truth received from Him, faithfully to proclaim it, and vigorously to defend it" (No. 14). Jesus said that the truth would set us free. Common sense tells us that two opposing views cannot both be true. However, if the truth is to set us free, we must know what the truth is. Consequently, a vehicle is needed to explain and verify it. Apologetics is that vehicle.

For those who seek to defend the faith, a word of advice: Don't expect that everyone will convert once you have demonstrated the Catholic position. People remain outside the Church for various reasons. Some simply do not wish to abandon that which has been familiar to them. The deeper someone is immersed in a way of thinking, the harder it is to see any flaws in it. For some people, sentiment and friendships can take precedence over the truth. Also, do not be a bull in a china shop. As Peter said, defend the faith with gentleness and reverence.

Some leave or stay out of the Church because they are unwilling to accept one or more of its teachings. Whether those teachings are true is beside the point. As Scripture puts it: “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings” (2 Timothy 4:3).

This is due to our human nature. We tend to prefer things a certain way. Consequently, we can be inclined to see only that evidence that supports or seems to support our position. Evidence to the contrary, no matter how strong, is easily dismissed. We do this in politics, religion, and even in our daily lives. None of us is immune to this type of thinking. The question is, are we willing to see it?

No matter what we prefer to believe, reality is reality. I can decide not to believe in the law of gravity. But if I jump off a tall building, I am still going to make a mess on the sidewalk. That is how reality works. Facing reality may not always be pleasant or desirable. However, it is always the right thing to do.

When sharing the faith with others, it is possible for your intentions to be misinterpreted. Oftentimes people are insulted by any kind of correction. Be careful in the way you communicate. Pray that God would open the hearts of the people that you want to reach. Bear in mind that it is the Holy Spirit who converts hearts.

Regardless of the outcome, never be judgmental or demeaning. While you may not have won the person over, you may have planted a seed, a seed that may sprout and grow strong at some future date. Do not jeopardize that with the wrong attitude. Your objective should be to win souls, not arguments. I once heard Mother Angelica say, “An argument is an exchange of feelings. A discussion is an exchange of ideas. Discussions lead to truth; arguments lead to bitterness.” I could not agree more. That is why the Scriptures tell us to “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15).

When using the essays with family or friends, make sure that you read them first and understand them. You may want to highlight points that you think are important or that may have come up in past conversations. Before your discussion, you may want to consult books like Karl Keating's “Catholicism and Fundamentalism” or Rev. John O'Brien's “The Faith of Millions,” as they cover the most common objections in more detail than I have.

The majority of the essays deal with objections raised by other Christian groups. Traditionally, these people were referred to as Protestants. Some object to the label. They claim they are not protesting anything. However, if you are a Christian, and your beliefs differ from those of the Church established by Jesus 2,000 years ago, you are in fact protesting that which God established. And thus, the label Protestant would be accurate. No offense is intended. I just need a word to use when referring to those Christians who reject Rome. And listing each of the thousands of Bible-only denominations or groups is just not practical.

Sebastian R Fama

Creationism or Evolution?

The two most popular explanations for the origin of man are; 1. Creation – the idea that we were created by an all-powerful God and 2. Evolution – the idea that life was formed accidentally by an interaction of pre-existing elements. Evolutionists reject the idea of an all-powerful God because they say the idea is unscientific. Facts, they say, must be observable by the senses. And since God cannot be brought into the lab for examination, He is not even considered as a possibility. Ironically, evolution is not observable by the senses.

Creationists, on the other hand, contend that belief in an all-powerful God is consistent with scientific principles. We can know that God exists even though we cannot see or touch Him? To illustrate my point, consider radio waves. We believe they exist, and yet we cannot see or touch them. And we believe it because the evidence allows for no other conclusion. We turn on our cell phones and we can talk to people hundreds of miles away. Thus, we can know that radio waves exist even if we cannot see or touch them.

Similarly, we can know that God exists because the evidence allows for no other conclusion. For instance, we can infer the following from the Second Law of Thermodynamics: (1) Natural processes always tend toward disorder, (2) the simple will never produce the complex and, (3) the universe is running down. Nothing has been observed to break this law. The Theory of Evolution would require us to believe that observable laws of nature are false. If the universe is running down (stars burning out), that would make the universe finite. Anything finite had a beginning. And anything with a beginning, needs a cause. Consequently, the universe could not have always been here.

If, as some say, all we have is nature, then time as we know it would be eternal. Thus, all finite processes, or any series of finite processes, should have been completed in the past. This would be true no matter how far back in time that you went. And that is because any finite process requires a day one. And there is no day one. So, for us to exist here and now is not natural. And yet we do exist here and now. Therefore, the cause of our existence must be supernatural. Our name for that supernatural cause is God. We think of this God as an intelligent being because there is logical detail in His creation.

Evolution is represented as a fact in many of our schools. However, it is nothing more than a theory. A close examination of this theory reveals several problems. We are told that at one time our planet was a molten mass. After it cooled down, a variety of complex and delicately balanced ecosystems consisting of tens of thousands of species of land and sea animals, plants, and bacteria were formed by chance. All this supposedly evolved from a burnt rock, which is all the earth would have been once it cooled down. Of course, all of this raises a question; if life could come into existence by chance chemical reactions, why can't the process be repeated in the laboratory with deliberate actions, millions of dollars, and the brightest minds?

But what about the fossil record, isn't that evidence of evolution? The fossil record actually creates problems for the theory of evolution. The biggest problem is the absence of any transitional forms. Transitional forms are not important to evolution – transitional forms are evolution. No transitional forms, means no evolution! So, what is a transitional form? We are told that evolution takes millions of years. Consequently, if a fish were to evolve into a land animal there would be billions of variations along the way. Each of these variations would be a transitional form. But as I said previously, there are no transitional forms in the fossil record. Even in the earliest fossil layers we find completed, complex life forms, such as clams, snails, jellyfish, sponges, worms, etc. No one has been able to find fossilized ancestors for a single one of them.

Another problem arises when we realize that even the so-called "simple" life forms are not really simple. Today we know that a cell is one of the most complex structures known to man. In a book titled "The Evidence for Creation" by Dr. G.S. McLean, Roger Oakland and Larry McLean, we find the following on page 113:

> The cell has turned out to be a micro universe containing trillions of molecules. These molecules are the structural building blocks for countless complex structures performing chains of complex biochemical reactions with precision… a single cell surrounded by a cellular membrane exhibits the same degree of complexity as a city with all of its systems of operation, communication and government. There are power plants that generate the cell's energy, factories that produce enzymes and hormones essential for life, complex transportation systems that guide specific chemicals from

> one location to another and membrane proteins that act as barricades controlling the import and export of materials across the cellular membrane.

In the nucleus of every cell is the DNA. DNA contains millions of bits of coded information – information necessary for the building and development of our bodies. The inner workings of our DNA is highly complex. Is it not reasonable to conclude that something this complex had an intelligent designer?

Within the human body there are several irreducibly complex systems. That is, systems that would not function if they were any simpler. One example is our digestive system. Microvilli, which line the intestines, are microscopic bristles that somewhat resemble the bristles of a hairbrush. The spaces between the bristles are wide enough to allow nutrients to pass through to be absorbed and digested. However, the spaces are narrow enough to block the passage of bacteria, bacteria that would kill you if they were allowed to pass. This in itself, refutes the theory of evolution, which contends that when a need presents itself, the body adapts by gradually changing (evolving) over millions of years. In this case millions of years would be too long. As soon as the deadly bacteria appeared, the body would have minutes to hours to design and evolve a system to block them. Failure to do so would result in immediate extinction. Our continued existence rules out evolution.

What about the ape men fossils? No one has ever found a fossil that indicates a link between man and ape-like ancestors. Fossils are either pure ape or pure man. Some of the supposed ape-man skulls were pieced together with fragments and are either guesses or hoaxes. Others, like Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon are fully human. The artistic renditions of ape-men are in large part the product of imagination. Boyce Rensberger, writing in *Science Digest* in 1981 stated: “Unfortunately, the vast majority of artist’s conceptions are based more on imagination than on evidence. … Much of the reconstruction, however, is guesswork. … Artists must create something between an ape and a human being; the older the specimen is said to be, the more ape-like they make it.”

Some say God created everything in a primitive state and then evolution took over. But Scripture says otherwise: "Look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed. **Thus, also mankind comes into being**" (2 Maccabees 7:28).

Richard Lewontin, a prominent evolutionary scientist, exposes a serious flaw with his side of the debate. He wrote:

> We take the side of science in spite of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, in spite of its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, in spite of the tolerance the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment to materialism. It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our a priori adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counter-intuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is an absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine foot in the door (“Billion and Billions of Demons” *The New York Review,* January 9, 1997, page 31).

“Scientists claim to have found our common ancestor – a woman who lived 200,000 years ago and left resilient genes that are carried by all of mankind” (*Newsweek* January11, 1988). They even call her “Eve.” However, being committed evolutionary scientists they attempted to fit her into the evolutionary narrative. But think of it; according to the theory of evolution, at the time this woman walked the earth, there would have been millions of other people in existence. How is it that only her descendants survived until the present day?

Mary Schweitzer, a paleontologist from North Carolina State University, discovered the remains of blood cells and soft tissue in T-Rex bones. The T-Rex in question is said to be 68 million years old. According to science textbooks blood cells and soft tissue would never last that long. Upon making such a discovery you would think the age of the bones would be reassessed. But that did not happen. Instead, they are trying to figure out how a dinosaur’s blood cells and soft flexible tissue still exists after 68 million years. Somehow that does not seem logical. In the end we are left with two choices: Either an intelligent being created everything out of nothing or nothing created everything out of nothing. Which do you suppose is more likely?

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The Bible

The Bible has been translated into more languages and has sold more copies than any other book in the history of mankind. It was written by numerous authors over a period of 1500 years. It was written in several languages on three different continents, and yet it is internally consistent in all that it teaches. It presents a message so profound that countless numbers of believers have gone to their deaths rather than deny it. Those who believe that the Scriptures were divinely inspired do not do so blindly. The divine inspiration of the Bible is something that can be demonstrated.

There are a total of 5364 New Testament manuscripts in existence. That is far more than for any other work of antiquity. The fact that some differ from the others does not detract from the Bible's credibility. Because the vast majority of them are the same, we can safely assume that they accurately reflect the originals. If the Bible were merely a collection of human writings, hand copied and passed down through the ages by men, we would expect a great number of omissions, additions, and variances. Most of the differences that we do find are nothing more than the types of errors that printers make today, what we would call typos. Only the originals would be free from such errors. **Upon examination we find that these small mistakes don't affect any doctrine, precept or promise of the Bible.** In other words, the teachings of the Bible remain uncorrupted.

The Dead Sea Scrolls provide further evidence that God protected the Bible from corruption. They were found in a cave near Khirbat Qumran, Jordan, in 1947. They contained fragments of every book of the Old Testament except for Esther. The book of Isaiah was found in its entirety. They turned out to be 1000 years older than the Masoretic manuscripts, which up until then were the oldest known. There were some differences in style, but none in substance.

There are claims that the Bible contains contradictions. Such claims are based on reading Scripture out of context. To properly understand Scripture, we must always take into account the society for which a particular book was written and the literary style employed. The Bible contains history, poetry, and apocalyptic writing (a highly symbolic language). We also find parables (stories composed to illustrate a point) and a good deal of hyperbole. Even today we routinely use hyperbole. We will often speak of someone laughing his or her head off or of it raining cats and dogs. Only someone unfamiliar with our culture would misunderstand such statements. Likewise, if we are unfamiliar with the culture in which the Bible was written, we will not understand certain parts of it. **When read in its proper context, the Bible has a message that is consistent and without contradiction.**

Archeology confirms the accuracy of Scripture. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire in Genesis 19 was thought by many to be a fairy tale, but in recent years the remains of two large cities were found at the southern tip of the Dead Sea. There is a great deal of bitumen, salt, and sulfur in the area. An investigation revealed that the layers of sedimentary rock were molded together by intense heat. The biblical account seems to indicate that there was a natural gas explosion. Such an explosion would have ignited the bitumen and sulfur, which would account for the "fire and brimstone" which the Bible says rained down on the cities. It would also explain how Lot's wife could have been encrusted in salt.

But what about the "silly passages"? You know, like the story of Noah's Ark? Incredibly enough, the story of Noah's Ark does not discredit Scripture - rather it does the opposite. There is a lot of evidence indicating that the earth was once entirely covered by water. The Grand Canyon is one example. We are told that it was formed over millions of years by the Colorado River wearing down through solid rock. But that is simply not possible. It is a hydrodynamic principle that water cannot meander while cutting through a solid material. It can only meander if it is cutting through soft, unconsolidated material such as mud or sand. It meanders because the soft material gives way to the pressure of the water. The Grand Canyon meanders and is quite deep. Logically one must conclude that the canyon was formed while its layers were still relatively soft.

But how would so much mud and sand come to be in one place? After all, the Grand Canyon is 277 miles long, 18 miles wide, and 5000 feet deep. And what would produce enough water to perform such a feat? The only possible answer seems to be that the mud and sand were deposited by global floodwaters. A large channel, such as the Grand Canyon, could only have been cut when those same floodwaters receded.

The existence of large fossil beds is another indication that the earth was once totally flooded. Generally speaking, fossils are not a natural occurrence. When an animal dies or is killed, its flesh is either eaten or it rots. Over time its bones turn to dust. The only way that it could be preserved as a fossil is if it was buried at, or soon after, death. The existence of fossil beds containing the remains of as many as five million animals each would certainly rule out small natural floods.

The main objection to the flood of Noah is that such a flood would not have been natural. This is correct; it would not have been natural. However, we know that it happened. **If it happened and it was not natural, then it was supernatural, which is exactly what the Scriptures teach.**

There are occasions when historians will scoff at the Bible with claims that certain individuals mentioned in Scripture never existed. One such case is that of Gallio, Proconsul of Achaea. Acts 18:12-17 records that the apostle Paul was brought before him. The whole account was dismissed by many as being fictitious. Even Gallio's title was thought to be fantasy. That is, until an inscription was found at Delphi recording both his name and his title. It also dates him to 51 A.D., the time that Paul was in Corinth (F.F. Bruce, *New Testament History* pages 298, 316).

For the most part, objection to the Bible has little to do with obscure passages or points of history. The real objection is to the many clear passages dealing with morality. In all too many cases the rejection of Scripture is just an attempt to take God out of the picture. If the Bible can be discredited, then its moral teachings carry little weight. If that is the case, then we are left to ourselves to determine what is right and what is wrong. Inevitably, we do as we please. Unfortunately, this has a negative effect on society.

In the early 60's many Americans saw fit to rebel against the biblical morality that had guided us for so long. The results were disastrous. Since 1960 our population has risen 41% – yet violent crime has risen 560%. Total crime is up 300%. People have become more self-centered and much less caring. There are an estimated 12 million new cases of sexually transmitted diseases in the U.S. each year. Of these, three million occur among teenagers (Centers for Disease Control, *The Challenge of STD Prevention in the United States*). Despite massive education efforts, lives are still being destroyed by widespread drug abuse.

What do you think would happen if all Americans took Biblical morality seriously? The problems mentioned above would cease to exist. School children would go back to throwing snowballs at each other rather than using automatic weapons. People would begin to take marriage seriously and divorce rates would go down. Children would actually grow up knowing both of their parents. Tens of billions of dollars' worth of merchandise would no longer be stolen each year. Consequently, the cost of living would go down and the number of poor people would be dramatically reduced. Many of our other problems would disappear almost overnight.

Human experience demonstrates the power of Scripture. Prison inmates who attended 10 or more Prison Fellowship Bible studies in a year were nearly three times less likely to be re-arrested during the 12 months after release than a matched comparison group. Specifically, **only 14% of those attending Bible study were re-arrested compared with 41% of those who did not** (*Ministry Development Division. 1998. Religious programs, institutional adjustment, and recidivism among former inmates in Prison Fellowship Programs. Summaries of Prison Fellowship Program Evaluations & Surveys. Washington, DC: Prison Fellowship Ministries*, page 6). Professor David G. Myers notes that we now have massive evidence that people active in faith communities are happier and healthier than their unchurched peers. (Recent epidemiological studies—tracking thousands of lives through years of time—reveal they even outlive their unchurched peers by several years). Why do you suppose that is?

People may not always want to act like Christians themselves, but they always seem to want everyone else to. To illustrate this point Dennis Prager once asked: "If your car broke down in a crime-ridden area and some strapping teenage boys approached you, wouldn't you feel better knowing they had just come from a Bible study?"

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The Trinity

There is only one God. That one God, is comprised of three persons. There is no contradiction here. If we said that He was one being and three beings or one person and three persons that would be contradictory. But we are not saying that. Nor are we saying that the one God presents Himself in three different ways. To be sure there is a mystery involved. But that does not mean that we cannot know it to be true. Only that we cannot fully understand it.

The Nicene Creed says that Jesus is "begotten not made, one in being with the Father." It also says that the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father and the Son." Some think that means that the Son and the Holy Spirit came later? But that cannot be as it would mean that there was a time when God was not complete. The Creed also says that Jesus is true God from True God. And as such he would have all the attributes of "true God."

But how could the Son have been begotten by the Father and at the same time be eternally coexistent? Nature itself gives us a hint. You can light one candle from another. The second flame can be said to proceed from the first. And yet both flames are of the same substance and are the same age. When you hold the flames together, they are one. Pull them apart and they are distinctly two. We can say the second flame was begotten not made and one with the other. The same can be said if we include a third flame.

A perfect and all-powerful God does not need anything or anyone. If He were dependent on anyone or anything He would not be perfect or all powerful. In the words of St. Richard of Victor: "For God to be good, God can be one. For God to be loving, God has to be two, because love is always a relationship. For God to be supreme joy and happiness, God has to be three. Lovers do not know the full happiness until they both delight in the same thing, like parents with the ecstasy of their first child. Thus, the doctrine of the Trinity is reasonable and to be expected.

Scripture is clear on the fact that there is but one God. The prophet Isaiah proclaimed: "You are my witnesses" says the Lord, "and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am He. **Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me"** (43:10).

The Bible is also clear on the fact that anyone else who is referred to as a god is a false god and in reality, no god at all. Paul tells us the following in his first letter to the Corinthians:

> **"There is no God but one."** For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth – as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords" – **yet for us there is one God,** the Father, from whom all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist (8:4-6).

Note the last line. It says there is "one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist." The book of Colossians goes even further: **"For in Him [Jesus] all things were created,** in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities – **all things were created through Him and for Him** (1:16). The Bible teaches us in several places that it was God who created all things (see Revelation 4:11). Unless Jesus is God how can all things be created through Him?

Even the Old Testament presents us with evidence that supports the doctrine of the Trinity. Before man was ever created, God said: "Let us make man in **our image**…. So, God created man in **His own image**" (Genesis 1:26-27). At the Tower of Babel God said: "**Let us go down**, and there confuse their language… **So, the Lord** scattered them abroad" (Genesis 11:7). Notice how singular and plural terms are used interchangeably for the one true God?

But doesn't Scripture portray Jesus as a man who is subordinate to God? Yes, it does but there is no contradiction here. Jesus came to earth as a man to offer Himself up for our sins. This is called the Incarnation. As such He was fully human and fully divine. In His human nature He was subordinate to the Father. In His Divine nature He was one with the Father (John 10:30).

Isaiah predicts the birth of Jesus with these words: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder, and His name will be called “Wonderful Counselor, **Mighty God, Everlasting Father,** Prince of Peace” (9:5-6). **Mighty God, Everlasting Father?** There is only one way to interpret that statement. Jesus is God.

In Isaiah 44:6 God the Father says: “**I am the first and I am the last**; besides me there is no god.” In Revelation 1:17 Jesus says: “Fear not **I am the first and the last.”** God the Father said: **“I am the Lord, and besides me there is no savior”** Peter said: **“Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”** (2 Peter 1:11).

In Exodus 3:14-15 God says to Moses: “I AM who I AM” And He said, “Say this to the people of Israel, “The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you: this is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.”

The Hebrew word rendered as “I AM” is recorded as YHWH. As a sign of respect, the vowels were removed from God’s name so that no one would repeat it. It was felt that no one was worthy to speak the name of God. The name “I AM” is more a reflection of what the proper name of God means rather than the actual name itself. Yahweh and Jehovah are two guesses at what the original name was. For the sake of argument, I will use Jehovah.

Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name “Jehoshua.” Jehoshua is usually shortened to Joshua or Jeshua. In the east names are more than a label. Quite often they tell us something about the person. The name Jehoshua comes from two Hebrew words; Jehovah (the proper name of God) and hoshea (saving). So, Jesus or Jehoshua literally means Jehovah our salvation.

The first of the Ten Commandments forbids us from worshiping anyone other than the one true God (Exodus 20:2-6). In Revelation 7:11 we read the following: “And all the angels stood round the throne and round the elders and four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and **worshiped God.”** Here we see the residents of heaven worshiping the one true God.

The Greek word rendered as worship is proskuneo (προσεκύνησαν). It literally means worshiped. The following New Testament verses use the same Greek word in relation to Jesus:

> 1. And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Hail!” And they came up and **took hold of His feet and worshiped** Him (Matthew 28:9).
> 2. Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw Him they **worshiped Him** (Matthew 28:16-17).
> 3. And those in the boat **worshiped Him,** saying, “Truly you are the Son of God” (Matthew 14:33).

Conclusion; Scripture tells us we can only worship the one true God. Scripture also tells us that we can worship Jesus. Thus, Jesus must be God. Acts 5:3-4 tells us that lying to the Holy Spirit is lying to God. In 2 Corinthians 3:17 we are told that the Lord is the Spirit. Finally, in Hebrews 3:7-9 the Holy Spirit claims to be God:

> Therefore, as **the Holy Spirit says,** “Today when you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing **in the wilderness**, where your fathers put **me to the test and saw my works for forty years.**

Referring to the same event Deuteronomy 8:2 says: "And you shall remember all the way which **the Lord your God** has led you these **forty years in the wilderness."**

One verse says it was the Holy Spirit and the other says it was God. Thus, the Holy Spirit is God. And so, we see that there is only one God. We also see that the Father is God, Jesus is God and the Holy Spirit is God. And that is the doctrine of the Trinity.

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Jesus is the Messiah

As Catholics, we consider Jews to be our spiritual elders. Pope Pius XI once said: “Spiritually, we are Semites.” The purpose of this essay is not to repudiate Judaism, but to show that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah. The Jews were, and are God’s chosen people: “For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable” (Romans 11:29).

The Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) predicted the coming of the Messiah. It also gave us clues as to who He would be and what His mission would entail. Jews see the Messiah as a human leader. They believe he will inspire people to act in a righteous manner. He will also be a great general who will lead Israel to victory. He will be a descendant of King David, and he will bring about the return of the Jewish people to Israel. He will also rebuild the temple. Furthermore, they believe the Messiah is yet to come. Christians, on the other hand, see the Messiah as the Son of God. His main purpose would be to atone for the sins of mankind. Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the Messiah. As the Son of God, He is fully divine. As the son of Mary, He is fully human.

Signs pointing to the Messiah begin to appear in the Book of Genesis. We hear God forbidding Adam to eat from a certain tree, the serpent (the devil) tempts his wife Eve to defy this order, she does so and gives some of the fruit to her husband, God confronts them, Adam blames Eve, and Eve blames the serpent (2:15-17 and 3:1-13). As a result, God lets them all know that there will be consequences for their actions. But He also promises a remedy:

> The Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you above all cattle, and above all wild animals; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” (Genesis 3:14-15).

The woman spoken of here is not Eve. God said that there would be enmity between the devil and the woman and between his offspring and hers. Enmity is a deep-seated hatred for and a complete opposition to something. Since Eve was a sinner, she would still, on occasion, give in to the temptations of the devil. Thus, there would be no complete separation. Conversely, Mary would be totally obedient to God. Her offspring (Jesus) would crush the head of the serpent by destroying the power of sin with His death on the cross.

Some Jewish Rabbis agree that Genesis 3:14-15 refers to the coming Messiah. However, they do not see him as an atoning Messiah. As previously stated, they believe the Messiah will be an earthly king who would deliver them from their earthly troubles. But the prophet Isaiah provides us with some evidence to the contrary:

> But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment, he was taken away; and for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people (Isaiah 53:5-8).

While Christians see this as a prophecy concerning the Messiah, our Jewish friends see this as a reference to the nation of Israel. One argument to this effect is based on Isaiah 52:13 which is an introduction to Isaiah 53. In that verse God says: “Behold, my servant shall prosper…” They assert that this can only refer to the people of Israel. The reason for that is simple. On several occasions prior to this the people of Israel are called “The servant of the Lord.” Thus, they reason, Isaiah 53 must also be speaking about the people of Israel. But a title that is applied to the Nation of Israel can also be applied to an individual. The Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) refer to David, Samuel, Moses, and other individuals as servants of the Lord. Furthermore, the text clearly states that in this case, the Lord’s servant will suffer on behalf of others: “The chastisement upon Him was for our benefit.” It also states that those benefitting from His suffering despised Him: “He was despised and we had no regard for Him” (Isaiah 53:3). If the suffering servant is the nation of Israel, on whose behalf does Israel suffer? Note what comes next:

> And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the Lord to bruise him; he has put him to grief; when he makes himself an offering for sin (Isaiah 53:9-10).

So why would Christians see Jesus in this passage? The text literally says that the suffering servant was an offering for sin. In other words; an atoning Messiah. He was innocent and died for sinners. Can this really be a description of the nation of Israel? When she was loyal to God she was blessed. When she turned her back on God she was punished. The suffering servant "had done no violence and there was no deceit in His mouth." And yet, "It was the will of the Lord to bruise Him."

The end of verse 10 says this: "The will of the Lord **shall (future tense) prosper in His hand**." How is that possible if He is dead and in the grave? That could only happen if He were to be raised from the dead. And that is exactly what the New Testament says happened to Jesus. Isaiah 53 describes many of Jesus' other attributes as well. I would think if the Messiah were to be an earthly king He would be described as something more along the lines of a King David.

Many passages in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) prefigure what we find in the New Testament. In other words, there are passages that predict or illustrate what is to come. In the Old Testament a lamb or goat would be sacrificed to atone for sins. Any animal sacrificed would have to be without blemish. This would prefigure Jesus' who was sinless (without blemish). The Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it this way:

> You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers . . . with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake." Man's sins, following on original sin, are punishable by death. By sending his own Son in the form of a slave, in the form of a fallen humanity, on account of sin, God "made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21; CCC 602).

That does not mean sin would cease to exist. What it means is that men would no longer be powerless against it. The grace produced by Jesus' death on the cross would empower them to overcome it. In the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) the Holy Spirit was bestowed on a select few. In the New Testament He is available to everyone. This is the power of the cross, a grace that transforms and saves. Jesus did not go to the cross to take away our free will. He went there to purchase our salvation.

God's grace comes to us in different ways. We receive it through prayer, the sacraments and at Mass. The Mass is the pure sacrifice spoken of in Malachi 1:11: "For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place, incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts." Jesus is a pure offering because He is God. Jeremiah says as much. The word rendered as Lord at the end of the following passage is Yahweh and it is a name that can only be used for God:

> Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The **Lord** is our righteousness' (Jeremiah 23:5-6).

The Mass is a re-presentation of the Last Supper. When we celebrate the Mass, we are being obedient to our Lord's command: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). To participate at Mass is to partake of the fruits of Jesus once for all sacrifice on the cross. On the cross Jesus is both High Priest and sacrifice. Jesus is the "Pure Offering" that is offered up among the nations. In other words, the New Testament sacrifice is not for the Jews alone, but for the whole world.

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The Church

Evangelicals and Fundamentalists claim the Church established by Jesus is not a visible institution. They say the Church is merely the body of all true believers wherever they may be. That is, in different denominations or in no denomination at all. This idea serves two purposes. First, it is an attempt to discredit the Catholic Church which is a large and visible organization. Second, it is an attempt to justify the rampant disunity in Protestantism.

While this view may be attractive to some, it is easy to see that such a view is inconsistent with Scripture. Jesus compares His Church only to visible things, such as a flock, a body, a house, a city set on a hill, and a kingdom. And of course, that makes perfect sense. If the Church were not a visible institution how would anyone know for certain what the truth was? Paul describes **the Church** as **"The pillar and foundation of truth"** (1 Timothy 3:15). The words "pillar and foundation" signify doctrinal assurance and stability, not division and confusion.

Under the Old Covenant we see a system that is visible, hierarchical, and authoritative. Thus, the people of God knew what was expected of them. The New Covenant is the fulfillment of, and superior to, the Old Covenant. Are we really to believe that the superior covenant would be lacking in these critical elements? God is the author of all truth and He chooses to communicate that truth through the Church He established. By design, believers are to be a part of that Church. That Church has many parts, and the many parts have different functions (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).

The function of the Church's hierarchy is clearly shown in Scripture. Peter and the council of Jerusalem taught by the power of the Holy Spirit: “For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things…" (Acts 15:28). All the Churches were to abide by the decision: "As they went on their way through the cities, they [Paul and Timothy] delivered to them for observance the decisions which had been reached by the apostles and elders who were at Jerusalem." (Acts 16:4).

Bishops were in authority over congregations: “This is why I left you in Crete, that you might amend what was defective, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you” (Titus 1:5). The office of bishop is spoken of eight times in the New Testament. The Greek words used are episcopos (ἐπίσκοπος), which means a superintendent or overseer, someone who visits, and episskope (ἐπισκοπή), which just refers to the office.

Presbyters were reminded of their responsibilities: " And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church… ’Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians, to feed the church of the Lord which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them'" (Acts 20:17, 28-30).

How do you suppose those "who speak perverse things" will appear? "And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So, it is not strange if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness." (2 Corinthians 11:14-15). Thus, John says, "We are of God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and he who is not of God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." (1 John 4:6).

This reflects Jesus' own words: “He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me." (Luke 10:16), and: "If he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector." (Matthew 18:17). Nowhere does Jesus ever say: "Go read the Bible and judge for yourself." Consequently, believers were to submit to Church authority:

> Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings… Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give account. Let them do this joyfully, and not sadly, for that would be of no advantage to you (Hebrews 13:7-9, 17).

The word "leader" is translated from the Greek word hegeomai (ἡγέομαι) and means to lead with official authority. Similarly, in 1 Peter 5:5 we read, "Likewise you that are younger be subject to the elders."

The teaching of the early Church parallels the scriptures. In the year 110, Ignatius of Antioch wrote in his *Letter to Polycarp*, "You must be made holy in all things by being united in perfect obedience, in submission to the bishop and the priests." That Rome was the source of authority is confirmed by Irenaeus (A.D.140-202): "We point to the tradition of that very great and very ancient and universally known Church, which was established at Rome…for with this Church, because of its superior authority, every church must agree" (*Against Heresies* 3, 3:2).

But there are those who claim that at some point the Church lost its way. And as you might expect these individuals see it as their duty to set things straight. But is that even possible? Isn't Jesus God? And isn't God all powerful? In Matthew 16:18 Jesus clearly said that the gates of hell would not prevail against His Church. Is God not able to bring about what He promises? Catholics think He is capable. Jesus expands on this idea in Matthew 28:18-20:

> And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe all that I have commanded** you; and lo, **I am with you always**, to the close of the age."

Here we see Jesus speaking with Divine authority. He tells his apostles to teach all nations. And He promises to be with them always. He specifically mentions "the close of the age." This of course goes well beyond the lifespan of the twelve apostles. When we combine that with Matthew 16:18 (the gates of hell shall not prevail) the picture is clear. Jesus commands that His Church teach with full authority until He returns at the end of the age. To say that the Church could lose its way doctrinally would contradict the very words of Jesus.

Jesus prayed that we would be one as he and the Father are one so that the world would know that the Father sent Him (John 17:20-23). A divided church hurts the cause of Christ. Jesus said: "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32). The fact that Jesus uttered these words means that the truth is something that can be known with certainty. If such were not the case, Jesus' statement would be a tease and not an invitation.

Even men with the best of intentions can get it wrong. Scripture says the truth is important. Disunity says, "but none of us knows exactly what it is." God is a God of order (1 Corinthians 14:33). And division is not order. Protestantism is undoubtedly a house divided. And Jesus said: "If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand" (Mark 3:25). Paul also warns us against forming divisions:

> I appeal to you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarrelling among you, my brethren. What I mean is that each one of you says, "I belong to Paul," or I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Corinthians 1:10-13)

So, we are on solid ground when we say that there are to be no dissensions among believers. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that any system that allows for dissensions is opposed to the Word of God. As Paul said: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, **one Lord, one faith, one baptism"** (Ephesians 4:4-5). Elsewhere he says: "Complete my joy by **being of the same mind**, having the same love, **being in full accord and of one mind**" (Philippians 2:2).

Speaking to His apostles Jesus said: "When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13). If Jesus keeps His promises, and there is no reason to believe that He doesn't, what need would there ever be for divisions? Jesus saw to it that the Church He established possessed "all of the truth." And it would possess that truth; from the moment it was delivered until the end of its earthly existence. That some see it differently is not an act of God, but the product of our fallen nature.

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The Pope

What Catholics believe about the papacy, was first expressed by Jesus Himself:

> "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, **you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church,** and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. 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"** (Matthew 16:15-19).

When God gives someone a new name it signifies a new role. For example, He changed Abram to Abraham. Abraham means father of many nations, which is what Abraham became. Peter means rock, which is what Peter became. The standard argument against this is that Peter in Greek is petros (πέτρος), meaning pebble, and that rock is petra (πέτρα), meaning mass of rock. Since Peter is a pebble, he cannot be the rock. Those who support this argument fail to take into account John 1:42: "Jesus looked at him, and said, **'So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas.'"** The Apostle Paul refers to Peter as Cephas eight out of the ten times that he mentions him. Cephas is the transliteration of the Aramaic word Kepha. Aramaic is the language that Jesus and His apostles spoke. **KEPHA** means **ROCK** the same as **PETRA.**

So why then is Peter called petros rather than petra? Greek nouns are genderized. Petra is the feminine form of rock and it would have been improper to use it for a man's name. Consequently, the masculine form (petros) had to be used. Hence, the preservation of the original Aramaic by the apostles John and Paul. If Matthew wanted to refer to Peter as a small stone, he could have used the word Lithos (λίθος) which we find in Revelation 17:4.

Some say that the rock spoken of is Peter's profession of faith or Christ Himself. Karl Keating, in his book "*Catholicism and Fundamentalism,*" points out that this is impossible because:

> According to the rules of grammar, the phrase 'this rock' must relate to the closest noun. Peter's profession of faith (Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God) is two verses earlier, while his name, a proper noun, is in the immediately preceding clause. As an analogy, consider this artificial sentence: "I have a car and a truck, and it is blue." Which is blue? The truck, because that is the noun closest to the pronoun "it". This identification would be even clearer if the reference to the car were two sentences earlier, as the reference to Peter's profession is two sentences earlier than the term rock. The same kind of objection applies to the argument that the rock is Christ Himself, since He is mentioned within the profession of faith (page 208).

Jesus validates Peter's role as the rock when He says, "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 symbol of the keys always implied power and authority. For instance, in Isaiah 22:20-22 we read: "In that day I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, and I will clothe him with your robe, and will bind your girdle on him, and will commit your authority to his hand…**and I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open and none shall shut; he shall shut and none shall open."**

Eliakim was given the keys of the house of David. Thus, he had the authority to rule on its behalf. Likewise, Peter was given the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Thus, he had the authority to rule on its behalf.

It is critical to realize that Jesus' statement in Matthew 16 consists of all three verses, 17 through 19. To separate them, and attach unrelated meanings to them, is to misrepresent Scripture.

The night before He died Jesus said to Peter, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail, and when you have turned again, **strengthen your brethren"** (Luke 22:31-32). Jesus prayed that Peter would strengthen the others. This statement presupposes that Peter is first among the Apostles. Luke 22:26 also implies an apostolic leader. "Let

the greatest among you become as the youngest, and **the leader** as one who serves." After the Resurrection Jesus bestowed upon Peter the role he was twice promised. He said to him:

> "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time He said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17).

In this passage, Jesus the Great Shepherd is entrusting the care of His lambs and sheep to Peter. Note that Jesus acknowledges the presence of the other disciples but speaks directly to Peter. This can hardly be construed as a directive for all Christians. The Greek word for tend in verse 16 is poimaino (ποιμαίνω), meaning to tend as a shepherd or to rule.

Whenever the pope rules on religious matters, his ruling is protected by “Papal Infallibility.” Papal Infallibility is not a personality trait but a charism or gift. A pope speaks infallibly only when he speaks on faith or morals with the stated intention of requiring the compliance of the faithful. Even in the Old Testament, God used less than perfect men as the authorized interpreters of the law. Jesus shows us this in Matthew 23:1-3 when He says: "The Scribes and the Pharisees have taken the seat of Moses. Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow their example. For they preach but they do not practice."

Even when he rules infallibly, a pope is doing no more than proclaiming what has always been taught. There is no special revelation involved. The pope's infallibility comes from the fact that the Holy Spirit prevents him from officially teaching error. Truth by its very nature does not allow for opposing views. Because the Church is the recipient and dispenser of truth, infallibility is necessary if it is to function as Christ intended: "Make disciples of all nations…teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20).

In the year 95, Clement, the fourth bishop of Rome, wrote a response to the Corinthians instructing them to receive back the bishops who were expelled by a turbulent faction. After explaining that the hierarchy was of divine origin, he said in part, "But if there are any who refuse to heed the declaration, He [the Holy Spirit] has made through our lips, let them not doubt the gravity of the guilt and the peril in which they involve themselves" (*1Clement 59:1*). So now we find that even before the last apostle had died, the bishop of Rome was directing the affairs of another church. A few years later in the year 110, Ignatius of Antioch acknowledged Rome's authority when he addressed the Roman church as "presiding over the brotherhood of love."

Around 189, there was a controversy between the churches of Asia and the rest of the Christian world. Eusebius tells us that Victor, the bishop of Rome, directed that they conform. Polycrates of Ephesus resisted him. Victor replied with an excommunication. When Irenaeus intervened and pleaded Polycrate's case, Victor withdrew the excommunication. Although there was disagreement, the resistance of the Asian bishops did not deny Rome's authority (*The History of the Church 5:23-25*).

Some contend that the Papacy is the result of the Church becoming corrupt in the year 312 during the reign of Constantine. Consequently, true Christianity was lost until the Protestant Reformation. If that is true, then Christianity did not exist for a period of 1205 years. Remember that Jesus said that the gates of Hell would not overcome His Church, and that He would be with us always, even until the end of the age (Matthew 16:18, 28:20). The anti-Papal theory makes Jesus a liar. Another problem arises from this view. The Old and New Testaments were settled at the councils of Hippo, (393 AD) Carthage, (397 AD) and Carthage (419 AD) by Catholic bishops who then submitted the list to Pope Boniface for official approval. "Thus, that the church beyond the sea [Rome] may be consulted regarding the confirmation of that canon" (Council of Carthage, *Canon 36*). Note that the councils took place well after the supposed corruption of the Church in 312. If this were the case, why would Protestants accept the product of a corrupt church as the Word of God and their sole rule of faith? If you reject the primacy of Peter and his successors, logic demands that you reject the Bible as well.

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Papal Infallibility

The doctrine of Papal Infallibility can evoke some strong reactions from those who oppose it. This is due to a misunderstanding of what the Church means by "Papal Infallibility." The most common misconception is that the Church claims that the pope himself is infallible, that in all things he is incapable of error. This, of course, is not true! The pope is a human being. It is a necessity of Christian theology that every person be allowed the exercise of free will. Everyone, the pope included, must be free to accept or reject Christ for himself. If God were to make the pope infallible in the ultimate sense, he would be depriving him of his free will. So, what is Papal Infallibility?

> **Infallibility does not mean that a pope is incapable of sin.** All popes are human and therefore sinners.
>
> **Infallibility does not mean that the pope is inspired.** Papal infallibility does not involve any special revelation from God. A pope learns about his faith in the same way that anyone else does – he studies.
>
> **Infallibility cannot be used to change existing doctrines or proclaim new ones.** It can only be used to confirm or clarify what has always been taught. The teachings of Christ cannot change. As the Scripture says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).
>
> **Infallibility does not mean that a pope cannot err when he speaks as a private teacher.** As a man he is fallible and capable of error.
>
> **Infallibility does not guarantee that a pope will officially teach anything.** However, when he does teach, he is protected. If he decides to teach the truth, the Holy Spirit allows it. If he decides to teach error, either knowingly or unknowingly, the Holy Spirit will not allow it.
>
> **Infallibility is not something that endows a pope with divine powers, but rather it is a gift of the Holy Spirit that protects the Church from the human frailties of a pope.**

All Christians believe that God used men infallibly in writing Scripture. Why then is it so hard to believe that He would work infallibly through men to protect it from corruption? Surely such a protection was implied when Jesus said to His disciples, "He who hears you hears me" (Luke 10:16).

The First Vatican Council taught that three conditions must be met for a pronouncement to be considered infallible:

1. The pope must speak ex cathedra (from the Chair of Peter) in his official capacity.
2. The decision must be binding on the whole Church.
3. It must be on a matter of faith or morals.

The first two conditions can be reasonably deduced from Matthew 16:19: "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 acts of binding and loosing in this context would by necessity be something more than casual remarks. The previous verse begins with Jesus saying, "You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church" (16:18). Thus, the acts of binding or loosing would have to be official and meant for the whole Church.

The third condition stems from the fact that Christian teaching is primarily a matter of faith and morals. Christianity's main objectives are getting people to heaven (faith) and teaching them how to live here on earth (morals).

Infallibility is also extended to the college of bishops when they, as a body, teach something in union with the pope. Collegial authority is usually exercised in an ecumenical council such as the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-29).

Upon leaving the earth Jesus' final command to His apostles was to make disciples of all nations, **"teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age"** (Matthew 28:20). Are we to believe that Jesus left us no means of knowing exactly what He commanded? That would make His parting statement nonsense. The Catholic Church believes the Bible when it teaches that:

1. Jesus requires that we obey all that He commanded (Matthew 28:20).
2. Jesus gives us the grace to obey all that He commanded (Philippians 4:13).
3. Jesus provides us a means of knowing what He commanded (Matthew 16:15-19).

Early Christian writers bear witness to the Church's infallibility. Cyprian declares: "If someone does not hold fast to this unity of Peter, can he imagine that he still holds the faith? If he [should] desert the chair of Peter upon whom the Church was built, can he still be confident that he is in the Church?" (*The Unity of the Catholic Church* 4, 251 AD). Clement of Alexandria writes: **[T]he blessed Peter, the chosen, the preeminent, the first among the disciples,** for whom alone with himself the Savior paid the tribute [Matt. 17:27], quickly grasped and understood their meaning. And what does he say? "Behold, we have left all and have followed you" [Matt. 19:2 7, Mark 10:28] (*Who is the Rich Man That is Saved?* 21:3-5 [A.D. 200]).

Despite the evidence, critics try to prove their case by appealing to three supposed examples of popes teaching error. The first two are Pope Liberius (352-366) and Pope Vigilius (537-555). Both were made to sign questionable statements of faith while under duress. This of course does not count, as Infallibility only applies to free acts of the pope and not to acts under torture.

The third example is that of Pope Honorius (625-638). Critics of Papal Infallibility feel that this example demolishes the doctrine once and for all. Here, they contend, is an example of a pope teaching error. After his death, an ecumenical council (The Third Council of Constantinople) condemned him. What could be more contradictory than an infallible pope being condemned by an infallible council? However, there is much more to the story.

The controversy stems from a letter that Pope Honorius wrote to Sergius, a Monothelite heretic. The Monothelite heresy maintained that Jesus had only one will, a divine will. The Church had always taught that Jesus was fully God and fully man. As such, He had both a divine and a human will. Before the heresy was widely known, Sergius sought to get the pope's approval by deception. In a letter to the pope, he stated that Jesus never opposed the Father. Consequently, if two persons agree they may be spoken of as being of "one will." The pope, unaware of Sergius' deception, answered to the subject of Christ's "opposition" to the Father. He wrote in part: "We confess one will of our Lord Jesus Christ…Since Christ's human will is faultless there can be no talk of opposing wills." Subsequently, Monothelites fraudulently used this statement to claim the pope agreed with them.

Pope Honorius was deceived and then misrepresented. Furthermore, the Third Council of Constantinople condemned him for inaction, not for teaching heresy. In any event, his letter was private. Thus, the issue of infallibility never even entered the picture. By the way, if papal infallibility really was just a human invention, do not you think that the list of errors after 20 centuries would fill at least one book? And yet we are presented with only three examples, three examples that are not even plausible. Does this not speak in favor of the Church's position?

Ironically, many of the individuals who oppose the doctrine of papal infallibility claim to receive special revelations from God. Most believe that they can privately interpret Scripture in direct violation of 2 Peter 1:20. They characterize the doctrine of papal infallibility as arrogant, while claiming for themselves authority that goes far beyond it. And what is the fruit of their claims? Thousands of denominations all claiming the Bible as their authority and yet all disagreeing on what it teaches. To make matters worse, many of their teachings change from time to time. Those who object to the doctrine of papal infallibility are the greatest proof of its need.

An honest examination of the evidence can only lead to one conclusion: That Jesus Christ established an infallible Church. Scripture teaches it, logic demands it, and history confirms it.

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The Canon of Scripture

During a discussion about Biblical interpretation, one young lady told me that she did not need the Catholic Church to interpret Scripture for her. To which I replied: "But you needed the Catholic Church to give you the Bible in the first place." She just stared at me in silence.

Protestants spend a lot of time reading and discussing the Scriptures. However, there does not seem to be a lot of discussion on how we got the Bible in the first place. Understanding how we got the Bible is important. Knowing who put it together gives us insight into its proper interpretation. After all, if the Church did not understand the meaning of Scripture, she certainly had no business choosing the books that would comprise it.

One of the issues that divide Catholics and Protestants is the canon of Scripture. The canon is the list of inspired books that belong in the Bible. Catholic Bibles contain seven more books than Protestant Bibles do. The seven books, all in the Old Testament, are Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch and 1 and 2 Maccabees. Catholics call the disputed books deuterocanonical and consider them to be inspired. Protestants call them apocryphal and consider them to be spurious.

When Jesus walked the earth there were two Old Testament canons in use. There was the Palestinian canon, which is identical to the Protestant Old Testament, and there was the Alexandrian canon which is identical to the Catholic Old Testament. The Alexandrian canon was also known as the Septuagint. The Palestinian canon was shorter than the Septuagint. The reason why the Catholic Church uses the Septuagint is simple. The Apostles and the early Church used the Septuagint. Evidence can be found in the Bible itself. The New Testament quotes the Old Testament approximately 350 times. Most of those quotes are from the Septuagint.

The Palestinian canon was written in Hebrew. Protestants say they use the Palestinian canon because it matches the present-day Jewish canon. They will often quote Romans 3:2, which says, "The Jews are entrusted with the oracles of God." They reason that since God entrusted the Old Testament to the Jews; they should be the ones who determine which books belong in it.

There are a couple of things wrong with this line of reasoning. First, both Old Testament canons were received from the Jews. Thus, neither one is eliminated by this verse. Secondly, the Jews did not settle on the Palestinian canon until 90 A.D. at the Council of Jamnia. This was well after Jesus established His Church. At this point the Jews were no longer in charge. Ironically, it was at the Council of Jamnia that the Jews also rejected the New Testament. Logically speaking, anyone who would consider Jamnia as being authoritative would also have to reject the New Testament. And I am not aware of any Protestants who have done that.

Some point to the "apparent contradictions" in the disputed books as evidence against them. An apparent contradiction is something that appears to be a contradiction. However, upon close examination we find there is no real contradiction. Apparent contradictions can also be found in the universally accepted books of the Bible. For example; the apostle Paul’s conversion story appears twice in the book of Acts. While on the road to Damascus Paul sees a bright light and falls to the ground. Then Jesus speaks to him. Regarding his travelling companions the first account says: “The men who were travelling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one” (Acts 9:7). The second account says: “Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me” (Acts 22:9). How could both verses be true? You can hear a voice but not understand it much like people talking down the end of a hall. In this case you could honestly say you heard (noise). You could also say you did not hear (comprehend). And of course, both statements would be true. Use of the word “hear” is not always strictly literal.

At the birth of Christianity, the Old Testament was the sum total of Scripture. As time went on an authorized list of Christian writings was needed. Rather than take their cues from those no longer in authority, the early Christians looked to their own Church for guidance. When the Councils of Hippo (393 A.D.) and Carthage (397 A.D.) set the canon of the New Testament they also confirmed the Septuagint as the Old Testament. Both the Septuagint and the New Testament were written in Koine Greek. Koine Greek was the language of commerce and every day communication during the time of Jesus.

Some critics attempt to dismiss the Church's role in putting together the New Testament. They believe that the final list was just something that most of the churches agreed on. The idea is that the Holy Spirit caused the books of the New Testament to fall into place without any human interaction. And then he enabled believers to recognize His work. Divisions in the Church throughout the ages pretty much disproves that. It is true that God could have done things in that manner. But He did not. He chose to use the Church which He Himself had established. He knew that even the best of men could be misled. And so, He provided a way for us to know and not guess what He requires of us.

The fourth chapter of Ephesians is just one of many places in Scripture that illustrates the role of God's Church:

> And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, **until we all attain to the unity of the faith** and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; so that we **may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine**, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles (4:11-14).

The process was not as easy as some may think. The book of 1 Clement was considered inspired by most in the early Church (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3:16, 325 A.D.). We also know that the book of Revelation was disputed by many at the time. And yet Revelation made it into the canon and 1 Clement did not. That is because the Church set the canon of Scripture, and she did so under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Just as God worked infallibly through men in writing the Bible, He worked infallibly through men in communicating exactly which books it should contain.

And so, the canon stood unchanged for centuries. That is until the Protestant Reformation. Whenever the Bible contradicted some new doctrine created by the reformers, books were either downplayed or eliminated. When debating Martin Luther on the Church's view of Purgatory, Johann Eck Quoted 2 Maccabees 12:40-45 which clearly supports the Catholic doctrine. Luther replied that the passage had no binding authority since the book was outside the canon.

Martin Luther once famously referred to the book of James as "an epistle of straw." He sought to have it removed from the Bible. He claimed that he valued the book highly but that he did not think it was of apostolic authorship. When we dig a little deeper, we find that the book of James contradicts one of the Reformations foundational doctrines. Martin Luther taught all one had to do to be saved was to trust in God's perfect love. But James writes: "man is justified by works and not by faith alone… For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead" (James 2:24-26). Such a refutation of his new doctrine must have been perplexing.

No matter how you interpret Scripture there is one thing that logically everyone should agree on. And that of course is that no man has a right to remove books from the Bible no matter what the reason. For if some books can be removed why can't we just throw the whole thing out? Are we really to believe that it took God 1500 years to get the Bible right?

In Revelation 22:19 John proclaims, "If any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book." It's true that this verse refers to the book of Revelation. However, common sense tells us that the same principal would apply to all of Scripture. I think it's a pretty safe bet that God would never be pleased with us throwing out any part of His word. Whenever we find ourselves at odds with Scripture it is a safe bet that the problem lies with us. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). And so is His word.

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Scripture Alone

One of the pillars of the Protestant Reformation is the doctrine of "Sola Scriptura," or "Scripture alone." The reformers taught that the Bible was the sole rule of faith, and that there was no need for an authoritative church. Now if this were a true teaching, as some still contend, we would expect to find it in the Bible, but we do not. The verse usually used to justify Sola Scriptura is 2 Timothy 3:16: "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

Note that this passage nowhere says that Scripture is the sole rule of faith. It says that it is profitable, and that is true. But that doesn't make it the sole rule of faith. It says that it can make you complete, and that is also true. However, in order for Scripture to make us complete, we must accept all that it teaches. And Scripture teaches that Christ established an authoritative church. That is why Paul tells Titus, who headed the church at Crete, to **"Exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you"** (Titus 2:15). Indeed, an authoritative church is necessary in light of 2 Peter 1:20: "You must understand this, that **no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation."** That is also why the Bible tells us that **the Church** and not the Bible **is the pillar and foundation of truth** (1 Timothy 3:15). So, Scripture makes us complete by providing us with all we need to know to be saved and by also providing us with a Church that can ensure that we receive that message accurately.

Cardinal Newman noted some years ago that 2 Timothy could not support the doctrine of Sola Scriptura because Paul's statement to Timothy would have to apply to him at that time. At that time there was only an Old Testament. Thus, the "Sola Scriptura" interpretation would rule out the New Testament.

Some claim they have no need of an authoritative church. They point to 1 John 2:26-27, which says, "I write this to you about those who would deceive you, but the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you, as His anointing teaches you about everything."

Note that John begins by saying, **"I write this to you about those who would deceive you."** These are the teachers that John tells us we have no need of. Read verses 21-25, and the context becomes even clearer. "I write to you, not because you do not know **the truth,** but because **you know it…Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father."** They do not need new teachers because they have been already taught by the Church. Two chapters later he underscores the point when he says: "We are of God. Whoever knows God listens to us" (1 John 4:6). Or as Jesus said it when speaking to His apostles: "He who hears you hears me" (Luke 10:16).

A verse of Scripture should not only be read within its immediate context, but in the wider context of Scripture as a whole. And 2 Peter 1:20 clearly states: "There is no prophecy of Scripture that is a matter of one's own interpretation." And if you cannot interpret for yourself, you need a teacher.

While it is true that the Holy Spirit can and oftentimes does guide us personally, it is equally true that we are not always listening. Sometimes our own thoughts or the deceptions of others can be mistaken for the Holy Spirit. That is why Jesus established His Church. After all, if we are to make a choice for Christ, we must **know** and not **imagine** what that choice entails.

The book of Ephesians expands on 2 Timothy and 1 John beautifully, "And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors **and teachers, for the equipment of the saints...**so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (4:11-12, 14). Remember earlier in 2 Timothy, we found the phrase, (concerning Scripture) "that the man of God may be complete, **equipped** for every good work."

First Paul tells us that we need Scripture to be equipped, then he tells us that we need teachers to be equipped. Is there a contradiction here? Not at all as Scripture without the proper interpretation is of no value. That is why the

Ethiopian Eunuch, despite his genuine desire for God, needed Philip to explain the Scriptures to him (Acts 8:26-40). Note that it was God who sent Philip to the eunuch. The last thing Jesus said to His apostles, and by derivation, their successors was: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations … teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” (Matthew 28:18-20). He never said: “Just give them a Bible and I will fill in the details later.”

The claim that we do not need teachers fails not only on the theological level, but in its practical application as well. If John believes that we do not need any teachers, why is he sending a letter that teaches? In fact, why were any of the epistles written and preserved? Are they not the authoritative teachings of Church leaders? It is also interesting to note that most Protestant pastors attended seminary where they were **taught the Bible.** On Sundays they give sermons in which they **teach the Bible.** They have Bible studies where again they **teach the Bible.** If we really do not need teachers why is all of this going on?

The printing press wasn't invented until around 1440. Before that time Bibles were hand written and a copy would have cost the modern-day equivalent of about $8000.00. Even if they had access to Bibles, it would not have been much better as 99% of the people were illiterate. So, the type of Christianity that most Protestants say Jesus established wasn't even possible for fourteen centuries after he supposedly established it. Even today many countries have a low literacy rate. Didn't Jesus die for everyone? How are those who cannot read to know the Gospel? An authoritative church is the only logical and Biblical answer. Also worthy of note is the fact that the doctrine of Sola Scriptura is not found in any of the creeds from the early Church.

There are thousands of Protestant denominations that claim authority from the Bible. And they don’t all agree on what the Bible teaches. Is it really possible that God created a Church comprised of thousands of disagreeing sects? To say as much is to say that the Holy Spirit contradicts Himself. And that simply is not a possibility. Obviously, much of what is taught is the product of human understanding. And as the book of Proverbs warns: “Lean not on your own understanding” (3:5). If human beings are flawed creatures, it stands to reason that their reasoning can be flawed. Obviously, another standard is needed.

Oftentimes those who reject Church authority do so in the name of freedom. But their concept of freedom is seriously flawed. Freedom is accompanied by responsibilities. As someone once said, "Freedom is not just about making choices but about making right choices. To place one's hand in an open fire is to exercise human freedom irresponsibly." In other words, freedom is not achieved by doing what you want; it is the result of doing what is right.

Sola Scriptura and the accompanying idea of private interpretation bear a striking resemblance to New Age thought. The New Ager says, "I am God." A belief in Sola Scriptura says in effect, "I speak for God." A major tenet of the New Age Movement is that there is no ultimate reality. Everyone must decide for himself what reality is. Thus "every man does what is right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6). With the private interpretation of Scripture everyone decides for himself what Christian reality is. This is a far cry from the Biblical view of, "One Lord, **one faith,** one Baptism" (Ephesians 4:5). We would do well to heed the warning of Proverbs 14:12, "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death."

Some may see that as harsh. After all, we are told, Protestants only disagree on non-essential issues. But is that really the case? One of the areas of contention is the subject of salvation. We are told by some that once you accept Christ as your Lord and Savior you are saved. At that point some say that you can lose it and some say that you cannot. And then there are those who believe in a strict predestination. The idea that God arbitrarily chooses who will go to heaven and who will go to hell. The individual can do nothing to affect this decision. Thus, you can even have a baby who dies in the womb burning in hell for all eternity because God says so.

All these views are accepted under the umbrella of Protestant orthodoxy. And yet they are contradictory. Are they non-essential? The whole point of Christianity is salvation. Get that wrong and you labor in vain. Such contradictions are a scandal to the world. A stumbling block that keeps people from taking Christ seriously. And if every soul is precious, how can we write off millions of them in the name of freedom?

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Tradition

The Catholic Church is often accused of placing a higher value on tradition than it does the Bible. The implication is that Catholics prefer to observe their own customs rather than the teachings of Christ. This, of course, is a false charge. The Bible speaks about two kinds of tradition; one is condemned and the other requires belief. Jesus was very clear in describing the type of tradition He condemned in Mark 7:8-13:

> "You leave the commandment of God and hold fast **the tradition of men**." And he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God, in order to keep **your tradition**! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'… but you say, 'If a man tells his father or his mother, "what you would have gained from me is corban" (that is, given to God), then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus **making void the word of God through your tradition**.

The Scribes and Pharisees deliberately ignored the plain meaning of the Commandment and replaced it with a meaning that was more to their liking. Since it was not from God it was a "tradition of men." Sacred Tradition, which comes from God, requires belief. The apostle Paul tells us to: "Stand firm and **hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter**" (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

Notice how Paul puts oral tradition on the same level as written tradition. He tells us why in 1 Thessalonians 2:13: "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when **you received the word of God which you heard from us**, **you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God…**."

The oral and written teachings of the Apostles were both considered to be the word of God. And of course, that is perfectly natural as they were the appointed leaders of Christ's Church. Paul continues the theme in his first letter to the Corinthians: "I commend you because you remember me in everything and **maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you**" (1 Corinthians 11:2).

It is sometimes claimed that the oral traditions that Paul is speaking of are the teachings that he would eventually put into writing. Writings that would later become Scripture. But the Early Church never mentions any such thing nor does Scripture indicate as much. In fact, the testimony of the Early Church Fathers around the time that the canon was finalized indicate otherwise. Basil of Caesarea, who was recognized as a doctor of the Church in the east as well as the west wrote the following in the year 375:

> Of the beliefs and practices whether generally accepted or publicly enjoined which are preserved in the Church **some we possess derived from written teaching; others we have received delivered to us "in mystery" by the tradition of the Apostles; and both of these in relation to true religion have the same force.** (*On the Holy Spirit* 27).

John Chrysostom, archbishop of Constantinople said pretty much the same thing a short time later:

> So, then brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word, or by epistle of ours" (2 Thessalonians 2:15). **Hence it is manifest, that they did not deliver all things by epistle, but many things also unwritten,** and in like manner both the one and the other are worthy of credit. **Therefore, let us think the tradition of the Church also worthy of credit. It is a tradition, seek no farther** (*Homilies on Second Thessalonians* [circa A.D. 400]).

How can we distinguish the traditions of men from Sacred Tradition? Well, if a tradition cannot be traced back to the early Church it is man-made. To believe otherwise would be to imply that God did not get it right the first time. What Catholics call Sacred Tradition can be traced back to the early Church. The same cannot be said of those beliefs that are uniquely Protestant. Protestantism was the creation of men. It first appeared in the sixteenth century. We even know the names of the men who started it. Names like Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli. If men started it, it is a tradition of men and not of God.

When something is classified as a tradition it has no bearing on its legitimacy. It is merely a description of the method of transmission. When it came time to determine which books should be included in the New Testament, one of the criteria for determining inspiration was agreement with the Church's doctrinal traditions. **The Church**

values Scripture and Sacred Tradition equally as "they both flow out of the same divine wellspring, making up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God" (*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* 2:9,10).

All Christians agree on which 27 books belong in the New Testament. All Christians believe that public revelation ended with the death of the last apostle. And yet neither of these beliefs can be found in Scripture. Quite simply, they are Catholic traditions, or more properly; Sacred Tradition. Ironically, the Protestant idea that the Bible is the Word of God and the sole rule of faith is itself based on Catholic Tradition.

Long before Basil of Caesarea and John Chrysostom, Fathers of the Church were stressing the importance of Sacred Tradition. In the year 200 A.D. Tertullian wrote, "Wherever it shall be clear that the truth of the Christian discipline and faith are present, there also will be found **the truth of the Scriptures and their explanation, and of all the Christian traditions**" (*The Prescription Against Heretics* 19:3).

A few decades later, Origen writes, "**That alone is to be believed as the truth which is in no way at variance with ecclesiastical and apostolic tradition**" (*Fundamental Doctrines* 1, preface: 2, circa 225 A.D.).

Before the first page of the New Testament was written, the Gospels themselves were oral traditions. The apostles and their disciples preached what they were taught. If it was found that someone was teaching falsely, the Church, in its authority, would correct it. We see this happening at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-33). Jesus gave His Church authority and she exercised it. That same authoritative Church exists today (Matthew 16:18).

The Church pre-existed the New Testament and so did her teachings. Her purpose in putting the New Testament together was not to present a complete and detailed catalogue of Christian doctrine. At the time there were many writings being circulated among the churches. In determining which books would comprise the New Testament the Church was simply saying; these books are inspired, and all the others are not.

I can imagine that this is a horrifying thought for some. And that is because they have abandoned the teacher (the Church) but kept the textbook (the Bible). Without the teacher you lose access to her wisdom, experience, and perspective. As the Catholic Encyclopedia points out: "It is the living Church and not Scripture that St. Paul indicates as the pillar and the unshakable ground of truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). The truth has always come to us from God through the apostles and their successors to the faithful. Undoubtedly, Scripture has been a part of that. But not the only part. For if that were the case, we would have needed the printing press in 33 A.D. and not in the fifteenth century.

Take away the Church and all you have is the Bible. "Bravo" says the Protestant. "I have need for nothing else." And so, he goes on his way cutting a path that differs from the rest of his Protestant brethren. And this of course is a strict violation of 2 Peter 1:20: "First of all you must understand this, **that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation.**"

The Bible is the Church's book. And contrary to the claims of her detractors, there is nothing in Sacred Tradition which contradicts its writings. When used properly the Scriptures promote unity. When used by those who reject Catholicism it becomes an instrument of disunity. That may not be their intent. However, when you separate the textbook from the teacher it is practically inevitable. It is only when we embrace Scripture and Sacred Tradition that we have the complete Word of God. And as Jesus once said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by **every word** that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

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Justification

Justification refers to the method by which we are made right with God. Since only those who are justified can enter heaven, it is important that we get this right. Many Protestants claim that we are justified by faith alone. They say that all one must do is to publicly proclaim their trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior. Many of them also have the mistaken notion that Catholics believe in works salvation. Works salvation is a system by which a person earns a place in heaven by his own efforts. Both views are false.

Initial justification is by neither faith nor good works. Initial justification is a totally free gift (1 Peter 3:21). But it is also true that justification is a process. As the apostle Paul tells us: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13). So, part of the process of justification is allowing **God to work** through us. And those are the works (God’s) that are necessary for Salvation. Jesus Himself made this very clear. He said: “Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, **but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.**" Once again, the works spoken of here are works **performed by God through us**. As the Apostle Paul said: “It is no longer I who live, but **Christ who lives in me**” (Galatians 2:20).

In Romans 1:17, Paul tells us that: **"The just shall live by faith."** The Catholic Church is in full agreement with this statement. However, she does not agree with the way some would define faith. The Church speaks of faith in the biblical sense. While Paul says, "the just shall live by faith," he also says: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but **faith working through love"** (Galatians 5:6). He further states: "If I have a faith that can move mountains, but **have not love, I am nothing…** And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. **But the greatest of these is love"** (1 Corinthians 13:2, 13). And why is the greatest of these love? Because without love there is no saving faith.

So then, how is love manifested? Well, in Romans 12:9-13 Paul says: "**Let love be genuine,** hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good, love one another with brotherly affection, outdo one another in showing honor. Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord**. Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality."**

In Romans 1:5 Paul speaks about the obedience of faith. He said: "Through him **we have received the grace of apostleship, to bring about the obedience of faith,** for the sake of his name, among all the Gentiles." For Paul, to have faith meant to act. But didn’t Paul say: "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1)? Yes, he did and as Jesus points out, that is only true if we remain in Him (John 15:4). Paul expands on this in Romans 8:13 where he says: "**For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."** He also says: "For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, **but the doers of the law who will be justified**" (Romans 2:13).

When the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, "Men, what must I do to be saved?" Paul said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved" (Acts 16:30-31). Some take this to mean intellectual assent, but the Biblical concept of believing means to act in accordance with. Notice how Jesus answers the rich young man who asked, "Good Teacher, **what must I do to inherit eternal life?"** He said: **"You know the commandments…sell what you have and give to the poor"** (Mark 10:17-22). In Matthew 25:32-46, Jesus characterizes the saved as those who feed and clothe the poor and visit those in prison. He also characterizes the damned as those who refrain from such activities.

In Revelation 20:12 and 2 Corinthians 5:10 we are told that we will be judged by our deeds. Was the Apostle John in error when he wrote: "**And by this we may be sure that we know Him, if we keep His Commandments? He who says 'I know him' but disobeys His Commandments is a liar,** and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps His word, in him truly love for God is perfected. **By this we may be sure that we are in Him**" (1 John 2:3-5). Finally, we are told in 1 John 3:23: "And **this is His commandment,** that we should **believe** in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and **love one another,** just as He has commanded us."

In Matthew 25:40, Jesus said: "Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." Reject your neighbor, and you reject Jesus! Does this mean that your good works will earn you

salvation? No, not at all. As we saw in Romans 8:13, all that we do, we do by the grace of God. Indeed, we cannot even say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3). That is why Paul can say: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). So, throughout the process of Justification, we see God’s grace at work. And no man can take credit for that.

For the Christian there is no excuse for serious deliberate sin. "Therefore, let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation **will also provide the way of escape** that you may be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 12:13). Also: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His Commandments. And **His commandments are not burdensome"** (1 John 5:3). They are not burdensome because, once again, He enables us to obey them with His grace. As we are told in Hebrews 4:15-16: "For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses…Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, **that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."** This grace was the reason why Paul could say, "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). Certainly, avoiding serious sin is included in all things.

Obeying the commandments is a prerequisite for receiving the Spirit. In John 14:15-16 Jesus says: "If you love me, you will keep my Commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Councilor, to be with you forever." Certainly, the commandments spoken of here are not only the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament but the new commandment given by Jesus: “that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 13:34). And as we saw earlier, love implies action.

So, a failure to do good works is not a failure to earn one's salvation, but a rejection of grace which is ultimately a denial of the power of the Holy Spirit, and that is the "unforgivable sin" (Mark 3:28). It is unforgivable because it is a rejection of Christ. Good works are not something in addition to faith, but evidence that faith exists.

Clement, the fourth Bishop of Rome, writing around the year 95, wrote about the connection between grace and works and the need for our cooperation with grace. He wrote:

> **Let us therefore join with those to whom grace is given by God.** Let us clothe ourselves in concord, being humble and self-controlled, keeping ourselves far from all backbiting and slander, **being justified by works and not by words…**Why was our father Abraham blessed? **Was it not because of his deeds of justice and truth, wrought in faith? …** So, we, having been called through His will in Christ Jesus, were **not justified through ourselves** or through our own wisdom or understanding or piety or works which we wrought in holiness of heart, **but through faith, whereby the almighty God justified all men** (1 Clement 30:3, 31:2, 32:3-4).

As for the sacraments, they are occasions of grace and not rituals that must be performed to earn salvation. The grace received enables us to accept our salvation and to live the Christian life. This is reflected in Jesus' statement concerning the Eucharist in John 6:56. He said: **"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him."** It is only by the grace of God that we accept Christ in the first place and it is only by the grace of God that we remain in Him. This is what the Church calls Sanctifying Grace. Besides Sanctifying Grace, every sacrament produces Sacramental Grace. Sacramental grace is a special grace that helps in the fulfillment of the duties related to a particular sacrament. For example, in the sacrament of Matrimony, the Sacramental Grace received can enable the couple to be the husband and wife that God would have them be. All the sacraments were instituted by Christ and can be found in Scripture. For example: Baptism is found in John 3:5, Confirmation in Acts 8:14-17, Reconciliation / Confession in John 20:21-23, the Eucharist in Matthew 26:26-28, & John 6:53-55, Matrimony in Matthew 19:5-6, Holy Orders in Titus 1:5; and the Sacrament of the Sick in James 5:14-15.

When all is said and done, Catholics and Protestants claim to believe the same thing. We agree that Jesus did the work of salvation. We agree that He offers it to us free of charge. And we agree that each of us must say yes to Jesus in order to be saved. But only the Catholic says yes in the manner prescribed by Scripture.

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Can Salvation Be Lost?

One of the pillars of the Protestant Reformation was Martin Luther's belief that we are saved by faith alone. All one had to do was to profess a belief in Christ and he would be saved for all eternity. Anything he might do from that point on would have no effect on it. Luther once wrote: "No sin will separate us from the Lamb, even though we commit fornication and murder a thousand times a day" (*Letter to Melanchthon*, August 1, 1521).

Luther's novel teaching was in stark contrast to what we find in Scripture. The apostle Paul clearly believed that salvation, once achieved, could be lost. He affirms this when writing to the church at Corinth: "But you yourselves wrong and defraud, and that even your own brethren. **Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor the idolaters, nor the adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God"** (1 Corinthians 6:8-10).

It is important to note that Paul was talking to a group of Christians. In other words, He was talking to people who Martin Luther would say were saved. And yet Paul is warning them about losing their salvation. Jesus Himself made the same point when He addressed the Church at Ephesus: "Realize how far you have fallen. **Repent, and do the works you did at first. Otherwise, I will come to you and remove your lamp stand from its place"** (Revelation 2:5).

The lamp stand is symbolic of Christ's presence. To have your lamp stand removed is to be separated from Christ. That they had a lamp stand to remove indicates that they were at one point, "in Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Jesus' command to repent is a warning that they must once again abide in Him. And as we are told in John 15:4-6 we must abide in Him or be cast forth like a branch and be burned.

Earlier in 1 Corinthians Paul allows for the possibility that even he might not be saved. He wrote:

> It is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court**. I do not even judge myself. I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.** Therefore, do not pronounce judgment before the time, before **the Lord** comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and **will disclose the purposes of the heart**. Then every man will receive his commendation from God (1 Corinthians 4:2-5).

Paul points out that it is God who pronounces judgment. And he takes the extra step to tell others not to pronounce judgment. That means you can never definitively say that a person is damned or saved. Only God can make that judgment. Paul also said: "Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Well, I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air, but **I pommel my body and subdue it lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified"** (1 Corinthians 9:25-27).

I do not think that anyone would argue with the fact that Paul is a Christian at this point. And yet in this passage he tells us that he can lose his salvation. The reason why Paul, or any Christian for that matter, can lose their salvation is because even after accepting Christ a person is still capable of sinning and remaining unrepentant. And as we saw above (Revelation 2:5) repentance is necessary for forgiveness.

Apostasy is another way that salvation can be lost:

> For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold Him up to contempt. For land which has drunk the rain that often falls upon it, and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near being cursed; its end is to be burned (Hebrews 6:4-8).

Protestants will point to several verses of Scripture which appear to bolster their argument. For instance:

> He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son of God has not life. I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:12-13).
>
> My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand (John 10:29).

In the first reading John tells us that he who has the Son has eternal life. And of course, this raises the question; who are the ones who have the Son? John himself answers that question; those who remain in Him have the Son (John 6:57). He also says that those who believe in Jesus have eternal life. Consequently, those who do not believe do not have eternal life. To believe in Jesus is to believe in what He taught. When asked what was necessary for salvation Jesus replied, obey the commandments, and give to the poor (Mark 1017-22).

As for John 10:29; It is true, no one can snatch the saved from the Father's hand. However, if we have free will we can voluntarily jump out of the Father's hand. And that is just the point we saw illustrated earlier in the readings from 1 Corinthians and Ephesians.

James makes the case even stronger:

> My brothers, if anyone among you should **stray from the truth** and someone **bring him back**, he should know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way **will save his soul from death** and will cover a multitude of sins (James 5:19-20).

Abide in the truth, your saved. Stray from the truth, your condemned. Brought back to the truth, your saved.

Another argument used to support the Protestant view comes from John 6:39 which reads: "and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me but raise it up at the last day." And so, the reasoning goes, one who is saved is given to Jesus. Thus, if anyone who has been given to Jesus is subsequently lost it would mean that the will of God had not been realized. Since God is all powerful that could never happen. Hence, once someone is saved, they are always saved.

But this is based on a misunderstanding of the nature of God's will. There are three aspects of God's will. First there is what some would call God's Executive will. He says: "let there be light" and without the slightest hesitation there is light. God is all powerful and it simply cannot be any other way. Then there is God's permissive will. This would involve His allowing bad things to happen. And this is usually the result of our bad choices. Lastly there is God's active will. This would involve those things that God desires for us. God only desires good things for us. But He does not force them on us. He loves us, and He wants us to love Him. Only someone with free will can choose to love God. Once we accept God our free will is not taken away. One who can choose to love can also choose not to love.

Just as it is the will of God that Jesus not lose one that is given to Him, so it is also the will of God that all men be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). And yet we know that most people will choose hell. Jesus Himself tells us this: "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few (Matthew 7:13-14)." Is this a failure on God's part? No, it is a failure on the part of those who have rejected God's offer.

Salvation can also be lost if we neglect to do that which God calls us to. While faith is certainly a vital element in achieving salvation, it is also true that our faith must be evident in our actions. The book of James is very clear on this:

> What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So, faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead (James 2:14-17).

I have said it before, but it bears repeating, the works that lead to salvation are not the product of our own intrinsic goodness. They are accomplished by the power (grace) of God. A failure to do good works is a rejection of God's grace. And that brings us back to our original question; can salvation be lost? It most certainly can be lost. And it will be lost when, at any point, a Christian rejects God's grace and remains unrepentant.

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Baptism

Some Christians consider baptism to be a mere ordinance, a symbol of one's commitment to Christ. As a result, they only baptize adults who have made such a commitment. To their way of thinking, baptizing infants would serve no purpose. Catholics see baptism a little differently. We see it as one of the sacraments of Initiation. We believe that its reception imparts both actual and sanctifying grace.

In Acts 2:38-39, Peter says, "**Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children** and to all that are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Him."

Why would Peter mention children if it only applied to adults? I suppose someone could say that it would apply to them in the future. But isn't that a given? If something is for adults it obviously would be for your children once they became adults. I think Peter mentions children here because he meant that it applied to them at that very moment. Given the nature of baptism, that actually makes a lot of sense. Peter said we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit in baptism. Through the Holy Spirit we receive grace. And it is grace that enables us to be who God wants us to be.

So why would an infant need grace? Because their entire existence is a learning experience. We teach them how to eat, how to communicate, how to behave and a thousand other things. And if we are Christians, we teach them about Jesus. First Corinthians 12:3 tells us that "no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit." If an adult needs the Holy Spirit to recognize his need for God, then so does a child. At Baptism there is an infusion of grace. If the grace an infant receives at Baptism is nourished (in a Christian atmosphere) it grows; if not, it dies. Grace enables us to hear and accept the Gospel not only as adults but also as children hearing it for the first time. Does that mean that our small children are supposed to be little theologians? No, of course not. But they do need to understand God on their own level. That He is a loving Father who they can cry out to. A God who wants them to be happy forever.

In his book "The Faith of Millions," Fr. John O'Brien writes: "While there is no explicit mention of the baptizing of infants in the New Testament, it is highly probable that there were some babes among the families of Lydia, Stephanas, and the Jailer at Philippi, where in each instance St. Paul baptized the whole family" (Acts 16:14-15, Acts 16:29-34 and 1 Corinthians 1:16).

In Colossians 2:11-12 Paul alludes to infant baptism when he tells us that Baptism has replaced circumcision. Circumcision took place on the eighth day after birth (Genesis 17:12). We know that the early Christians baptized their infants on the eighth day after birth because the third Council of Carthage decreed in the year 252, that baptism of children need not be deferred until the eighth day after birth as some maintained, but might be administered as soon as possible (Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistle 64*:2 [A.D. 253]). When someone became a Jew, they were circumcised. And when someone became a Christian, they were baptized: "For by one Spirit we were all **baptized into one body**" (1 Corinthians 12:13).

That infants can benefit spiritually is clearly seen in Luke 18:15-16: "Now they were bringing even infants to Him that He might touch them. And when the disciples saw it they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to Him saying, 'Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.'" Mark finishes the story in his account, "And He took them in His arms and blessed them, laying His hands upon them" (Mark 10:16).

The Waldenses and the Cathari were the first to raise objections to infant Baptism (12th century). Modern day objections can be traced back to the Anabaptists who were a part of the Protestant Reformation (16th century). However, there are no early Christian writers who condemn the practice. In fact, there is much written in support of it. Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp who was a disciple of the Apostle John, he wrote: "**Christ came to save all who through Him are born again unto God, infants and children, boys and youths**, and aged persons" (*Against Heresies* 2, 22:4 [A.D. 189]). Origen wrote: "**Baptism is given even to infants**" (*Homilies in Leviticus* 8:3 [A.D. 248]).

When we make a personal commitment to Christ (post baptism) it is our conscious decision to keep and maintain what God has already given us. Baptism doesn't guarantee one's salvation; rather one is saved as a result of responding positively to the grace we receive.

People are sometimes asked by friends or even strangers if they have been born again? What the questioner usually means by that is “have you accepted Christ as your personal Lord and Savior.” If you have, they would consider you to be born again and on your way to heaven. This is all based on John 3:3-5. While committing your life to Christ is a good thing to do, this passage is actually speaking about baptism. In verse 3 Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born again in order to see the kingdom of God. But Nicodemus does not understand what He means. So, Jesus gives him a fuller explanation in verse 5. Listen to what He says: "Unless one is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God." That is baptism. Water cleanses our souls and the Holy Spirit bestows grace (see Acts 2:38-39 above).

Of course, there is a sense in which the other interpretation is true. If someone truly gives their life to Christ, there is a rebirth. As we read in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come." But John is talking about something different here. He doesn’t disagree with Paul; he is just talking about something else.

The Greek word rendered as "again" is anothen (ἄνωθεν). Anothen is a word that can mean one of two things. It can mean again as in to repeat something. And that is the way that Nicodemus seems to understand it. But it can also mean "from above." And judging by His comments to Nicodemus that is exactly the way Jesus meant it. And that is exactly the way the early church saw it. Justin Martyr described baptism this way:

> Then they are brought by us where there is water and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For, in the name of God, the Father... and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit [Matt. 28:19], they then receive the washing with water. For Christ also said, "Unless you are born again, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (*First Apology* 61 [A.D. 151]).

Being born from above is another way of saying being born of the Spirit. Remember what John the Baptist said of **Jesus**: "This is **He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit**" (John 1:33). And that is exactly what Jesus does in the sacrament of baptism.

Some maintain that only baptism by total immersion is valid. However, the Early Church administered baptism in three ways. Some were baptized by total immersion and some were baptized by having water poured or sprinkled over the head. Cyprian of Carthage confirms this in one of his letters:

> In the saving sacraments, when necessity compels and when God bestows His pardon, divine benefits are bestowed fully upon believers, nor aught anyone be disturbed because the sick are poured upon or sprinkled when they receive the Lord’s grace (*Letter to a Certain Magnus* 69 [A.D. 254]).

There are three types of baptism. Aside from water baptism there is baptism of desire. If a person comes to believe in Jesus but does not know that baptism is required or else dies before it could be administered, his honest desire for Christ would be enough. Likewise, water baptism is not a requirement for those who are martyred upon conversion. The Church refers to this as Baptism of Blood. While water Baptism is normative, God is not legalistic. What is most important to Him is the condition of one's heart (1 Samuel 16:7, 1 Corinthians 4:5). Thus, all those who truly desire God shall have Him.

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The Mass

Are Catholics trying to re-sacrifice Jesus when they celebrate the Mass? Some people think so. And this is due in large part to a misunderstanding of just what the Mass is. Part of the misunderstanding stems from the fact that the Mass is often referred to as “The Sacrifice of the Mass.” Our accuser’s reason, if Jesus was sacrificed on the cross two thousand years ago how can we be sacrificing Him now? After all, doesn’t the Bible refer to Christs sacrifice in singular terms? It sure does, and Catholics do not attempt to re-sacrifice Christ. The sacrifice of the Mass is the “once for all” sacrifice of Jesus.

The New Testament sacrifice (Jesus) was prefigured by the Old Testament sacrifice. And In the Old Testament sacrifice there were two parts; the death of the victim, and the offering up of the fruits by the high priest. The same is true of the New Testament sacrifice. Jesus' death took place at one point in time and it cannot be repeated. Yet, the fruits of His sacrifice must be applied to every believer past, present and future. That is why the book of Revelation continues to portray Jesus as a sacrificial lamb. In fact, it refers to Him in this way 29 times. And that is because as the high priest of the New Covenant, He is continually offering up the fruits of His sacrifice on the cross. We partake of those fruits when we participate in the Mass.

Ironically, some of the most vocal critics of the Mass claim to be "washed by the blood of the Lamb" – blood that was shed two thousand years ago. If you asked them if they were re-sacrificing Jesus they would say “no, we are receiving the benefits of His once for all time sacrifice" (Hebrews 10:12). And so it is with the Mass.

The Mass is obviously a ritual. Many Protestants don't believe in performing rituals. They claim that Christianity, unlike Judaism, is not a religion. They say that it is a relationship with God; therefore, rituals are unnecessary. However, **Christianity is a religion, a religion where believers can have a personal relationship with their God.** In James 1:26-27 we read the following: "If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this man's **religion** is vain. **Religion** that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."

When James calls Christianity a religion, he is commenting on its nature. The Greek word that is translated into "religion" is threskeia (θρησκεία). Threskeia means ceremonial observance, which is what a ritual is. This is the same word used by Paul to describe Judaism in Acts 26:5. If rituals have no place in Christianity, why does the Word of God refer to it in ritualistic terms? Of course, Christianity is more than just a bunch of rituals. When we are open to the grace that is received at Mass and in the sacraments, we are enabled to be the people that God wants us to be.

Malachi 1:11 speaks prophetically of the Mass: "From the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place, incense is offered to my name, and **a pure offering**, for my name is great **among the nations**, says the Lord of hosts." The sacrifice spoken of is not the Judaic sacrifice. The passage refers to a pure sacrifice that will take place everywhere among the nations (Gentiles). This makes perfect sense as we are living in "the times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24).

Psalm 110 [109] provides even more detail. Verse 4 reads, "The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, 'You [Jesus] are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.'" In Genesis 14:18 Melchizedek offered a sacrifice of bread and wine. So, Psalm 110 is a prediction that Jesus would offer a perpetual sacrifice involving bread and wine. He does this at the Last Supper and commands that His apostles do the same. Consequently, the Sacrifice of the Mass involves the offering of bread and wine (not grape juice).

The early Church understood the Mass to be a true sacrifice. Clement, the fourth bishop of Rome, wrote in the year 95 A.D., "Our sin will not be small if we eject from the episcopate those who blamelessly and holily have offered its **sacrifices"** *(1 Clement 44:4)*. A few years later in the year 110 A.D., Ignatius of Antioch said the following: "Make certain, therefore, that you all observe one common Eucharist, for there is but one body of our Lord Jesus Christ, and but one cup of union with His blood, and one single altar of **sacrifice,** even as there is also but one bishop, with his clergy and my own fellow servitors, the deacons" *(Letter to the Philadelphians No. 4)*

A close examination of the Mass reveals that it is saturated with Scripture. From the greeting to the dismissal, we find verse after verse drawing us deeper into the Word of God. One of many examples is *"The Gloria."*

> Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth (cf. Lk. 2:14). Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, (Rev. 19:6) we worship you (Rev. 22:9), we give you thanks (Eph. 5:20), we praise you for your glory (Rev. 7:12). Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father (2 Jn. 3), Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us (cf. Jn. 1:29); you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer (Rom. 8:34). For you alone are the Holy One (cf. Lk. 4:34), you alone are the Lord (Rev. 15:4), you alone are the most High, Jesus Christ (Lk. 1:32), with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen (cf. Jn. 14:26).

There are two parts to the Mass. The liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. During the Liturgy of the Word there are three Scripture readings. One from the Old Testament, one from the epistles or New Testament letters, and one from the Gospels. The three readings are usually connected in some way. This shows us how Scripture works together as a whole.

The Church also has three liturgical cycles. Each of these cycles lasts a year. Each cycle features a different set of readings from the Bible. At the end of the three years Catholics have heard the vast majority of the Bible read and preached upon. This is done so that Catholics will have a balanced and accurate view of what is taught by the Scriptures.

In the Liturgy of the Eucharist, we partake of the Lords Supper. Some are opposed to the Mass because of the Catholic belief that the bread and the wine become the body and blood of Jesus. I address this issue in detail in another essay (The Eucharist). However, to touch on it briefly; Are we wrong to say what Jesus said? Are we wrong to do what He commanded us to do? That it boggles the natural mind is irrelevant. Speaking the universe into existence boggles the natural mind. But we know from the word of God that it happened. God always accomplishes what He says He will. Another example is when He said He would raise His own dead body (John 2:19). As He says in the book of Isaiah: "So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, **achieving the end for which I sent it**" (Isaiah 55:11). That would not just refer to some of what God says but to all of it. As Jesus Himself said: "It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, **but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God**" (Matthew 4:4).

So, when Jesus says that He will raise his own dead body it happens. Likewise, when He says at the Last Supper that the Bread and the wine have become that same body, it happens. And of course, it only stands to reason that when we do likewise, as He commanded, it happens again. Manipulating the Word of God to appeal to the natural mind serves no useful purpose: "For we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). The Last Supper was the first Mass. That was the belief of the Early Church and that is the belief of the Catholic Church.

But some will say, "I don't get anything out of the Mass." To the uninformed person, a candy bar seems more exciting than a million-dollar check. The colorful wrapper is certainly more pleasing to the eye, and you have a piece of candy inside. How can a plain piece of paper with handwriting on it compete with that? To the uninformed, the Mass may be viewed similarly. If you do not know what it is all about you are not going to understand its importance and you are not going to be open to what it has to offer. Thus, you will not get anything out of it.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church wisely points out that our Yes to Jesus Christ is twofold: “A trustful abandonment to God and a loving assent to all that he has revealed to us. This is possible only by means of the action of the Holy Spirit” (Nos. 150,176). If you are one of those who "does not get anything out of the Mass," learn more about it and pray for the grace to be open to all that it has to offer. It will change your life.

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The Eucharist

The Church has always taught that the Eucharist is the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ. This doctrine is referred to as “The Real Presence.” Understandably this can be a hard teaching to accept. However, belief in the Real Presence rests upon the words of Christ Himself. In John 6:48-57 we read the following:

> **I am the bread of life.** Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. **I am the living bread** that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread, will live forever, and **the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.** The Jews quarreled among themselves saying, **"How can this man give us His flesh to eat?"** Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, **unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you do not have life within you.** Whoever eats **my flesh** and drinks **my blood** has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For **my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.** Whoever **eats my flesh** and **drinks my blood** remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who **feeds on me** will have life because of me."

Opponents of the Real Presence contend that Jesus was speaking figuratively. They say the words flesh and blood refer to His teachings. And that it is devoured by the ear. But that is not possible. Jesus had already been dispensing that sort of “bread” for the last two years. Concerning the bread spoken of in John 6, Jesus says in verse 51: **“The bread that <u>I will give</u> is my flesh for the life of the world.”** The word will, is future tense. So, the bread in John 6 is something other than that which He had already been giving. Moreover, it was on the cross that He gave the flesh in question “**for the life of the world**.” And that flesh was His literal body.

Read what happens in John 6:60 and 66, – "Then many of His disciples who were listening said, **'This saying is hard, who can accept it?'... As a result of this, many [of] His disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied Him."** Obviously, they took Jesus literally. If they were wrong, why didn’t He correct them? Also, if the bread and wine were just symbols, why didn’t He just say so? The Greek word parabole (παραβολή) means just that, and is used in Hebrews 9:9 and 11:19.

A year later at the Last Supper, Jesus fulfilled His promise:

> While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, 'Take and eat, **this is My body.'** Then He took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it all of you, **for this is My blood** of the covenant, **which will be shed** on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins'" (Matthew 26:26-28).

Note that Jesus held the bread and the cup in His hands when He said, "This is my body," and "This is my blood." If I were holding a baby and I said: “This is my son.” No one would think I was speaking figuratively. Likewise, when Jesus holds bread and wine in His hands and says: “This is my body” and “this is my blood,” no one should think He was speaking figuratively. Jesus also identifies the blood as that which would be shed on the cross. Are we really to believe that this refers to His teachings? Finally, Jesus says to do this in memory of Him (Luke 22:19).

Paul identifies the cup and bread as the body and blood of our Lord in 1 Corinthians 10:16 and 11:27-29:

> The cup of blessing that we bless, **is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?** The bread that we break, **is it not a participation in the body of Christ?...** Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer **for the body and blood of the Lord...**For anyone who eats and drinks **without discerning the body,** eats and drinks judgment on himself.

If the Lords body and blood are not present, how can a wrong be committed against them? Moreover, if the body and blood were figurative, these verses would make no sense. Are we not supposed to preach the Gospel to all nations? Are we really to believe that non-believers need to be made worthy before we present the Gospel to them? No, of course not. To receive unworthily means to receive communion in a state of mortal sin (1 John 5:16).

To recap, Jesus said:

1. I am the Bread of life (John 6:48).
2. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life (John 6:54).
3. Take and eat, this [bread] is my body (Matthew 26:26).
4. Do this in memory of me (1 Corinthians 11:24).

Under the Old Covenant God commanded the Israelites to offer sacrifices to atone for their sins. One of the sin offerings was a lamb (Leviticus 5:1-6). The Old covenant prefigured the New Covenant. The sacrificial lamb of Leviticus is a type or picture of Christ. Jesus is the sacrificial Lamb of the New Covenant: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

The Old Covenant lamb would be sacrificed and then a part of that sacrifice would be eaten to receive its benefits. (Leviticus 6:24-26). Likewise, Jesus, the New Covenant Lamb, would be sacrificed and His body would be eaten in order to receive its benefits: "**Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you do not have life within you" (John 6:53).**

After the resurrection God's relationship with His people changed. In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit was given to a few individuals. But in the New Testament the Holy Spirit is given to anyone who asks (Luke 11:13). In the Old Testament God was present in a special way in the Holy of Holies. But only the High Priest could stand in His presence. In the New Testament God is present in a special way in the tabernacle. But now anyone can stand in His presence. And most importantly, anyone who is properly disposed can receive Him in a most personal way.

The Early Church understood the nature and significance of the Eucharist. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch from the year 69 to 110, writes in his *Letter to the Smyrnaeans:* "But look at the men who have those perverted notions about the grace of Jesus Christ…**They will not admit the Eucharist is the self-same body of our Savior Jesus Christ which suffered for our sins, and which the Father in His goodness afterwards raised up again" (**7:1).

A few decades later, around the year 150, Justin martyr wrote: "Not as common bread or common drink do we receive these, but since Jesus Christ our savior was made incarnate by the word of God and had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so too as we have been taught, the food which has been made into the Eucharist by the eucharistic prayer set down by Him, and by the change of which our blood and flesh is nourished, **is both the flesh and the blood of that incarnated Jesus"** *(First Apology 66).*

But why the Eucharist? Why couldn't Jesus just strengthen us through prayer? Well, He can, and He does. However, we are physical and the world we live in is physical. The Eucharist is something we can see and touch and that makes it more relatable. Jesus came to earth physically. And He sacrificed His physical body to save us from our sins. Jesus is called the Word of God because he is the physical manifestation of the hidden reality (God). Likewise, the Eucharist is the physical manifestation of the now hidden Christ. Adoring a Jesus you can see is easier than adoring a Jesus you can't see. I am not saying that it is a necessity, but it is an aid. St. Thomas Aquinas said as much in his *Summa Theologica*:

> Sacraments are necessary unto man's salvation for three reasons. The first is taken from the condition of human nature which is such that it has to be led by things corporeal and sensible to things spiritual and intelligible. Now it belongs to Divine providence to provide for each one according as its condition requires. Divine wisdom, therefore, fittingly provides man with a means of salvation, in the shape of corporeal and sensible signs that are called sacraments (3:61:1).

It is easy to have faith in Jesus when he tells us to love our neighbor. But how about when He challenges us with something that is outside of our normal realm of experience? Jesus invited Peter to walk on water (Matthew 14:22-29). God told Noah to build an ark to prepare for an event that was, to the natural mind, beyond the realm of possibility (Genesis 6:13-17). God told Abraham He would give him a son in his old age and then once he did, he asked him to sacrifice him on an altar (Genesis 22:1-14). Moses was asked to take on Pharaoh (Exodus 3:1-12), Mary was asked to have a virgin birth (Luke 1:26-35).

When faced with a situation that seems to defy logic, do we believe Jesus, or do we come up with our own plan like Sarah did (Genesis 15:1-6, 16:1-4)? To deny the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, is to deny that God is capable of supernatural acts.

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Confession

"'Peace be with you. **As the Father has sent me, even so I send you**.' And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, **'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained'"** (John 20:21-23).

In this passage Jesus empowers his apostles and their successors to forgive the sins of men. But there are those who disagree. They would say that Jesus was merely teaching His apostles to forgive those who have sinned against them. But that can't be right. Jesus starts off by saying: "**As the Father has sent me, even so I send you**." Jesus is sending the Apostles to forgive as He was sent to forgive. And how was He sent to forgive?

> And when **Jesus** saw their faith, He **said** to the paralytic, "My son, **your sins are forgiven**." Now some of the Scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, "Why does this man speak thus? It is blasphemy! **Who can forgive sins but God alone?**" Jesus, knowing what they were thinking, said in part, "But that you may know that **the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins**,' – He said to the paralytic, 'I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home." And he rose, and immediately took up the pallet and went out before them all (Mark 2:5-12).

Jesus was sent to forgive sins. Plain and simple! His clear words and the reaction of the Scribes leave no doubt. That Jesus is delegating some of His authority to forgive sins is evidenced by what He does and says next; "He breathed on them, and said to them, **'Receive the Holy Spirit.'"** Jesus said and taught a lot of things. However, He was not in the habit of saying "receive the Holy Spirit" before each lesson. He says it here because he is empowering them to do something. And He reveals what it is in the next sentence: "**If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained**."

The only time a priest would retain anyone's sins is when there is an obvious lack of repentance. And of course, that is to be expected as repentance is necessary for forgiveness. "**Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out**" (Acts 3:19).

That God desires to forgive sins through the ministry of men can be further evidenced in James 5:14-15. There we read: "Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, **he will be forgiven."**

The passage in John 20, couldn't refer to our forgiving those who have sinned against us. And that is because we are never given the option to retain anyone's sins. In fact, our own forgiveness is dependent on our forgiving others. Jesus tells us this very thing in Matthew 6:14-15: "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you. But **if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses**."

The fact that the apostles could forgive or retain sins meant that they would have to know what the sins were and the disposition of the person in question. That could only happen if the person were to tell or confess his or her sins. Furthermore, if this function was necessary in the first century it would be necessary today. For the Church is to last until the "close of the age" (Matthew 28:20). And so, the practice would have to be passed down to the apostles' successors. Early Church writings indicate that it was.

The Didache which was written between 70 and 120 A.D. records the following: "**Confess your sins in church**, and do not go up to your prayer with an evil conscience. This is the way of life" (14). Cyprian of Carthage wrote: "Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But [the impenitent] spurn and despise all these warnings before their sins are expiated, **before they have made a confession of their crime, before their conscience has been purged in the ceremony and at the hand of the priest**" (*The Lapsed* 15:1-3 **[A.D. 251]**).

Hippolytus of Rome a third century theologian, wrote:

> The bishop conducting the ordination of the new bishop shall pray: God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . pour forth now that power which comes from you, from your Royal Spirit, which you gave to your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, and which he bestowed upon his holy apostles. . . and grant this your servant, whom you have chosen for the episcopate, [the power] to feed your holy flock and to serve without blame as your high priest, ministering night and day to propitiate unceasingly before your face and to offer to you the gifts of your holy Church, **and by the Spirit of the high priesthood to have the authority to forgive sins, in accord with your command** (*Apostolic Tradition* 3 **[A.D. 215]).**

Origen, another early Christian theologian wrote likewise:

> [A filial method of forgiveness], albeit hard and laborious [is] the remission of sins through penance, when **the sinner . . . does not shrink from declaring his sin to a priest** of the Lord and from seeking medicine, after the manner of him who say, "I said, to the Lord, I will accuse myself of my iniquity" (*Homilies in Leviticus* 2:4 **[A.D. 248**]).

Confessing sins has its roots in the Old Testament. In Numbers 5:5-7 we read: “And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Say to the people of Israel, ‘When a man or woman commits any of the sins that men commit by breaking faith with the Lord, and that person is guilty, he shall confess his sin which he has committed.’” Leviticus 5 backs up what we read in Numbers 5: “When a man is guilty in any of these, he shall confess the sin he committed, and he shall bring his guilt offering to the Lord “(5:5). It also specifies what type of sin and guilt offerings were required for the various sins. Logically, one would need to confess in order to be told which sin offering would apply.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) is the normal means of obtaining forgiveness. However, it is not the only means. If someone were to die suddenly without having a chance to confess, he or she would be forgiven provided they were truly sorry for their sins. So why bother with confessing at all? Well for one, because Jesus says so. But also, because the Sacrament of Reconciliation is an occasion of grace. And grace can help us to avoid sinning in the future. "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

Some object to the idea of confessing to a priest because the priest is “just a man” and a “sinner.” But God chooses to work through sinners. When the apostles healed the sick or raised the dead, it was Jesus working through them. In James 5:14-15 we are told: “Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and **if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven**.” If God chooses to use men to forgive sins in time of sickness, why would anyone doubt that He would do it under normal circumstances?

Human beings seem to have a natural need to confess even if at times we are hesitant to do so. It is not unusual for people to seek out friends or family when something is bothering them. "Getting it off our chest," as the saying goes, is often very therapeutic. Confession offers us this and much more. A good confessor is not only a good listener but an experienced counselor who can help us to properly address the problem areas in our lives.

Some are reluctant to confess because they are embarrassed or afraid that the priest will be disappointed in them. And from the human standpoint, that is understandable. But as we said before, he too is a sinner, so there is nothing to fear. Besides, he has probably heard it all. Rare is the individual who can shock a priest in the confessional. We also need to remember that humility is a Christian virtue. As the scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5). Confession is not something that we should avoid. Rather it is something that we should look forward to. For every gift of God is given for our benefit.

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Purgatory

All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). But only those who are forgiven can enter heaven. The Bible is clear: **Nothing unclean shall enter it [heaven]**, (Revelation 21:27). The Apostle John writes about two types of sin:

> If any one sees his brother committing what is not a mortal sin, he will ask, and God will give him life for those whose sin is not mortal. **There is sin which is mortal**; I do not say that one is to pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but **there is sin which is not mortal** (1 John 5:16-17).

The Greek word used for mortal is thanatos (θάνατος). Thanatos signifies spiritual death, as a consequence of sin – what we would call eternal damnation. What would happen if we did not repent of a sin that was not mortal (venial) and we died? We are neither damned nor forgiven – yet we must be totally forgiven to enter heaven.

In Matthew 12:32 Jesus talks about forgiveness after death: "And whoever speaks a word against the Son of man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit **will not be forgiven**, either in this age or **in the age to come**." Why mention the age to come if forgiveness only takes place here on earth?

The word Purgatory does not appear in Scripture. However, the concept does. The word Purgatory comes from the Latin *purgare* and simply means; to make clean or to purify. In Purgatory a soul is purged of all impurities, impurities such as unrepented venial sins and any temporal punishment due for past sins.

Temporal punishment is a debt to God which remains after our sins are forgiven. There are two notable examples of temporal punishment in the Old Testament. The first is when Moses and Aaron, despite being forgiven, are not allowed to enter the Promised Land because of their sin (Numbers 20:12). The second is when David commits murder and adultery. David tried to hide his sin but is called out by the prophet Nathan. David repents but that is not the end of the story:

> David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "**The Lord also has put away your sin**; you shall not die. Nevertheless**, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child that is born to you shall die**." Then Nathan went to his house (2 Samuel 12:13-15).

Note that Nathan tells David that the Lord has forgiven him. However, because of the seriousness of the offence he must still be punished. And so, he is. In both cases there is serious sin, then forgiveness, then punishment.

Jesus refers to Purgatory in Matthew 18:23-35. While speaking on forgiveness He says: "The kingdom of heaven may be likened to..." and then He tells a story about a king who forgave a servant's large debt. That same servant refused to forgive a much smaller amount owed to him by a fellow servant. When the king found out he threw the first servant into prison "**until he should pay back the whole debt**." Jesus then says, "So will my Heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives his brother from his heart." What prison is there in the kingdom of heaven where you might remain until your debt is satisfied? Purgatory is the only thing that makes any sense. We know it cannot be hell as anyone who goes there never gets out. In other words, their debt is never fully paid.

In 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 Paul tells us: "The work of each will come to light, for the day will disclose it. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire [itself] will test the quality of each one's work. If the work stands that someone built upon the foundation, that person will receive a wage. But if someone's work is burned up, that one will suffer loss, **the person will be saved, but only as through fire**." If that is not Purgatory, what is it?

Those detained in Purgatory can be aided by those of us still on earth. The Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it this way:

> From the beginning the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God. The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance be undertaken on behalf of the dead (1032).

One example of "from the beginning" comes to us from Tertullian who writes: "**The faithful widow prays for the soul of her husband,** and begs for him in the interim repose, and participation in the first resurrection, and **offers prayers on the anniversary of his death**" (*Monogamy* 10 [A.D. 213]).

All that are in or headed to heaven are members of the Body of Christ. And thus, we are connected to one another. To care and pray for one another is natural and to be expected as we are united in a bond of love. As the Catholic Encyclopedia notes: “Augustine declares that the souls of the faithful departed are not separated from the Church, which is the kingdom of Christ, and for this reason the prayers and works of the living are helpful to the dead” (*The City of God* 20:19 [A.D. 419]).

Inscriptions in the catacombs bear witness to this ancient Church teaching. One reads, "Intercession has been made for the soul of the dear one departed and God has heard the prayer, and the soul has passed into a place of light and refreshment." Another one reads, "In your prayers remember us who have gone before you." Finally, there is the Epitaph of Abericus:

> The citizen of a prominent city, I erected this while I lived, that I might have a resting place for my body. Abercius is my name, a disciple of the chaste shepherd who feeds his sheep on the mountains and in the fields, who has great eyes surveying everywhere, who taught me the faithful writings of life. Standing by, I, Abercius, ordered this to be inscribed; truly I was in my seventy-second year. May everyone who is in accord with this and who understands it pray **for Abercius** ([A.D. 190]).

In 2 Timothy 1:16-18 Paul appears to be praying for a friend who has died. He writes:

> May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me; he was not ashamed of my chains, but when he arrived in Rome, he searched for me eagerly and found me. **May the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that Day** and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus.

Note that Paul does not say may the Lord grant mercy on Onesiphorus and his household. He mentions them separately because they are not together. He then asks mercy for Onesiphorus "**on that day**" (future tense). This is a reference to the final judgment.

The tradition of the Jews can be found in 2 Maccabees 12:42-46:

> **Turning to supplication, they prayed that the sinful deed might be fully blotted out...He then took up a collection among all his soldiers, amounting to two thousand silver drachmas, which he sent to Jerusalem to provide for an expiatory sacrifice…if he were not expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been useless and foolish to pray for them in death…Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be freed from this sin**.

If praying for the dead is wrong, as some contend, and it was practiced in the early Church and even among some Jews, why didn't Jesus, His apostles or any of the Early Church Fathers condemn it?

Yes, there is suffering in Purgatory, but there is also great joy. For all who are there are assured of their salvation. While they long for heaven, they are even more consumed with the desire to be cleansed before being presented to their groom (Jesus). As the Scripture says: "Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready" (Revelation 19:7).

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Indulgences

Did the Catholic Church invent its doctrine on indulgences in order to extract money from the faithful? Some people think so. They are quick to remind us that it was the selling of indulgences in the Middle Ages that sparked the Protestant Reformation. No one disputes that there were abuses by individuals in the past. But past abuses should not be used as a reason to reject indulgences or any other doctrine. The Bible itself has always been subject to abuse. Should it too be rejected? Of course not! Both the Bible and the doctrine on Indulgences should stand or fall on their own merits.

To begin with, indulgences cannot be bought. Some will claim that the fees attached to Masses for the dead prove otherwise. However, the fees are small and usually go to the priest who says the Mass. Certainly priests, just like all full-time ministers, deserve to get paid for the work they do. The Apostle Paul says as much in 1 Corinthians 9:11-12: "If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits? If others share this rightful claim upon you, do not we still more?"

The use of indulgences goes back to the early days of the Church and is firmly based on scriptural principals. As we saw in the essay on Purgatory the Bible clearly teaches that some punishments are **eternal (lasting forever),** and others are **temporal (lasting for only a time).** Indulgences are granted for the remission of the temporal punishment due to sin.

The Church has always taught that temporal punishment is a possibility in this life and in Purgatory. It **heals the wounds of sin** and **prepares us for eternal happiness with God.** Pope Paul VI speaks of that dual role in his *Apostolic Constitution on Indulgences*: "The aim pursued by ecclesiastical authority [The Church] in granting indulgences is not only that **of helping the faithful to expiate the punishment due sin** but also that of **urging them to perform works of piety, penance, and charity – particularly those which lead to growth in faith and which favor the common good"** (4:8). The Bible itself encourages such behavior.

> **On piety:** "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Romans 12:1).
>
> **On penance:** "Yet even now," says the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the Lord, your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repents of evil" (Joel 2:12-13).
>
> **On charity:** "But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children let us not love in word or speech, but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:17-18).

Those receiving indulgences must be sorry for their sins. The wrong attitude toward sin renders our prayers ineffectual. In Psalm 66:18-19 we read: **"If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened."** Performing acts of piety, penance and charity helps us to focus on the effects of sin, thus promoting in us a genuine contempt for it. A truly repentant individual is more likely to grow in holiness.

Indulgences may be partial, remitting only a part of the temporal punishment due, or plenary, remitting all the temporal punishment due. The Catholic Church is sometimes accused of trying to keep people away from the Bible. Ironically, "A *partial indulgence* is granted to the faithful who, with the veneration due the divine word, make a spiritual reading from Sacred Scripture. A *plenary indulgence* is granted, if this reading is continued for at least one half an hour" (*Enchiridion of Indulgences* No. 50).

Strictly speaking, the granting of indulgences is not the forgiving of sins. "An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins **whose guilt has already been forgiven"** (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* No. 1471). Thus, indulgences may be applied to the souls in purgatory by way of prayer. This was taught by the early Church as evidenced by Tertullian, who wrote: “The faithful widow prays for the soul of her husband, and

begs for him in the interim repose, and participation in the first resurrection, and offers prayers on the anniversary of his death" (*Monogamy* 10 [A.D. 213]).

"An indulgence is obtained through the Church who, by virtue of the power of binding and loosing granted her by Christ Jesus (Matthew 16:19), intervenes in favor of individual Christians and opens for them the treasury of the merits of Christ and the saints to obtain from the Father of mercies the remission of the temporal punishment due for their sins" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* No. 1478).

There is some misunderstanding concerning the term "the treasury of the merits of Christ and the saints." It is feared that the Church is somehow equating the saints with Christ. However, this is not so. The treasury consists of the prayers of Christ and the saints. The term is simply an acknowledgment that they both pray for us (Hebrews 7:25, Revelation 5:8). The Bible itself refers to us as "God's co-workers" (1 Corinthians 3:9).

Furthermore, the use of the word *"merits"* does not mean that we can earn anything from God. James Akin addressed this point in an article that appeared in the November 1994 issue of *"This Rock"* magazine entitled, *"A Primer on Indulgences."* He wrote:

> Humans can't earn anything from God, though by His grace they can please him in a way He chooses to reward. Picturing the saints' acts under a single, collective metaphor (such as a treasury) is biblical: "It was granted her [the bride] to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure" (Revelation 19:8). John tells us, "For the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints." Here the righteous deeds of the saints are pictured under the collective metaphor of clothing on the bride of Christ, the Church. Jewish theology also recognizes a treasury of merits. Jewish theologians speak of "the merits of the fathers" – the idea being that the patriarchs pleased God and inherited certain promises as a reward. God fulfills these promises and ends up treating later Jews more gently than they would have been treated. The idea of "the merits of the fathers" is essentially the same as the Catholic concept of the "treasury of merits." Both postulate a class of individuals, the Old Testament patriarchs on the one hand and Christ and the saints on the other, who have pleased God and whom God chooses to reward in a way involving lesser temporal punishments on others.

An example of this principle can be found in 2 Kings 8:16-19:

> In the fifth year of Joram the son of Ahab, king of Israel, Jehoram the son of Jehosophat, king of Judah, began to reign. He was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as the house of Ahab had done, for the daughter of Ahab was his wife. And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. Yet the Lord would not destroy Judah, for the sake of David his servant, since he promised to give a lamp to him and to his sons forever.

If the doctrine on indulgences was created to extort money from the faithful, the Church has done a very poor job of it. A simple prayer such as: "Jesus, Mary and Joseph; have mercy on the souls in purgatory," will provide them with relief. If someone says a rosary in the presence of the Eucharist, (usually in Church) they can obtain a plenary indulgence which they can then offer up for someone in Purgatory. And as we saw above, indulgences can also be gained by reading Scripture, or by performing charitable acts. And you can do all of this without Church officials ever knowing about it.

That indulgences exist is reasonable and to be expected. The same loving Father who, through the death of His only Son provided a way to eliminate our eternal punishment, also provided a way to eliminate our temporal punishment.

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Invoking the Saints

Catholics are often criticized for asking the saints in heaven for help. This stems in part from the fact that the practice is sometimes referred to as “praying to saints.” Praying, they reason, is worship. And only God should be worshipped. The word pray has more than one meaning. One definition means to simply ask. Another is to worship or adore. When we pray to God, we can do both. But when we pray to the saints in heaven, we simply ask them to pray for and with us. That being said, the proper term for the practice is; “invoking the saints.”

I find it amazing that this accusation is still made. What the Catholic Church teaches is anything but secret. The Church’s position on this has been spelled out for centuries. For instance, St Thomas Aquinas wrote:

> In more technical terms used by the Tradition to draw this important distinction, devotion to Mary belongs to the veneration of ***dulia***, or the homage and honor owed to the saints, both angelic and human in heaven, and not to ***latria***, or the adoration and worship that can be given only to the Triune God and the Son incarnate. Because of her unique relationship to Christ in salvation history, however, the special degree of devotion due to Mary has traditionally been called ***hyperdulia***. While ***latria*** is owed to her Son by reason of unity of his divine and human natures in the Person of the Word made flesh, ***hyperdulia*** is due to Mary as truly his mother (*Summa Theologica* II-II, q. 103, a. 4; III, q. 25, a. 5 [A.D 1270]).

Dulia, hyperdulia, and latria are Greek words. To put it into modern English we might say that dulia and hyperdulia are degrees of honor. It is not unusual for us to honor teachers, pastors, or a dedicated pro-lifer. As Catholics we merely apply this principle to those who have gone before us who have likewise done well. Latria, as we saw, is the adoration and worship due to God alone.

You might disagree with the Catholic position on this. But you must admit that Catholics do not equate Mary and the saints with God. To say otherwise would be to "bear false witness against your neighbor" (Exodus 20:16).

But why go to the saints when we can go to God? Doesn’t the Bible tell us that we have but one Mediator between God and man and that is "Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5)? That is true, but if this prohibits the intercession of the saints in heaven it also prohibits the intercession of the saints on earth. And we know that is not true. So, what does Paul really mean? If we read the verse in context the meaning becomes clear:

> First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way. This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was born at the proper time (1 Timothy 2:1-6).

So, Paul begins by asking us to pray (mediate) for all men. He then says that it is good and acceptable to God because He desires all men to be saved. Paul sees intercessory prayer as a way to bring men to Christ and ultimately to salvation. Once on the subject of salvation, Paul expands on it by explaining how it was made possible. He does this by referring to Jesus’ unique act of mediation: "there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all." Hebrews 9:15 makes this last point even clearer. It says that Jesus "is the Mediator of a new covenant." When the saints in heaven pray for us they are no more mediating a new covenant than we are when we pray for each other. So, what is the lesson from these passages?

1. Pray (mediate) for men that they might be saved.
2. Salvation comes from Jesus' unique mediation.
3. Jesus' unique mediation consists of His death on the cross.

Clearly, the Bible encourages intercessory prayer. The only question left is whether or not the saints in heaven can intercede for us? Scripture indicates they can. We know that "the prayer of a righteous person has great power" (James 5:16). Who could be more righteous or pray more fervently than those in heaven?

We know that they care for us, "There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:7). And it is reasonable to conclude that they know what is happening in our lives because God wills it. Why would God will such a thing? He wills it because He wants His children to love one another (John 13:34). God does not need us to do anything. But He chooses to use us in His plan of salvation because it pleases Him.

Scripture says that we are made in the image and likeness of God. Since God is pure Spirit, it obviously doesn't have anything to do with our physical appearance. That only leaves one possibility; we are designed to imitate Him. Whenever we act charitably, we are a likeness or image of God. And just like an earthly father would be pleased, God is pleased. As Jesus said we are to love one another as He has loved us (John 13:34). Are we not "one body in Christ, and individually members of one another?" (Romans 12:5). Is Christ divided? Does He have two bodies? As long as we are connected to Him, we are connected to one another. And as we know, the saints on earth and the saints in heaven are both connected to Him.

And finally we see that those in heaven present our prayers along with their own to Jesus: "The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and **with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints**" (Revelation 5:8). Also, "And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and **he was given much incense to mingle with the prayers of all the saints** upon the golden altar before the throne. **And the smoke of the incense rose with the prayers of the saints from the hand of the angel before God"** (Revelation 8:3-4). Note that incense represents our prayers, and that the angels and elders in heaven present our prayers to God.

In Matthew 18:10 we read: "See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven." What do you suppose that the little ones' angels would be doing on their behalf before God? Praying for them is the only logical answer.

Demonstrating early Christian belief, Origen wrote in the year 233, "But not the High Priest [Christ] alone prays for those who pray sincerely, but also the angels…as also the souls of the saints who have already fallen asleep" (*On Prayer* 11). Cyril of Jerusalem wrote the following: Then [during the Eucharistic prayer] we make mention also of those who have already fallen asleep: first, the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs that through their prayers and supplications God would receive our petition... (*Catechetical Lectures* 23:9 [**A.D. 350**]).

Evidence is also found in the Old Testament. In the book of 2 Maccabees 15:11-14 we see the high priest Onias and the prophet Jeremiah praying for Israel. At the time this took place they had both already died. The passage reads as follows:

> He armed each of them not so much with confidence in shields and spears as with the inspiration of brave words, and he cheered them all by relating a dream, a sort of vision, which was worthy of belief. What he saw was this: Onias, who had been high priest, a noble and good man, of modest bearing and gentle manner, one who spoke fittingly and had been trained from childhood in all that belongs to excellence, was praying with outstretched hands for the whole body of the Jews. Then in the same fashion another appeared, distinguished by his gray hair and dignity, and of marvelous majesty and authority. And Onias spoke, saying, "This is a man who loves the family of Israel and prays much for the people and the holy city—Jeremiah, the prophet of God."

Some will object to my quoting 2 Maccabees. And that is understandable because Protestant Bibles do not include it. However, up until the Protestant Reformation this book was in every Christian Bible. The reformers decided on their own authority to eliminate not only this book but six others as well. But even if you do not accept this book as being a part of Scripture, you would have to admit that it is a historical document. And that is significant because it shows us that the doctrine in question was not some late invention of the Catholic Church. Rather it is a practice based on ancient belief, and as we saw earlier, Scripture itself.

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Mary's Role in the Church

Mary receives special honor because she, who once cared for the physical body of Christ, now cares, through her intercession, for the mystical body of Christ (the Church). Devotion to Mary differs, just as devotion to family differs, from devotion to God. In no way does it imply equality with God. When we refer to Mary's power we are talking about the power of her prayers. As James 5:16 says: "the prayer of a righteous person has great power."

When we honor Mary, we are only imitating Christ. Scott Hahn once noted: "Jesus fulfilled the Law perfectly. And that would include the fourth Commandment which tells us to: 'Honor thy father and mother.' The Hebrew word for honor is kabed. Kabed means to bestow honor and glory in a heavy manner. As Christians we imitate Christ."

Mary was the first Christian. Her life serves as the perfect illustration of what a Christian should be. As Saint Faustina noted: "The more I imitate the Mother of God, the more deeply I get to know God" (Diary 843). Mary was willing to do whatever God asked of her. She was about 14 years old when the angel Gabriel told her that she would conceive a child by the power of the Holy Spirit. At that time a woman could be stoned to death for bearing a child that was not her husband's. Despite that, Mary trusted God and said yes. She was humble and obedient.

The Bible does not tell us a lot about Mary. However, she does appear or is mentioned at several critical points. Here are four that I think are important:

1. Her role in Salvation history is foretold (Genesis 3:15)
2. Jesus' first miracle is a result of her intercession (John 2:1-11)
3. At the foot of the cross her role as mother of the Church is implied (John 19:26-27)
4. She is portrayed as the ark of the New Covenant and the mother of all believers (Revelation 12)

In all four of these passages, Mary is referred to as "woman." In Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke, Woman is a term of respect. However, it is not a title that a son would normally use for his mother. In John 2 and 19 Jesus is telling us that Mary is the woman prophesied in Genesis 3:15. And in Revelation 12:17 we receive confirmation that Mary, "the woman," is also the mother of the Church: "Then the dragon was angry with **the woman**, and went off to make war on the rest of **her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus.**"

The Early Church was aware of Mary's importance. Epiphanius remarked: "True it is . . . the whole race of man upon earth was born of Eve; but in reality, it is from Mary that Life was truly born to the world, so that by giving birth to the Living One, **Mary might also become the Mother of all the living**" (*Against Eighty Heresies*, 78,9 [circa A.D. 374]). Augustine wrote: "The Mother of the Head, in bearing Him corporally **became spiritually the Mother of all members of this Divine Head**" (*Of Holy Virginity* 6, [A.D. 401]).

As for the title of Co-Redemptrix, it must be noted that the Church did not give Mary this title but agrees with the theology behind it. The title comes from tenth century theologians who explain that redemption was accomplished in three steps: (1) The Incarnation, when the Word was made flesh, (2) The performance, Christ's death, and resurrection (the essential sacrifice which redeemed man), and (3) The application, whereby redemption is communicated to believers.

Jesus alone accomplished the second step. Mary cooperated in the first and third steps. Indeed, we are all commanded to participate in the third step: "Make disciples of all nations" (Mark 28:19). In 1 Corinthians 3:9 we are referred to as "God's co-workers." Does that make us equal to God? Does our work have the same value as His? Of course not! We merely work with God for the furtherance of His kingdom. It is only in this sense that we can be co-workers or co-redeemers with Christ.

Marian apparitions are another area that attracts criticism. One accusation is that the apparitions are a manifestation of Satan. But is that really the case? The Bible records several occasions where an angel or saint was sent by God to deliver a message. Sometimes the visit would be in person while at other times it would be in a dream. In Genesis 19 two angels visit Sodom to help Abraham and his family escape God's judgment. In 1 Samuel

28, Samuel appears to King Saul. In 2 Maccabees, Onias and Jeremiah appear to Judas Maccabeus. In Matthew 17 Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus on a mountain. In Luke 1:11 the angel Gabriel appears to Zechariah. And finally, in Luke 1:26 the Angel Gabriel appears to Mary. So, apparitions are not some unique Catholic invention. We see the precedent for them in the pages of Scripture.

But what about Marian apparitions? Are they from Satan? Jesus gave us guidance on the matter when He said: "By their fruit you will know them" (Matthew 7:16). If the message is Christ centered and faithful to Church teaching the fruit is good. Anything else is unacceptable. There have been very few apparitions that have been approved. And in any case no one is required to believe in them. So, what type of fruit do we get from the approved apparitions:

Fatima – Pray, avoid sin, do what Jesus tells you, I will aid you with my prayers.

Lourdes – confirmed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, exalted the virtues of Christian poverty and humility, and promoted personal conversion as it is the next life that is important, prayer, penance, humility as well as mercy for sinners and compassion for the sick.

Guadeloupe – God is the only God and Creator of everything, follow and live God's commandments, Mary takes us to Jesus, do not despair – Mary prays for us. As a result, nine out of ten million Aztecs who professed a polytheistic human sacrificing religion converted to Christianity.

Mary's ministry can be summed up by her words at the wedding at Cana: "Do whatever He [Jesus] tells you" (John 2:5). That is not a message that Satan would endorse. As Jesus once said: "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end" (Mark 3:24-26).

The most curious objection to Mary concerns her title "The Mother of God." Some take this to mean that Mary is the mother of the Trinity. That in some way Almighty God is subordinate to her. Obviously, such an accusation is laughable to say the least. The title Mother of God has more to do with Jesus than with Mary. It is an assertion of His divinity. Mary as the "Theotokos" or God-bearer conceived our Savior by the power of the Holy Spirit. God was the originator and Mary was the bearer. As we read in Scripture Mary was the mother of Jesus … Jesus is God. Therefore, Mary is the mother of Jesus who is God. In short Mary is the Mother of God. The Gospel asserts as much in Luke 1:43 where Elizabeth says to Mary: "How does this happen to me that **the mother of my Lord** should come to me**.**" We call Jesus Lord because He is our God. The mother of my Lord is the mother of my God or, to shorten it, **the mother of God**.

Martin Luther, the father of the Protestant Reformation, wrote in *A Prologue to the Magnificat*: "May the tender mother of God herself procure for me the Spirit of wisdom profitably and thoroughly to expound this song of hers." Also, in his last sermon at Wittenberg he said: "Is Christ only to be adored? Or is the holy Mother of God rather not to be honored? This is the woman who crushed the Serpent's head. Hear us. For your Son denies you nothing."

John Calvin, in his "*Institutes of the Christian Religion*," wrote, "We cannot celebrate the blessings given us in Christ without commemorating at the same time how high an honor God has granted to Mary when he chose to make her the mother of his only Son." Ulrich Zwingli stated, "The more honor and love for Christ, the more also the esteem and honor for Mary."

Scott Hahn once noted: "Just as a sculptor is honored when we admire his work, so too is God honored when we admire his work" (Mary).

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Mary Ever-Virgin

The Church has always believed that Mary was a virgin for her entire earthly life. But not everyone agrees. Detractors will point to Matthew 1:24-25, which reads: "When Joseph awoke he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home. He had **no relations with her until she bore a son**, and he named him Jesus."

The word "until" seems to indicate that after the birth of Jesus there were normal marital relations. And if the original sentence were written in English that is exactly what it would have meant. However, the Greek word heos (ἕως) which is translated as until, does not imply that anything happened after Jesus' birth, nor does it exclude it. The point of the verse is that Joseph was not responsible for the conception of Jesus.

We can see how "heos" differs from the English word "until" by observing how it is used in 1 Corinthians 15:25. Speaking of Jesus it says: "For he must **reign <u>until</u> he has put all his enemies under his feet**." To put your enemies under your feet is to defeat them. Does that mean that once Jesus has defeated all His enemies he will resign as king? Of course not. The Bible makes that clear to us in Revelation 11:15: "Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and **he shall reign for ever and ever**.'"

Another verse of Scripture that is used against the Catholic position is Luke 2:7 which reads: "And she gave birth to her **first-born son**." And so the argument goes, if Mary had a first-born, she must have had a second-born. But that is not necessarily so. In the Hebrew culture the term first-born is simply a title for a woman's first child. If she only had one child, he would still be her first-born. You can see this very point illustrated in Numbers 3:40: "The Lord then said to Moses, 'take a census of all the **first-born males of the Israelites a month old or more** and compute their total number.'" How many of those one-month-old babies do you suppose had younger siblings? I think it would be accurate to say none of them. And yet they are still called "first-born."

But what about the verses that speak about the brothers and sisters of Jesus? For instance, Matthew 13:55-56: "Is He not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother named Mary, and His brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? Are not His sisters all with us?"

Could Matthew be referring to Jesus' cousins? Although both Greek and English have a word for cousin, Aramaic, the language spoken by Jesus, does not. Hence the words brothers and sisters are used. These terms can also be used to refer to friends. Observe how Jesus himself uses the word "brothers" in Matthew 28:10 and see what happens in verse 16: "Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid. Go **tell my brothers to go to Galilee**, and there they will see me'...**The eleven disciples went to Galilee**, to the mountain which Jesus had ordered them." Were the disciples His siblings? Of course not!

A close look at what is commonly referred to as "*The Annunciation"* sheds a little more light on the subject: "Then the angel said to her, 'Behold **you will conceive** in your womb and bear a Son, and you shall name Him Jesus.'… But Mary said to the angel, **'How can this be, since I have no relations with a man**?' And the angel said to her in reply, **'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you'"** (Luke 1:30-35). Mary's statement would not make any sense unless she intended to remain a virgin. The angel said; "you will conceive" not you have conceived. Surely Mary knew the facts of life. If she were to conceive, her normal thought would have been that at some future time she would have relations with a man. Her protest could only have meant that she was a virgin and that she would like to keep it that way. The angel's reply is an assurance that such would be the case. Mary's point becomes even more obvious when you consider the fact that she was already betrothed to Joseph. A woman who is betrothed will eventually marry. And it is not unusual for married women to have children.

Additional evidence can be found at the foot of the cross. In John 19:26-27 we find the following: "When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple there whom He loved, He said to His mother, '**Woman, behold your son**.' Then He said to the disciple, **'Behold your mother**.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his home." If Jesus had siblings, why did He entrust the care of His mother to the apostle John? He did it because He had no siblings.

In Mark 6:3 Jesus is called "THE" son of Mary not "A" son of Mary. Elsewhere, Mary is called the mother of Jesus, but never the mother of anybody else. Even Protestant reformers such as Martin Luther, John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli taught that Mary remained a virgin. They believed that it was the clear teaching of Scripture. Martin Luther said: "Christ . . . was the only Son of Mary, and the Virgin Mary bore no children besides Him . . . I am inclined to agree with those who declare that 'brothers' really mean 'cousins' here, for Holy Writ and the Jews always call cousins brothers" (*Sermons on John, chapters 1-4)*.

John Calvin wrote: "Helvidius displayed excessive ignorance in concluding that Mary must have had many sons, because Christ's 'brothers' are sometimes mentioned" (*From Calvin's Commentaries*).

In a sermon entitled "*The Perpetual Virginity of Mary"* Huldreich Zwingli said:

> I have never thought, still less taught, or declared publicly, anything concerning the subject of the ever-Virgin Mary, Mother of our salvation, which could be considered dishonorable, impious, unworthy or evil . . . I believe with all my heart according to the word of holy gospel that this pure virgin bore for us the Son of God and that she remained, in the birth and after it, a pure and unsullied virgin, for eternity (September 17, 1522).

The Early Church Fathers agreed. Origen, in his *"Commentary on Matthew"* wrote:

> The Book [*The Protoevangelium*] of James [records] that the brethren of Jesus were sons of Joseph by a former wife, whom he married before Mary. Now **those who say so wish to preserve the honor of Mary in virginity to the end**, so that body of hers which was appointed to minister to the Word . . . might not know intercourse with a man after the Holy Spirit came into her and the power from on high overshadowed her. And **I think it in harmony with reason that Jesus was the first fruit among men of the purity which consists in [perpetual] chastity**, and Mary was among women. For it were not pious to ascribe to any other than to her the first fruit of virginity (2:17 [A.D. 248]).

Hilary of Poitiers proclaimed:

> If they [the brethren of the Lord] had been Mary's sons and not those taken from Joseph's former marriage, she would never have been given over in the moment of the passion [crucifixion] to the apostle John as his mother, the Lord saying to each, "Woman, behold your son," and to John, "Behold your mother" [John 19:26-27], as he bequeathed filial love to a disciple as a consolation to the one desolate (*Commentary on Matthew* 1:4 [A.D. 354]).

Athanasius of Alexandria, the great defender of Christian orthodoxy wrote: "Let those, therefore, who deny that the Son is by nature from the Father and proper to his essence deny also that He took true human flesh from **the ever-virgin Mary** (*Discourses against the Arians* 2:70 [A.D. 360]).

The Catholic Church, the Early Church, and the Protestant reformers all agree that Mary remained a virgin for her entire life. Objections were raised at a later date. Once people accepted the erroneous idea that they could interpret Scripture for themselves, many new teachings were invented, and many apostolic teachings were rejected.

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The Immaculate Conception

In 1854 Pope Pius IX affirmed the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. He wrote, in part, "We declare, pronounce and define, that the doctrine which holds that the most blessed Virgin Mary, at the first instant of her conception, was preserved immune from all stain of sin, by a singular grace and privilege of the omnipotent God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ…" (*Ineffabilis Deus*).

We find support for this statement in Genesis 3:15 where God says to Satan, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heal." The seed of the woman is Jesus; so, the woman is Mary. The seed of Satan is sin. Note that the word enmity appears only once, and it is applied to both situations. So, it must have the same meaning in both cases. If there is a complete enmity between Christ and sin there must also be a complete enmity between Mary and Satan. If Mary were to sin she would be cooperating to some degree with Satan and there would be no complete enmity. Logic would tell us that for Genesis 3:15 to be true, Mary would have to be "Immune from all stain of sin."

Does this mean that Mary did not need a savior? Not at all, remember that Pope Pius IX said Mary was preserved from all stain of sin "in view of the merits of Jesus Christ." There are two ways the grace of God can save us. We can be preserved from sin or we can be saved from sin. Mary was preserved from sin. On a smaller scale we are sometimes preserved from sin. By the grace of God, I have never killed anyone. I was preserved from a particular sin. There are murderers who have turned to Christ and no longer have the desire to kill. They were saved from a particular sin. In both cases a savior was needed.

Some claim that the woman in Genesis 3:15 is Eve while others claim it is the nation of Israel. Eve does not qualify because she sinned when she disobeyed God in the garden. Likewise, it could not be the nation of Israel as the Israelites were at times famous for their rebellion against God. There are others who identify the woman as the Church. This would seem to be the most unlikely choice as Jesus is the seed of the woman. This means that the woman came first. Clearly Jesus came before the Church as He was the one who established it.

Support for the Immaculate Conception can also be found in the New Testament. Luke 1:28 records the angel Gabriel addressing Mary with the words: "Hail full of grace" (Some Bibles say "highly favored one"). Note that Gabriel does not address Mary by name but by the title "Full of Grace." The Greek word kekaritomene (κεcaritωμέnη), which is translated as "Full of Grace" (or "highly favored one"), means, among other things, much graced or imbued with special honor. It is important to point out that the word kekaritomene is a perfect participle, which simply means that it refers to something that was completed in the past. In other words, it refers to a characteristic of Mary which pre-existed the event being recorded. While this is not an explicit proclamation of Mary's Immaculate Conception, it dovetails nicely with what we read in Genesis 3:15.

It is by the grace of God that we avoid sin. To be full of grace would be a prerequisite to being sinless. However, being sinless does not make Mary equal to God as some have claimed. Remember that Adam and Eve were immaculately conceived, though by another method, and no where do we read that they were equal to God. Likewise, Mary's Immaculate Conception does not make her equal to God. Adam and Eve became sinful by choice. And because of their choice, we, their descendants, have inherited their fallen nature. Mary, being full of grace, was created in the same spiritual state as Adam and Eve. Only in her case she chose not to sin. Scripture tells us that Jesus was the second Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45). Expanding on this theme the early Church viewed Mary as the second Eve. Both women were conceived without sin, the first would fail; the second would triumph. Or as Irenaeus of Lyon put it: "The knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience: what the virgin Eve bound through her disbelief, Mary loosened by her faith" (*Against Heresies* 3:22:4 [A.D. 189]).

But what about Romans 3:23: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God?" Do you suppose that the word "all" includes severely retarded adults or babies who die at birth? Of course not. Paul is not speaking in the absolute terms that some assume he is. The meaning of this verse lies in its context. Who is Paul talking to? What is the issue being discussed? In the first three chapters of Romans, Paul is telling the Jewish Christians that they have no advantage over the Gentile Christians. In effect he is saying it does not make a difference, you are all in the same boat. Jews and Gentiles have all sinned and fallen short. Mary's sin offering in Luke 2:22 does not present a problem either, as it refers to ritual uncleanness and was purely external.

Several of the Protestant reformers upheld the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Two notable examples are Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli. Ulrich Zwingli was a Swiss Protestant Reformer. He wrote:

> He who was about to remove our sins but not to make all men holy, must be himself holy. Hence God sanctified his mother: for it was fitting that such a holy Son should have a likewise holy mother...."; "I have never thought, still less taught, or declared publicly, anything concerning the subject of the ever Virgin Mary, Mother of our salvation, which could be considered dishonorable, impious, unworthy, or evil...I hope this is sufficient to have made plain to pious and simple Christians my clear conviction on the matter of the Mother of God: 'I believe with all my heart according to the word of holy gospel that this pure virgin bore for us the Son of God and that she remained, in the birth and after it, a pure and unsullied virgin, for eternity. (*Annotationes in Evangelium Lucae*, and *Sermon on "Mary, ever virgin, Mother of God*" [A.D. 1524]).

Martin Luther, the father of the Protestant Reformation and the chief proponent of Sola Scriptura (Scripture alone), said the following in a sermon: "But as the Virgin Mary was herself born of a father and mother in the natural way, many have been disposed to assert that she was also born in original sin, though all with one mouth affirm that she was sanctified in the maternal womb, and conceived without concupiscence." (*On the Day of the Conception of the Mother of God* [A.D. 1527]).

The early Church fathers called Mary "all holy," "all pure," "most innocent," "a miracle of grace," "purer than the angels," and "altogether without sin." In the year 244 Origen wrote: "This Virgin Mother of the Only-begotten of God is called Mary, worthy of God, immaculate of the immaculate, one of the one" (*Homily 1*). A few years earlier Hippolytus wrote: "He [Jesus] was the ark formed of incorruptible wood. For by this is signified that His tabernacle [Mary] was exempt from defilement and corruption" (*Orat. In Illud, Dominus pascit me, in Gallandi, Bibl. Patrum*, II, 496 ante [A.D. 235]).

One hundred and fifty years later Ambrose of Milan echoed the words of his predecessors: "Come, then, and search out your sheep, not through your servants or hired men, but do it yourself. Lift me up bodily and in the flesh, which is fallen in Adam. Lift me up not from Sarah but from Mary, a Virgin not only undefiled but a Virgin whom grace had made inviolate, free of every stain of sin" (*Commentary on Psalm 118:22-30* [A.D. 387]).

But why would Mary need to be immaculately conceived? Actually, she didn't need to be. To quote Pope Pius IX, it was "fitting." He goes on to say:

> And hence they [the Church Fathers] affirmed that the Blessed Virgin was, through grace, entirely free from every stain of sin, and from all corruption of body, soul and mind; that she was always united with God and joined to him by an eternal covenant; that she was never in darkness but always in light; and that, therefore, she was entirely a fit habitation for Christ, not because of the state of her body, but because of her original grace. . ..
>
> For it was certainly not fitting that this vessel of election should be wounded by the common injuries, since she, differing so much from the others, had only nature in common with them, not sin. In fact, it was quite fitting that, as the Only-Begotten has a Father in heaven, whom the Seraphim extol as thrice holy, so he should have a Mother on earth who would never be without the splendor of holiness (*Ineffabilis Deus*).

Mary was in every way a fitting vessel for Jesus, who is our Lord and Savior, and the Redeemer of mankind.

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The Assumption of Mary

At the end of her earthly life, Mary the mother of Jesus was assumed bodily into heaven. Objections to this doctrine are based on several false assumptions (no pun intended). The chief of which is the idea that in order for any doctrine to be legitimate it must be explicitly taught in Scripture. The doctrine of Mary's Assumption, just like the doctrine of the Trinity, is not explicitly taught in Scripture. However, in both cases Scripture provides us with plenty of evidence to support them.

There are two passages in Scripture that speak of someone being assumed into heaven: "**By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death**; and he was not found, because God had taken him" (Hebrews 11:5). Also, "A chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. **And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven**" (2 Kings 2:11). Everyone agrees that Enoch and Elijah were bodily assumed into heaven. Logically then, all should agree that the same was possible for Mary. **1. Scripture teaches us that it was possible.**

The Assumption of Mary is further consistent with Scripture as it is the logical result of her Immaculate Conception (the fact that she was conceived without sin [Genesis 3:15]). Death and corruption in the grave are the consequences of sin: "You are dust and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19). Mary was sinless. Thus, her being assumed body and soul into heaven was natural and to be expected. **2. Scripture implies that it was likely.**

The fact that it is not explicitly taught in Scripture would not mean that it didn't happen. One thing we do find in Scripture is the establishment of an authoritative Church. For instance, the Church is "The pillar and foundation of truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). And rejection of the Church is rejection of Christ: "Whoever rejects you rejects me" (Luke 10:16). Concerning itself Scripture says: "First of all you must understand this, that **no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation**" (2 peter 1:20).

So, Scripture tells us that you can't privately interpret the Bible. And it also tells us that the Church is the pillar and foundation of truth. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that only the Church has the ability to teach without error. And of course, that Church would be the Catholic Church. No other church would qualify as no other church was established by Jesus Christ. **3. Scripture shows us that the Church, and not the individual, has the authority to teach.**

In 1950 Pope Pius XII formally defined the doctrine of the Assumption. **4. The Church in its authority proclaims the bodily assumption of Mary.**

To recap:

1. Scripture teaches us that it was possible
2. Scripture implies that it was likely
3. Scripture shows us that the Church and not the individual has authority to teach
4. The Church in its authority proclaims the bodily assumption of Mary

Pope Pius XII was not teaching something new. References to the Assumption of Mary are made early on. At the end of the third century Melito wrote:

> If therefore it might come to pass by the power of your grace, it has appeared right to us your servants that, as you, having overcome death, do reign in glory, **so you should raise up the body of your Mother and take her with you, rejoicing, into heaven.** Then said the Savior [Jesus]: "Be it done according to your will (*The Passing of the Virgin* 16:2-17 [**A.D. 300]**).

Another example from the early Church comes to us from Timothy of Jerusalem. He proclaimed: "Therefore the Virgin is immortal to this day, seeing that **he who had dwelt in her transported her to the regions of her assumption** (*Homily on Simeon and Anna* [**A.D. 400**]).

The Church does not say whether or not Mary died. When Pius XII defined the doctrine of the Assumption in 1950, he simply said that Mary "**having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory**" (*Munificentissimus Deus* 44). Whether or not she died has been a matter of speculation for centuries. Epiphanius, Bishop of Constantia, wrote the following in **376 A.D.**: "Whether she died or was buried we know not" (*Panarion* 78:2). If she did die, it would present no conflict with Scripture, as she did not remain in the grave. We saw earlier in Genesis 3:19 that the penalty for sin was not merely death but death and all that would normally accompany it, i.e. bodily corruption (to dust you shall return Genesis 3:19).

The Assumption of Mary was not a theological necessity. Rather it was fitting that the Mother of our Savior be honored in this way. In the words of St. John Damascene, an early father and doctor of the Church:

> It was fitting that she, who had kept her virginity intact in childbirth, should keep her own body free from all corruption even after death. It was fitting that she, who had carried the Creator as a child at her breast, should dwell in the divine tabernacles. It was fitting that the spouse, whom the Father had taken to himself, should live in the divine mansions. It was fitting that she, who had seen her Son upon the cross and who had thereby received into her heart the sword of sorrow which she had escaped in the act of giving birth to him, should look upon him as he sits with the Father. It was fitting that God's Mother should possess what belongs to her Son, and that she should be honored by every creature as the Mother and as the handmaid of God (*Dormition of Mary* [**A.D. 697**]).

St. Robert Bellarmine was even more descriptive. He wrote:

> And who, I ask, could believe that the ark of holiness, the dwelling place of the Word of God, the temple of the Holy Spirit, could be reduced to ruin? My soul is filled with horror at the thought that this virginal flesh which had begotten God, had brought him into the world, had nourished and carried him, could have been turned into ashes or given over to be food for worms (*The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary*).

Being assumed bodily into heaven does not make Mary equal to Jesus. Jesus ascended into heaven by His own power. Mary on the other hand was assumed into heaven. When someone is assumed into heaven it is an act of God and not the individual. Someday all the saved will be assumed into heaven: "For the hour is coming when **all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come forth; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life;** and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28-29).

Christians have always honored those who have gone on to be with the Lord. Cities that possessed the bones of saintly people proudly proclaimed the fact. However, there are no records of any city claiming possession of Mary's remains. And that is because there were none to claim.

Protestants are very vocal in their opposition to Mary receiving any special honor. They have been taught and they fear that any special honor given to Mary diminishes the glory given to God. However, God Himself honored Mary above all other women. He did so when He chose her to bear His Son. Are we wrong to honor who God honors? As the God Bearer Mary is the ark of the New Covenant. She is disciple number one. Her faith is something to be admired and emulated. We honor her because of her unique role in salvation history.

Do we not routinely honor those who have been a blessing to us? We honor pastors for 25 years of faithful service. We honor veterans for their sacrifices in war. And we even honor sports figures for their accomplishments. So why not honor the woman whose yes to God made our salvation possible? When all is said and done, I believe we can whole heartedly agree with Elizabeth when she says to Mary: "Blessed are you among women" (Luke 1:42).

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The Rosary

The Rosary is a popular Catholic devotion that consists of several prayers and meditations. The prayers that make up the Rosary are the Apostles Creed, The Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Glory Be, and the Hail Holy Queen. Since the prayers are said in a particular order a set of beads is used to keep track of the progress made.

The Apostles Creed is a statement of faith from the Early Church and is used as the opening prayer. The Our Father comes to us directly from Jesus in Luke 11:2-4. While reciting the Rosary, the Our Father is said six times. The Glory Be is a short prayer of praise for the three persons of the Trinity. The Glory Be is also said six times.

The Hail Mary is said a total of fifty-three times. The Hail Mary's are split up into five groups of ten with a group of three being said at the beginning of the rosary. Each decade is separated by an Our Father a Glory Be and a mystery. Some people add the Fatima Prayer after the Glory Be. The Fatima Prayer is an appeal to Jesus to forgive our sins as well as the sins of others.

There are a total of twenty mysteries and they are divided into four groups. Each group has a different theme. The day of the week determines which set you use. Eighteen deal with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The other two concern the Virgin Mary. There is a longer version of the Rosary which is called the Scriptural Rosary. When saying the Scriptural Rosary there is a short scripture meditation before each Hail Mary. This is in addition to the five regular meditations (the mysteries).

When saying the Rosary, it is very important to meditate on the Mysteries. The Rosary is meant to be a deeply contemplative prayer. Christian meditation draws us closer to Jesus as we contemplate His life and death. King David, "a man after God's own heart," (1 Samuel 13:14) understood the value of meditation. He wrote: "I remember the days of old, I meditate on all that thou hast done; I muse on what thy hands have wrought" (Psalm 143:5).

The Hail Mary is probably the most misunderstood Catholic prayer. It is alleged that this prayer somehow elevates Mary to a level equal to God. And that of course would be heresy. But the Hail Mary does no such thing. In fact, it is a very Scriptural prayer.

We begin by recognizing the uniqueness of Mary: "Hail [Mary], full of grace, the Lord is with thee." In doing this we are not exaggerating, as we use the words of God as spoken by the angel Gabriel in Luke 1:28. Next we utter the first recorded words of praise for Jesus in the New Testament. They come from Luke 1:42. Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth. Upon her arrival, Elizabeth proclaims, "Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb" [Jesus]. Finally, we ask Mary to pray for us. In short, we address Mary as God does, we praise Jesus, and we ask Mary to pray for us.

The Hail Holy Queen is used as a closing prayer. In this prayer Mary is referred to as "most gracious advocate." An advocate is just that. When someone is your advocate before God it means that they pray for you. There is no claim of divinity here just as there is no claim of divinity when we pray for each other here on earth.

Those who have gone to be with the Lord can and do pray for us. One verse of Scripture that is used in an attempt to discredit this belief is Deuteronomy 18:11. This verse condemns those who "consult the dead." But invoking the saints in heaven is not the same as consulting the dead. Reading verse 11 in context helps us to discover the real meaning of it. The New International Version words it this way:

> When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is **a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead (Deuteronomy 18:9-11).**

What is being condemned here is the practice of the occult. Note that it says; "a medium or spiritist who consults the dead." By definition, someone who practices the occult seeks power or hidden information from demons posing as departed humans. When someone asks Mary or any other saint in heaven for their prayers, they are not seeking power or hidden information, they are seeking prayers.

Because the Rosary is repetitious, reciting it is thought to be a violation of Matthew 6:7. The King James Version words it this way: "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do, for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking."

Jesus is not condemning repetition here. He is condemning **vain repetition**. Saying "Praise God" or "Amen" can be a vain repetition if not said from the heart. Was Paul wrong in telling the Ephesians to "Address one another [in] psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (5:19)? Are we to believe that psalms can only be recited once and that songs can only be sung once? Did God violate his own principles by allowing the 136th and the 150th Psalms into the Bible? In Psalm 136 the phrase "His steadfast love endures forever" appears 26 times (1-26). In Psalm 150 we read in a short span of six verses "praise the Lord," "praise God" or "praise him" thirteen times (1-6).

Another point needs to be made here. Jesus qualifies His statement. In condemning vain repetition. He says: "Use not vain repetitions, **as the heathen do."** So, what exactly was it that the heathen were doing? Tim Staples notes:

> We have to remember that the main idea of prayer and sacrifice among the pagans was to appease the gods so that you could go on with your own life. You had to be careful to "take care of" all of the gods by mentioning them, and saying all the right words, lest you bring a curse upon yourself.

The Greek word translated as "vain repetitions" is battologeo (βαττολογέω). Battologeo means to stammer, babble, prate, or to repeat the same things over and over mindlessly. The efficacy of your prayers is determined by your attitude, not the number of times you say them. Heartfelt prayers, even when repeated, are always acceptable to God. The Bible itself illustrates this:

> In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor regarded man; and there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, “Vindicate me against my adversary.” For a while he refused; but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will vindicate her, or she will wear me out by her continual coming.’" And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily (Luke 18:1-8).

The widow’s request was repeated many times. And yet Jesus uses this as a model for our own prayers. St. Monica prayed for her wayward son for 30 years. As a result, her son, St. Augustine of Hippo, converted to Christianity and became one of its greatest defenders.

Another objection to the Rosary is that there are 10 Hail Mary’s said for every Our Father and Glory Be. But as we saw earlier there should be no problem with that as the Hail Mary is Biblical. And since this type of prayer is one that asks for intercession, you would expect it to focus on its purpose. And, as I think we have demonstrated, nothing in the Rosary diminishes God. When we pray to God, we call upon His power. When we petition Mary, we are asking her to call upon God’s power. Every prayer said in the Rosary results in an appeal to God’s power.

Catholics seek Mary’s intercession because of her unique role as mother of the Church (Revelation 12:17). The apostle James wrote: "the prayer of a righteous person has great power" (James 5:16). I think it is safe to say that Mary is the most righteous of all believers. And as we saw at the wedding at Cana, her prayers can accomplish much (John 2:1-11).

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Sacramentals

A sacramental is anything set apart or blessed by the Church to excite good thoughts and to increase devotion (*Baltimore Catechism No. 2*, Question 292). Fr. William P. Saunders notes that "a sacramental helps the faithful to sanctify each moment of life…" In short, sacramentals are reminders of God. They help us to focus on the eternal amid all our daily distractions. Sacramentals can include statues, holy pictures, scapulars, medals, and relics.

Objections to the use of sacramentals are based on a faulty interpretation of Scripture. Those who object will usually appeal to Exodus 20:3-5 which reads: "You shall not have other Gods besides me. You shall not carve idols for yourselves in the shape of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth. You shall not bow down before them or worship them."

God is not prohibiting the making of images, but the deifying and worshipping of them. Note the first and last lines of the passage. Also, consider what we find in Exodus 36:8 concerning the tabernacle curtains: "The various experts who were executing the work made the dwelling with its ten sheets woven of fine linen twined, having cherubim embroidered on them." And Exodus 37:7, concerning the Ark of the Covenant: "Two cherubim of beaten gold were made for the two ends of the mercy seat…"

In 1 Kings we read some of what was in Solomon's Temple: "In the sanctuary were two cherubim, each ten cubits high, made of olive wood" (6:23). "This rested on twelve oxen" (7:25). Finally, "On the panels between the frames there were lions, oxen and cherubim" (7:29).

Why did God ask that images be made for His Temple and the Ark of the Covenant? Do you suppose that He did not understand His own commandment? Except for one late period, we see that not even the Old Testament Jews understood Exodus 20 to be an absolute prohibition on images. When we consider all that the Scriptures tell us, we can see that the views of that one period were an extreme and unnecessary attempt to obey a commandment. We see this same sort of thing happening in Matthew 12:10, when Jesus is accused of violating the Law because he healed on the Sabbath. The spirit of the Law was abandoned for the letter of the Law.

Pictures and statues of saints are valued in the same way that pictures of friends and family are. They are not idols, but visible reminders of what they represent. For idolatry to exist, a person must worship something or think of it as if it were God. A man who kisses a picture of his wife and children is not practicing idolatry. He is merely expressing love for his family. The same applies to pictures and statues of saints. Idolatry is an interior disposition. It is wrong to judge interior motives by what we think we see.

The lives of the saints are inspirational. Their images remind us of their testimony, which can encourage us in our own walk with God. In the early Church, when 99% of the people could not read and there were no readily available texts, statues, pictures and stained-glass windows were the common man's Bible.

If Exodus 20 were to be taken in the strictest sense, just think of what it would mean. Not only could you not have images of saints, but also no pictures of friends or family, no statues of George Washington, no paintings of Martin Luther, no picture Bibles, and no dolls or teddy bears. After all, if the Bible strictly prohibits the making of images, then you would not be able to do it for any reason.

The idea that the early Christians refrained from making images is a myth that has been refuted by archaeology. There are several examples that remain from the first centuries. The Catacombs were covered with paintings of the saints. One notable example of a sacred object being venerated in the early Church can be found in the city of Herculaneum. Herculaneum and Pompeii were destroyed by an eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in the year 79. Herculaneum was totally buried and was only uncovered in modern times. In one of the houses archeologists found a kneeler that was placed in front of the burnt remains of a cross or crucifix. Eusebius talks of color portraits of Peter, Paul and Jesus that remained to his own time (325 AD). He also mentions a statue of Jesus and the woman cured of a hemorrhage (Mark 5:25-34). He relates that the statue was in front of the woman's home (*The History of the Church* 7:18). Now if such practices are wrong but were common in the first century, why is there no condemnation of them in the New Testament? Certainly, such a "blasphemy" would not have been overlooked.

The scapular was originally a part of a monk's habit. It was a narrow piece of cloth that was worn over the shoulders. In the 13th century lay people began placing themselves under the spiritual direction of the different monastic orders. They were called Third Order members. To show that they were associated with a particular community (Carmelite, Benedictine, Trinitarian etc.) they would wear the scapular of that order. It was not always practical or convenient to wear the full scapular in daily life. Hence, the smaller modern-day version came into being. This consists of two small squares of woolen cloth joined by strings and hung around the neck.

In one way, having a scapular devotion is like being a sports fan. A sports fan will often wear clothing with the colors or logo of his favorite team. Wearing the team's colors is not an act of idolatry. It is an act of loyalty to the team it represents. Likewise wearing a scapular is not an act of idolatry. It is an act of loyalty to the spirituality of the monastic order it represents. Those who wish to wear the scapular should be enrolled in it by the proper religious authority. Upon enrollment, members agree to a particular prayer discipline. As a result, they share in the prayers of the community.

Many find Mary's promise concerning the brown scapular troubling. But they quote it in part and miss its true meaning. What they find objectionable is the following: "Whoever dies in this garment, will not suffer everlasting fire." But there is more to the story. Here is the entire quote: "Take, beloved son, this scapular of thy order as a badge of my confraternity and for thee and all Carmelites a special sign of grace; whoever dies in this garment, will not suffer everlasting fire. It is the sign of salvation, a safeguard in dangers, a pledge of peace and of the covenant."

Mary refers to the scapular as a "special sign of grace." The individual, as a result of prayer, receives grace. It is grace that enables us to live the Christian life and attain our salvation. As Fr. William Saunders notes: "The Church does not teach that wearing a scapular is some sure ticket to Heaven; rather, we must strive to be in a state of grace, implore our Lord's forgiveness, and trust in the maternal aid of our Blessed Mother — all positive acts of a person who wears a scapular sincerely."

The Church has always been careful to point out that no religious article is miraculous in itself, and that salvation always depends upon the life of the wearer. Christians have been using medals since the earliest centuries. A second century medal has been found with the images of the apostles Peter and Paul. Examples of other holy medals have been found in the catacombs. Medals are coin-like objects made to commemorate persons, places, historical events, or the mysteries of the faith. Medals serve as reminders of what they portray. They serve much the same purpose as the reminders of God worn by the Israelites in Numbers 15:37-40. There we read; "The Lord said to Moses, 'Speak to the people of Israel, and bid them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put upon the tassel of each corner a cord of blue; and it shall be to you a tassel to look upon and remember all the commandments of the Lord'."

Relics are the remains or personal belongings of saints. From the earliest times, miracles have been associated with their use. God chooses to work through them to testify to the holiness of the individuals they came from. The use of relics is firmly rooted in Scripture. In Mark 5:25-34 the woman with the hemorrhage was cured after touching Jesus' garment. In Acts 19:11-12 we see that aprons and handkerchiefs touched by Paul were used to perform healings and exorcisms. Finally, in 2 Kings 13:20-21 we find a dead man coming to life after touching the bones of the prophet Elisha.

The early Church also venerated relics. In *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, written around 155 A.D., we see how Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, was arrested and martyred for the Faith. After his martyrdom the authorities sought to deny the Christians his remains. Paragraph 17 relates it this way: "He [Satan] therefore proceeded to do his best to arrange that at least we should not get possession of his mortal remains, although numbers of us were anxious to do this and to claim our share in the hallowed relics."

When we look at all the evidence, we can clearly see that the use of sacramentals is an ancient practice that in no way violates the dictates of Scripture.

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Call No Man Father

"Call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven" (Matthew 23:9). But Catholics call their priests Father. Wouldn't that run counter to this verse of Scripture? A close look at the entire passage reveals why that would not be the case:

> Then said Jesus to the crowds and to his disciples, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for **they preach, but do not practice**. **They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by men; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues, and salutations in the market places, and being called rabbi by men.** But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren. And call no man your father on earth, **for you have one Father, who is in heaven**. Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ. He who is greatest among you shall be your servant; **whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted** (Matthew 23:1-12)**.**

Jesus is pointing out the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees. They teach the faith yet they fail to practice it. They enjoy the limelight and are very prideful concerning their positions. They enhance the outward appearances of their religion to make sure that they are noticed. In short, they thought they were something special and they wanted everyone else to think so too. Note what Jesus says in verses 6 and 7 which immediately precede the rejection of the titles of honor: "And they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the Synagogues, and salutations in the market places, and being called rabbi." The Scribes and Pharisees have effectively set God aside and put themselves in His place. True religion always points to God and not to self. That's why Jesus closes His remarks with the comments on being humbled and being exalted (see also verses 12-36). Jesus didn't object to titles but to the way they were used by the Scribes and Pharisees.

Father Mitch Pacwa points out that "There are 144 occasions in the New Testament when the title of father is used for someone other than God. It is applied to the patriarchs of Israel, the fathers of families, to Jewish leaders and to Christian leaders" (*Call no Man Father, This Rock* January 1991).

If the command to call no one on earth father were meant in the strict literal sense, why would God sanction it in Scripture? The Ten Commandments tell us to: "Honor your **father** and mother" (Exodus 20:12). I think it is obvious that the father spoken of here is not God the Father but the guy your mom fell in love with.

In Matthew 10:37 Jesus says: "He who loves **father** or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." And in Matthew 19:5 He says: "For this reason a man shall leave his **father** and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one." Is Jesus violating his own command? Why would He do something that He supposedly forbade? The only answer is that He didn't forbid it. At least not in the strict literal sense.

The apostles themselves had no problem using the title of father for someone other than God. Paul calls himself the father of the Corinthians. "I do not write this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. **For I became your father in Christ Jesus** through the Gospel" (1 Corinthians 4:14-15).

So if we can call priests father and the guy who impregnated our mother father why couldn't we call the Scribes and the Pharisees father? Well, we can as long as it is done in the proper sense. And Scripture does just that. In Acts 7:2 Stephen refers to the leaders of Israel as fathers. He said: ""Brethren and **fathers**, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our **father Abraham**, when he was in Mesopotamia…" Paul addresses the crowd in Jerusalem in the same manner: "Brethren and **fathers**, hear the defense which I now make before you" (Acts 22:1).

As we noted earlier the Scribes and Pharisees effectively put themselves in Gods place. Thus, Jesus' statement: "**for you have one Father, who is in heaven**." I am sure the Scribes and Pharisees never said they were equal to God. But the fact remains that your God is whatever you think about most. And it is obvious that the Scribes and Pharisees were obsessed with themselves.

We call our priests father because they perform the role of spiritual fathers. Just as our biological fathers guide us in temporal matters our spiritual fathers guide us in spiritual matters. In the words of Philip Gray:

> Our lives of faith are conceived by the acts of those who sow the seeds of faith. The apostles and their successors were commissioned by Christ Himself. They bear His Word in our lives and are ministers of His grace through the sacraments of the Church, beginning with our spiritual rebirth in Baptism. By sharing in the high priesthood of Christ, bishops and priests share in the attributes of the Father. As there is no father but the one Father in heaven, and no teacher or master but Christ, we properly understand that these men, having been commissioned by Christ to act in His person, also represent the Father, whom the Son reveals (cf. Jn. 1:14-18). Insofar as they uniquely participate in the spiritual begetting of God's children, bishops and priests are our fathers. For they share in the mission of Christ who reveals the eternal Father. St. Ignatius of Antioch, who knew the apostles, expressed this well when he wrote: "Let everyone revere . . . the bishop as the image of the Father" (as quoted in Catechism, no. 1554) (*Call No Man Father: Understanding Matthew 23:9,* http://www.catholiceducation.org/).

Are Protestants wrong to call their ministers "Pastor?" **Pastor is a Latin word and it means shepherd**. In John 10:14-16 **Jesus said:**

> **I am the good shepherd.** I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So **there shall be one flock, one shepherd**.

If we reason that we cannot call a priest Father because we "have one Father who is in heaven," then can we not also reason that we cannot call a minister Pastor because there is only "one Shepherd?" Pastors are called shepherds because that is what they are. God is Father and Jesus is Shepherd in the ultimate sense. Church leaders are shepherds and fathers in a lesser sense. Why else would Peter say:

> Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock. And when the **chief shepherd** is manifested you will obtain the unfading crown of glory (1 Peter 5:2-4).

The term "Chief Shepherd" indicates that there are subordinate shepherds. One scripture verse clarifies another, and so it is with the different verses pertaining to the title of father. When assuming these titles in their proper sense we share, in a subordinate way, in the priesthood of Jesus. As practiced by the Scribes and Pharisees, however, it was a way of exalting self while pretending to serve God. Practicing our faith should always result in our Glorifying God and showing others the way. It should never be an occasion for us to glorify ourselves.

Isolating and grabbing hold of one scripture verse is risky. It can be misleading or even dangerous. Even an honest and well-intentioned Christian can subconsciously bend a verse to suit his or her own needs. It is vitally important to understand the Bible as God intended. St. Augustine once said, "Not what one scripture says, but what all of Scripture says." When reading any verse of Scripture, we must always consider its context. Furthermore, we must consider what the rest of Scripture says about the subject in question. If we fail to do this, we run the risk of stripping the Word of God of its meaning and consequently its power.

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The Rapture

"The Rapture" is a term that is used to describe the belief that at some point in time Jesus will come, and all true believers will literally rise, meet Him in the air and be whisked away to heaven. Non-believers will remain on the earth to be dealt with later. The Catholic Church teaches that Jesus will come again and judge the living and the dead. The righteous will be saved and the unrighteous will suffer eternal damnation. No one will be left on earth.

Belief in the rapture first appeared in the late 1800's. One verse of Scripture used to support this new doctrine was 1 Thessalonians 4:17 which says: "Then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." However, when we read this verse in context, the rapture theory disappears:

> **But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep**, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; **then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air**; and so, we shall always be with the Lord. **Therefore comfort one another with these words** (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

This simply speaks about the end of the world when true believers will be saved. Paul's purpose is not to explain the judgment of the living and the dead, but rather he is assuring believers that the dead will participate in the Second Coming of Christ. Notice what the first and last verses of the passage say: **"But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep …therefore, comfort one another with these words."** The words "caught up in the clouds" are used to illustrate how quickly things will transform at the Second Coming of Christ: "We shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

Matthew 24:36-44 is also used to support belief in the Rapture. It reads in part, "Then two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken, and one is left." This speaks of the final judgement. Lukes's account is more explicit: "…one will be taken the other left. They said to Him in reply, 'Where, Lord?' He said to them, 'Where the body is, there also the vultures will gather" (Luke 17:37). As Tim Staples points out, that does not sound like heaven.

The seven verses that directly follow the above quote in Matthew, also back this view:

> **"Who then is the faithful and wise servant** whom his master has set over his household to give them their food at the proper time? **Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing.** Truly I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and eats and drinks with the drunken, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, **and will punish him, and put him with the hypocrites. There men will weep and gnash their teeth."**

Whenever the term "weep and gnash their teeth" appears in Scripture, it refers to eternal damnation. Note that verse 45 begins with the words "who then." This shows us that we are still on the same subject as we were in verses 36-44. This is important because it illustrates that on the appointed day the righteous are being saved and the unrighteous are going to hell. So, who would that leave on earth? No one! If we combine all the verses of Scripture that deal with this issue, we find that the Rapture is simply not possible. Consider the following:

Jesus will be coming back to earth one more time not two. The Rapture requires a second coming, (the Rapture) and a third coming (the end of the world). Some try to get past this by claiming that the Rapture is not the Second Coming because we meet Jesus in the air and not on the earth. But the verses used to support the Rapture such as 1 Thessalonians 4:15 speak of it as **"the coming",** which indicates that it is a coming and a singular event.

1 Thessalonians 4:15: "For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until **the coming** of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep."

Matthew 24:27: "For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will **the coming** of the Son of man."

1 Corinthians 15:22-23: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at **His coming** those who belong to Christ."

1 Thessalonians 2:19: "For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at **His coming?"**

Jesus must stay in heaven until that time. (That leaves no time for the Rapture before the end of the world)

Acts 3:19-21: "Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send the Christ appointed for you, **Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from old."**

When He comes, He will be coming all the way down to the earth. (Not hovering in the air)

Acts 1:9-11: "And when He had said this, as they were looking on, He was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as He went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, **will come in the same way as you saw him go…"**

When He comes, He will be coming to judge the living and the dead. (That would leave no one on earth)

Matthew 25:31-46: **"When the Son of man comes in His glory,** and all the angels with him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and He will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and He will place the sheep at His right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at His right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you'…Then He will say to those at His left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels'…**And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."**

In conclusion the Scriptures teach us the following:

1. Jesus will be coming back to earth one more time not two.
2. Jesus must stay in heaven until that time.
3. When He comes, He will be coming all the way down to the earth.
4. When He comes, He will be coming to judge the living and the dead.

In John 16:13, Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would lead His apostles into all truth. And yet we find no support for the Rapture in the scriptures, the early creeds, or the writings of the early Church Fathers. As we noted earlier, the idea of the Rapture was first taught in the late 1800's. If the apostles and their successors were ignorant of the Rapture for eighteen centuries, it would mean that Jesus lied in John 16. That, in itself, rules out the Rapture.

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Abstinence

The practice of saving sex for marriage is not as popular as it once was. Despite this, I think that most men and women, at least subconsciously, believe that fornication (sex outside of marriage) is wrong. The standard defense for having sex outside of marriage is usually a variation of the following: "There's nothing wrong with sleeping with **someone you really love.** " Curiously, the same men who say this to their girlfriends say the opposite to their sisters and daughters. The idea that it is okay for men but not for their daughters and sisters is nonsensical. Men do not want the women they care about fornicating because they know from their own experience that it is wrong.

To **really love someone,** you must really know them. This takes time and a clear mind. The promise of sex at the end of a date can cloud one's thinking. This is not at all conducive to a couple getting to really know each other. Perhaps you might be saying, "But I really do love this person." If that is the case you should not be afraid to proclaim your love publicly and to commit yourself to that person. Which, by the way, is what we call marriage. Which do you think represents **"real love"** – sleeping with someone, or committing your life to them?

In an attempt to refute the Church's position on pre-marital sex, a woman once said to me: "It's not like I am sleeping with a lot of men." This statement is totally irrelevant, but very telling. Whether an act is right or wrong has nothing to do with how many times it is done. A woman would only know that fornicating with many men is wrong if she first knew that fornicating with one is wrong.

Can the man who only robbed one person claim he is no thief because he didn't rob a lot of people? Of course not! Stealing from a lot of people is certainly worse than stealing from one person, but stealing is stealing. An act is wrong because of its intrinsic nature. Repetition just makes it worse. Extremes, in cases like this, do not establish principles. They only act as a magnifying glass. And when you look at something through a magnifying glass, it is hard to deny what it is.

Sex is addictive. With each new partner less discernment is used. It becomes easier and easier to cross the line. The act, rather than being a profound expression of love, becomes an end unto itself. Sexual desire easily becomes lust. This in turn causes the other person to become more an object and less of a person. The thrill of the moment takes priority over the long-term effects of our actions.

Everywhere you look fornication is portrayed as normal behavior. Movies, television, magazines, and so-called school health clinics reinforce the idea that sex outside of marriage is natural and even to be expected. But ideas lead to actions. And actions have consequences. Sexual actions have consequences on several levels. They affect us physically, psychologically, and spiritually.

Physical Effects – There are some thirty-seven sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Some of them are incurable and some are deadly. Society's answer to this problem is "Safe Sex." Just give people condoms, and they can go about having safe sex thus eliminating unwanted pregnancies and deadly STDs. Unfortunately, this solution has more to do with ideology than reality. "Focus on the Family" noted in a newspaper ad the results of 25 years of "Safe Sex" ideology. They wrote:

> Ten percent of all 15 to 19-year-old females become pregnant each year (*Kids Having Kids*, A Robin Hood Foundation Special Report on the Costs of Adolescent Childbearing, June 1996, p 1).
>
> More than 80 percent of pregnant girls under age 17 who give birth and keep their babies end up on welfare, costing society a staggering $21 billion a year (ibid, 20).
>
> Three million new cases of STDs among teens are reported each year (Division of STD Prevention. *The Challenge of STD Prevention in the United States*, available at http://www.cdc.gov/nchstp/dstd/STD_Prevention_in _the_United_States.htm)

> Up to 29 percent of sexually active adolescent girls have been found to be infected with Chlamydia (Alan Guttmacher Inst. *Facts in Brief* (*Sexually Transmitted Diseases in the United States*) Sept. 1993.
>
> A study of sexually active college women showed that 43 percent acquired HPV infection within a 3-year period (Ho, Gloria Y.F., et. al., "*Natural History of Cervicovaginal Papillomavirus infection in Young Women*," *The New England Journal of Medicine*, Feb. 12, 1998, Vol. 338, Number 7, p 442).

The physical effects of sex are not limited to just pregnancy and STDs. According to Health Canada: "You are more likely to develop cervical cancer if you have multiple sexual partners or if you become sexually active at an early age. Early sexual activity is believed to increase the risk because during puberty, cervical tissue undergoes many changes that might make the area more vulnerable to damage."

Individuals who seek to be married hope for the ideal partner. Someone who will love and cherish them for life. No sane person would think of choosing a husband or wife while intoxicated. And yet, this sort of thing is quite common. I say this sort of thing because drugs and alcohol are not the only substances that can impair your judgment. In an article on Chastity, Mary Beth Bonnacci talks about yet another physical effect. She writes:

> Hormonally, sexual arousal and intercourse set off a chain reaction designed to keep married couples bound together. Women experience a flood of oxytocin – the same hormone which they produce in labor and in nursing a baby. Oxytocin causes a woman to be forgetful, decreases her ability to think rationally – and causes an incredibly strong emotional attachment to form with the man she is with.

Bottom line: if you are trying to get to know someone, and you are sleeping with them, your judgment will be impaired. Those intense feelings that you feel are not love. They are the effects of bonding. Thus, you may end up with someone you would otherwise reject. This can cause you and any children that may come along a great deal of pain when the relationship disintegrates. Statistics bear this out as the ranks of the fatherless continues to grow.

Psychological Effects – It is not unusual for individuals who engage in casual sex to become plagued with regrets. The Heritage Foundation found that about 25% of sexually active girls say they are depressed all, most, or a lot of the time while only 8% of girls who are not sexually active feel the same way. Low self-esteem, promiscuity and even suicide are other problems that can develop.

Spiritual Effects – Christianity has always taught that fornication is illicit behavior. Some try to get around this by saying: "Isn't God a God of Love? Doesn't He love us just the way we are?" Yes, God loves us, but that does not mean that He approves of everything we do. The same Bible that tells us of God's incredible love for us in John 3:16, also calls fornication evil in Mark 7:21-23. And it is also the same Bible that tells us that fornicators will be outside the city in Revelation 22:15. Just for the record, the city spoken of here is heaven.

For those who have succumbed to the addictive nature of fornication, all is not lost. God's grace can restore you. Not only does God offer us forgiveness but healing as well. As the Scripture says: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Recent studies illustrate the superiority of Christian Sexual ethics. One study found that non-married men and women report significantly higher rates of sexual dysfunction than do married men and women (*Sexual Dysfunction in the United States, Prevalence and Predictors*, Edward O. Laumann, et. al.).

Another study found that married couples have the best and most satisfying sex (both physically and emotionally). The study also found that enjoyment was greatest when there was only one sexual partner in a lifetime (*The Social Organization of Sexuality: Sexual Practices in the United States*, Edward O. Laumann, et. al., table 10.5, p 364).

Abstinence before marriage and fidelity after marriage is the only sure way to avoid STDs. Combine that with the results of our two surveys, and it is easy to see that adhering to Christian sexual ethics is the best way to achieve safe sex and great sex. And isn't that what everybody wants?

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Contraception

Discussions on subjects such as the Trinity or the Eucharist can usually be kept on the intellectual level. But when it comes to a subject like contraception a person's position may be influenced by forces beyond mere intellect. That is because what people believe on this issue can have a profound impact on their lives. Consequently, people are not always willing to consider the arguments against contraception.

Up until 1930, all Christian bodies taught that contraception was illicit. At that time the Anglican Church decided that it was permissible for "grave reasons in a marriage." It was not long before "grave reasons in a marriage" became any reason. And that's pretty much the way it is today for most of Protestantism.

Scripture, the Early Church Fathers and even the Founders of Protestantism all condemned contraception. It had always been referred to as "onanism." The word onanism is derived from the name Onan. Onan was an Old Testament figure whose brother had died. According to the Levirate Law, if a married man died before fathering any children, his brother or nearest relative was duty bound to marry his wife in order to give the dead man descendants.

For selfish reasons Onan did not want to do this. Consequently, he spilled his seed on the ground rather than take a chance that his brother's wife would get pregnant. The Lord was so displeased that He killed Onan for **"what he had done"** (Genesis 38:6-10). Onan's sin was that he interrupted intercourse to prevent procreation. In other words, he contracepted.

Some say that Onan's sin was not that he contracepted but that he failed to provide his brother with offspring. This is hardly the case. Note that the text says that he was slain for what he did (spill his seed), not for what he did not do (provide his brother with offspring). If the opposite were true, why would it be necessary to describe Onan's actions so explicitly? Why not just say, he refused to give his brother offspring?

Further evidence is found in the New Testament. In Galatians 5:2, Revelation 9:21, 18:23, 21:8, and 22:15, sorcerers or sorcery is condemned. Upon reading these passages, the average reader might associate these terms merely with the practice of witchcraft. But the Greek words used in these passages mean more than that. The two Greek words used are pharmakeia (φαρμακεία) and pharmakeus (φαρμακεύς). Pharmakeia is defined as: medication (pharmacy), i.e., by extension magic (literally or figuratively): sorcery, witchcraft. The definition of pharmakeus is even more explicit: a drug, i.e., spell giving potion; a druggist (pharmacist) or poisoner, i.e., by extension, a magician or sorcerer. Note that both definitions give precedence to terms having to do with drugs or medication.

What type of medicine would be likened to witchcraft or sorcery? It certainly could not be the general use of medication for healing. It would have to be a destructive application, something like contraception. The writings of Hippolytus show us that contraception was practiced by some in the early Church. He writes: "Whence women, reputed believers, **began to resort to drugs for producing sterility**, and to gird themselves round, so to expel what was being conceived on account of their not wishing to have a child either by a slave or by any paltry fellow, for the sake of their family and excessive wealth. Behold, into how great impiety that lawless one has proceeded, by inculcating adultery and murder at the same time!" (*Refutation of All Heresies* 9:7, 225 A.D.).

John Chrysostom, another of the Early Church Fathers confirmed the teaching of the early Church when he wrote: "Why do you sow where the field is eager to destroy the fruit, where there are medicines of sterility [oral contraceptives], where there is murder before birth? ... Indeed, it is something worse than murder, and I do not know what to call it; for she does not kill what is formed **but prevents its formation**. What then? Do you condemn the gift of God and fight with His [natural] laws?" (*Homilies on Romans 24*, 391 A.D.).

The Church recognizes that there are two dimensions to the conjugal act (sexual intercourse). These are the procreative (bringing children into the world) and the unitive (expressing love and bonding). By nature, these cannot

be separated. Just as every conjugal act must be an expression of love it also must be open to the possibility of life. The conjugal act must be motivated by love, tenderness, and respect. It should never be reduced to an act of self-satisfaction.

Some think of the Church's stance as being out of touch or impractical. But is it? The prohibition on contraception is not merely a religious tenet. It is based on the Natural Law. The Natural Law is not a written law. It is something that is programmed into our nature. All living things have a nature. When they live in accord with their nature they flourish. When they do not, it creates problems. For instance, if we do not get enough sleep and the right kind of food our physical health will suffer. This is not a matter of opinion or religious belief. It is a fact of life. The same principle applies to the moral and psychological realms. Simply stated, the things we do influence the way we think. And the way we think, can change who we are.

Experience has shown that ignoring the Church's teaching on contraception has consequences. The use of contraceptives has made the sexual revolution possible. If sexual intercourse can be separated from procreation, why reserve it for marriage? Self-control is no longer necessary. After repeating a few obligatory phrases men are allowed to indulge themselves. Women become objects to be used rather than partners to be cherished. Predictably adultery and sexually transmitted diseases have increased dramatically.

In his book *"50 Questions on the Natural Law"* Charles Rice explains how abortion and euthanasia naturally flow from the contraceptive mentality. On page 256 he writes:

> Abortion: Contraception is the prevention of life, while abortion is the taking of life. But both involve the willful separation of the unitive and procreative aspects of sex. The contraceptive mentality tends to require abortion as a backup. And many so-called contraceptives are abortifacient in that they cause the destruction of the developing human being.
>
> Euthanasia: Once the contraceptive ethic and abortion accustomed people to the idea that burdensome lives are not worth living, the way was clear for euthanasia for the aged and the "useless." If man is arbiter of when life begins, he will predictably make himself the arbiter of when life ends.

As Mr. Rice notes, many contraceptives are abortifacient. Abortifacients do not prevent conception. They work by creating a hostile environment on the wall of the uterus. The fertilized egg cannot implant and is aborted. The IUD works this way as does Norplant, Deprovera, and occasionally the Pill. Abortions caused in this manner far outnumber abortions performed in clinics.

So, what does this all mean? Are we supposed to have babies until we die? No, not at all. The Church recognizes that there are natural means of regulating births that are consistent with nature and Divine Revelation. *Natural Family Planning* (NFP) has been shown to be reliable in controlling family size. And it does so while respecting the spouses and the conjugal act. It also does not carry with it all the dangerous side effects associated with contraceptives. Side effects can include liver disease, blood clots, strokes, heart disease, migraines, cervical cancer, and breast cancer. Also, when treated sewage is released into our waterways, a synthetic hormone found in birth control pills is released. The result is feminized fish. The decrease in male fish threatens several species.

A scientific survey conducted in 2000 under the direction of Dr. Robert Lerner of the University of Chicago showed that couples who use NFP have a 0.2% divorce rate, attend church more often and have happier, stronger marriages. With NFP intimacy and communication are enhanced. The family is made stronger and consequently society is made stronger. Not only is the Church's position not out of touch or impractical, it is the solution for much of what ails us. For more information on NFP contact the Couple-to-Couple League (www.ccli.org).

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Natural Family Planning

Natural Family Planning (NFP) seems to be the Catholic Church's best-kept secret. It was never intended to be a secret. However, the message just does not seem to get out. So, what is NFP? NFP is the licit alternative to contraception. NFP is all natural and it works in harmony with a woman's body. With NFP there are none of the complications or side effects usually associated with the different contraceptive methods. And unlike some contraceptives, it causes no harm to the environment. Furthermore, it is just as effective as any method of contraception. And unlike contraception, it does not conflict with Catholic teaching.

NFP is not the Rhythm Method. The Rhythm Method is dependent on the regularity of a woman's cycle. Many women do not have a regular cycle and so this method may not be very reliable by itself. NFP does utilize the Rhythm Method but it goes two steps further. NFP measures and senses the approach of ovulation. This is accomplished by monitoring three conditions in a woman's body. These are basal body temperature, cervical mucus, and the timing of a woman's cycle (the Rhythm Method). By charting a woman's fertile times, a couple can know on what days of the month she can get pregnant. If their goal is to limit their family size, they would abstain from intercourse on these days.

The Church has always taught that every act of sexual intercourse must be open to life. However, since times of infertility are a part of God's design, it is perfectly acceptable to have intercourse during these times. But some ask, what is the difference? Why would God care if we practiced NFP or used contraception? The result is the same. But it is not about the result. You would not say that going out and stealing money is the same as earning it just because the result is the same. The same principal applies here. It is all about the way we accomplish our goal. In our example, stealing is intrinsically wrong. And in family planning, contraception is intrinsically wrong.

Sexual intercourse is a gift from God. Consequently, it needs to be respected and used in accord with its design and purpose. Let me illustrate my point with an example. Suppose you were having dinner at a friend's house. After the main course your friend brings out some cheesecake. You really love the taste of cheesecake, but you do not want the calories. The proper thing to do is to pass on the cheesecake. There is nothing wrong with not eating cheesecake. However, it would be wrong to take some cheesecake, chew it, enjoy the taste, and then spit it on the table to avoid the calories.

If you abstain from sex during the fertile times, it is like not eating the cheesecake. If you use contraception during fertile times, it is like chewing the cheesecake and spitting it out in front of your host. That is because in both cases you have performed the first part of what is by nature a two-part process. The purpose of food is to taste good and to nourish. The purpose of sex is to communicate love and to produce offspring. Contraception is wrong because it separates sexual intercourse from its procreative function. Thus, sex can become an end unto itself. The result is mutual selfishness. Making love should never be reduced to a means of relieving oneself. Making love was designed by God to be a profound expression of love.

NFP respects the procreative function of intercourse. Couples become aware of and develop a respect for the woman's fertility. Several surveys have shown that the divorce rate for NFP couples is between .2% and 4%. That is a big difference from the 50% rate of the general population.

It does not get much press, but oral contraceptives have a negative impact on the environment. In an interview with Columbia Magazine, Dr. James J. Joyce noted:

> Hormonal contraceptives are removed from the body through the kidneys and make their way into the waste water systems in each community. These contaminate the water since they are not filtered or chemically removed from the water that we drink. The US Fish and Wildlife Department has reported that all areas of the country that have been tested have streams with endocrine disruption (hormone overdose) in fish and amphibians. This syndrome has affected the ability of these populations to reproduce. Although about 10 percent of couples in the United States experience infertility, it has not been established whether this is related to the contraceptive hormones in the water we drink.

In an article appearing on LiveScience.com, Wynne Parry got into more detail. He said:

> EE2, a synthetic hormone, is only one of a cocktail of natural and synthetic hormones that humans excrete into wastewater, including other estrogens. EE2 has a potent biological effect at low levels. "Animals are exquisitely sensitive to it," Jobling told LiveScience. The body of a fish or a frog reacts to EE2 as if it were a natural estrogen, "demasculinizing" male animals and creating a condition called intersex that interferes with an animal's ability to reproduce, Jobling said. Intersex males often produce eggs in their testes. It's not yet clear if levels of EE2 found in waterways affect mammals' reproductive cycle, she said (*Water Pollution Caused by Birth Control Poses Dilemma*).

At the very least this threatens the existence of the affected species. But the question remains, when the tainted water flows out to the ocean, does it have a similar effect on sea life. Or as one author asked: "Are we putting sharks and whales on the pill?"

It is true that some couples may struggle with periodic abstinence. But as with most things perseverance produces results. Professor Janet Smith notes that NFP data suggests that periodic abstinence increases passion and revitalizes romance. According to a study commissioned by the "Family of the Americas Foundation," NFP couples have more frequent marital relations than those in the general public. Also, because cooperation is needed, NFP enhances communication. When a couple works in harmony with what God has created, they develop a deeper respect for one another. And according to the Couple-to-Couple League: "NFP users report less irritability and depression, and an increased sex drive."

A comparison of both methods illustrates the superiority of NFP.

Contraception	**Natural Family Planning**
1. 97% effective	1. 99% effective
2. Sex is primary focus	2. Relationship is primary focus
3. Dangerous side effects	3. No side effects
4. Promotes selfishness	4. Promotes mutual responsibility
5. Can result in abortion	5. Never results in abortion
6. Weakens marriages (Higher divorce rate)	6. Strengthens marriages (Lower divorce rate)
7. Inconsistent with Scripture	7. Consistent with Scripture
8. Costs thousands of dollars over a lifetime	8. Costs nothing once learned
9. Less frequent sex (on average)	9. More frequent sex (on average)

NFP promotes true intimacy. I say true intimacy because all too many people equate intimacy with sexual relations. And to a certain degree that can be true. But it is possible to experience sexual union totally devoid of any intimacy. Intimacy is an emotional closeness that goes beyond the physical. The physical can express or enhance it but it is not automatic. When the sex act is an end unto itself, it becomes easier to view the other person as a mere object. Once a person is an object to be used, true intimacy is diminished or even eliminated. And of course, that does not bode well for any couple.

When a couple chooses NFP over artificial birth control they end up being in harmony with God, nature, and each other. Couples interested in learning more about NFP should contact the Couple-to-Couple League of Cincinnati (www.ccli.org) or the NFP office in their diocese.

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Marriage

Marriage is sometimes referred to as an unnecessary formality. Others see it as something that **"was created for the benefit of men at the expense of women."** They claim that women are required to vow blind obedience to their husbands? They are not, at least not in the Catholic Church. While there may be some slight differences from country to country, Catholic vows essentially consist of the following:

> I, _____, take you, _____, for my lawful husband / wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part.

The Church does not allow people to write their own vows. They are certainly free to express their feelings and make additional vows after the ceremony. But during the ceremony the vows are set by the Church. And that is because marriage is an ecclesial affair. Vows are not to be reduced to subjective feelings or ideas but rather are a statement of revealed truth.

The "blind obedience" objection is based on a misrepresentation of Ephesians 5:22 which reads in part: "Wives, **be subject to your husbands**." If we only focus on verse 22 the critics seem to have a case. However, if we look at the entire passage we come to a very different conclusion:

> **Be subject to one another** out of reverence for Christ. **Wives be subject to your husbands as to the Lord**. For the husband is head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, His body, and is Himself its Savior. As the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. **Husbands love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her**, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the Church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the Church, because we are members of his body. "For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one." (Ephesians 5:22-31).

Note that Paul starts off his comments with the words: **"Be subject to one another"** – so a husband and wife are to submit to one another. However, the way they are to submit to one another differs. In verses 22-24 Paul explains **how a wife is to submit**. In verses 25-30 he explains **how a husband is to submit**.

Now it is true that Scripture assigns the husband a leadership role. But this does not entitle him to be a dictator or taskmaster**. Jesus makes it clear that to mistreat others is to mistreat Him** (Matthew 25:40)**.** The leadership role that God has in mind here is more along the lines of what the military would call a "Point Man." When out on patrol, the point man leads (walks in front of) the other troops. If they wander into an ambush, he gets the brunt of the attack. Long story short; leadership in this context, means service and sacrifice not power.

All of this becomes even clearer when we consider what God requires of husbands. They are told to **love their wives "as Christ loved the Church."** And how did Christ love the Church? He healed the sick, fed the hungry, and He even washed the feet of His apostles. In a final act of love and humility He willingly submitted to torture and death on a cross so that we, his bride, might have eternal life. Thus, the husband is vowing before God and man to be the ultimate servant. A vow which, considering Christs example, is humanly impossible to fulfill. But nonetheless a vow which a man is required to work tirelessly to live up to.

This sort of arrangement is not unique to marriage. Jesus sets the same standard for Church leaders. In Matthew 20:26-27 He tells His apostles: "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave." Accordingly, the popes have referred to themselves as the servant of the servants of God. All Christians are given a similar command in Philippians 2:3: "Do nothing from selfishness or

conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves." If a man is obligated to have this attitude toward strangers, think how much more this would apply to the woman he has committed his life to.

A husband's primary responsibility is to lead his family to heaven. To teach his children to be humble servants of God and neighbor. Sons learn the proper respect for women by their father's example in the home. And by that same example, daughters learn not to accept anything less. A husband's leadership role should present no problem provided he follows Christ's example as explained above. The husband's role is not a regal privilege but a necessary responsibility. And one that God will judge him on. But what if a husband neglects his duties? In his encyclical entitled "*On Christian Marriage*," Pope Pius XI wrote the following: "If the husband neglects his duty, it falls to the wife to take his place in directing the family" (no. 28).

What if the husband turns out to be a tyrant? Does the "for better, for worse" clause require a wife to accept her situation and make the best of it? The simple answer is no, of course not. The Church suggests that the two should separate. Once again Pope Pius XI: "For in certain circumstances **imperfect separation of the parties is allowed… in order to safeguard the education of the children and the wellbeing of the family and to remove all those evils which threaten the married persons, the children and the state"** (no. 89).

No man has license to abuse his wife or family. "The battle of the sexes and, particularly, the subjugation of women is the result of original sin and not of God's original design for creation" (*Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World*). Bottom line; a wife is asked to submit to a man who submits to God, puts her needs before his, and is even willing to die for her. At the end of the day, there are no monarchs in marriage. There are only servants. And the one true Monarch (God), will judge each on how well they served.

Christian Marriage is a covenant. In a covenant, there is a total giving of self. Thus, "the two become one (Mark 10:8). But they are not alone. The sacrament of Matrimony bestows graces upon them which enable them to live the married life. As the Scripture says: "I can do all things in Him [Jesus] who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

Some believe couples who live together can be just as committed as married couples? But the facts do not bear that out. On average, couples who live together (cohabitation) fare much worse than married couples. Sixty percent of cohabiting couples will eventually marry. Unfortunately, the probability of divorce for cohabiters is 200% greater than those who did not cohabit prior to marriage (Family Institute, Duquesne University). Furthermore, a study following more than 11,000 British children from birth through age thirty-three concluded that "a parental divorce during childhood or adolescence continues to have a negative effect [on mental health] when a person is in his or her twenties or thirties" (Andrew J. Cherlin, P. L. Chase-Lansdale, C. McRae, "Effects of Parental Divorce on Mental Health Throughout the Life Course," *American Sociological Review* 63 (1998), 239-249).

The Family Institute also found:

> Marriage is an essential part of a stable society. Married fathers are, on average, more committed to their children than are unmarried fathers. Studies show that marriage contributes positively to the emotional, physical, and economic health of men, women, and children and thus, to the culture as a whole. Cohabiters [who eventually marry] exhibit lower levels of marital interaction and higher levels of marital discord and instability than non-Cohabiters. Drug and alcohol abuse was more likely to appear among Cohabiters than among non-Cohabiters. Physical aggression is more prevalent among Cohabiters. Cohabiters are three times more likely to engage in extramarital affairs. … Recent studies indicate that women contribute between 65-70% of the financial resources in these unions. Additionally, women Cohabiters indicate that they undertake an undue proportion of the duties and responsibilities necessary to maintain these households.

Marriage is about commitment; cohabitation is about convenience. When we consider all the facts, we can see that cohabitation and not marriage **"was created for the benefit of men at the expense of women."**

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Divorce, Remarriage and Annulment

God intended a Christian marriage to be a lifelong endeavor. In Luke 16:18 we hear Jesus saying: "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery." Paul says essentially the same thing in Romans 7:2-3: "Thus a married woman is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies, she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is still alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress."

Those who disagree will often point to Matthew 5:31 where Jesus says: "It was also said, 'whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

And so, the reasoning goes, if my spouse cheats on me I am free to divorce and remarry. But that is not the case. The Greek word that is translated as "unchastity" is porneia (πορνεία) which can mean harlotry, adultery, incest, or fornication. In determining how Jesus uses the word there are a couple of things we need to consider. First, you cannot have Jesus contradicting himself by making no exceptions in one verse (Luke 16:18) and then allowing for them in another (Matthew 5:31).

The Church has always seen the word unchastity as referring to an invalid marriage such as a couple who are living together. They can separate because they were never legitimately married in the first place. And then there is the obvious fact that if Jesus was referring to adultery, he would have used the word adultery, just as he did two other times in the same verse.

Second, let us look at this logically. If the critics are correct in their interpretation of Matthew 5:31, then anyone can divorce their spouse and remarry someone else no matter what the reason. Think about it, all that would be necessary is for one of them to go out and have an affair. Somehow, I do not think that is what God intended.

Marriage is a bond established by God. Jesus revealed this to us in Mark 10:6-9: "But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one. **What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder."**

These may be tough words, but they are the words of Christ Himself. While it is important to understand what they mean, it is also important to understand what they do not mean. It is true that the bonds of a valid marriage can never be broken short of death. However, there may be occasions when it becomes necessary for a couple to separate, for instance in the case of an abusive spouse. If there is any threat to the wellbeing of one of the spouses or the children, a separation would constitute the best course of action. However, even in such a case remarriage would not be possible. Paul makes this very clear in his first letter to the Corinthians where he writes: "To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband) and that the husband should not divorce the wife" (1 Corinthians 7:10-11).

There are times when an exception can be made. If certain problems existed at the time of the marriage, they could have prevented that marriage from being valid in the first place. If such is found to have been the case, a decree of nullity can be obtained, and the innocent party would be free to remarry.

Quite often you will hear an annulment described as a Catholic divorce. But an annulment and a divorce are two different things. Divorce dissolves a civil marriage while an annulment is a recognition that a sacramental marriage (valid in the eyes of the Church) never existed. The Church does recognize, however, that a civil marriage (valid in the eyes of the state) did exist.

For a marriage to be valid in the eyes of the Church, both parties must be aware of what constitutes a sacramental marriage. They must also be free, willing, and capable of entering such a commitment. Sometimes, despite the best of intentions, a couple is deficient in one or more of these areas. It is not unusual for such a couple to be unaware of this at the time they are married. **This, of course, illustrates why careful preparation before marriage is so important**.

Consequently, an annulment proceeding is concerned with the situation as it existed at the time the marriage took place. Subsequent events are important only insofar as they may shed light on relevant conditions that may have pre-existed the marriage. If serious problems were present at the beginning of the marriage, there is a good chance that they were present before the marriage. Of course, this must never be assumed. However, if such were the case it could have been an impediment to a valid marriage.

There are several reasons why a marriage can be declared invalid. They can be divided into two types of cases, Formal and Documentary. Within the Formal category the most practical grounds are divided into three sub categories: (1) Psychological (2) Simulation of Consent (3) Force and Fear.

Under psychological grounds a variety of factors are considered. Both parties must be able to grasp and assume the responsibilities of a lifelong commitment. Both must be mature, financially responsible, free from mental illness, and possess a sufficient use of reason. Additionally, spouses must have the ability to cope with ordinary stresses. Homosexuality would also be considered under this category.

Under Simulation of Consent both parties must be open to all that marriage entails. Both must enter marriage with the intention to be faithful. Both must be open to the possibility of children. If either party excludes from the beginning any essential element of marriage, the marriage is invalid. For valid consent to take place you must be aware of what is required, and you must agree to it internally and externally.

Under Force and Fear both parties must give their consent freely. No one should marry because of any outside threat or pressure. For example, marriage is not something to be used as an escape from abusive parents. Neither is it to be seen as a necessary result of pre-marital pregnancy.

Within the Documentary category we find two sub categories: (1) Defect of Form, and (2) Previous Bond. Concerning Defect of Form, the Catholic Church has a set of requirements for what constitutes a proper marriage ceremony. If the specified procedures are not followed, the marriage is not considered to be valid. For instance: if a couple was married by a Justice of the Peace and at least one of the parties was Catholic, the marriage would be invalid. If the marriage took place before a non-Catholic minister without the permission of the bishop, the marriage would also be invalid. As for Previous Bond, a Catholic with a previous valid marriage may not contract another marriage while the first spouse is still alive.

You do not have to worry about confronting a former spouse during the annulment process. In fact, most cases involve only the submission of paperwork by your parish priest. Also, just as a divorce has no effect on the legitimacy of any children produced by the marriage, so to a decree of nullity has no effect. Finally, the fee charged for an annulment does not even cover the cost of the process and is usually much lower than one would expect. If a petitioner cannot pay, the case will still go through.

I have heard people scoff at the annulment process and its requirements. They refer to it as "Church Law." And of course, they are implying that such laws were made by men and not God. Consequently, they can be ignored. Only those things said by Jesus are to be obeyed. I find that a rather curious argument. If we only consider what Jesus said directly on the subject there is no chance for remarriage after a divorce. Not that the Church is contradicting Jesus by granting annulments. As we saw before the Church is merely investigating whether a valid marriage was entered into in the first place. If the marriage was valid, remarriage is not possible. If it was not valid then remarriage is possible. Admittedly this can have an undesirable result for some. And while we can sympathize with those affected, we must in the final analysis follow Christ and not men.

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Abortion

There are a variety of reasons used to justify abortion. They include such things as I cannot afford a baby, a baby would interfere with my career, I have enough children, and the doctor said if we have this child, it will be handicapped. We are told that every child should be a wanted child.

But does any of this really address the core issue? The real question is not whether a child is wanted; the real question is whether what is growing inside the mother is a living child. If it is not a living child, a woman should be allowed to have as many abortions as she wants. However, if it is a living child, it should be allowed to live. If it is wrong to kill a ten-year-old because he/she is not wanted, it is wrong to kill a baby because he/she is not wanted.

Many abortion proponents will claim that a fetus is just a blob of tissue. Therefore, its elimination is no more significant than cutting and discarding one's own fingernails. Of course, this raises some curious questions. If a fetus is just a blob of tissue, why don't abortion proponents show pictures of this blob to debunk the arguments of pro-lifers? And why is it that abortion providers prefer that women not see their ultrasounds? The answer to both questions is obvious. A fetus is not just a blob of tissue. When women see their ultrasounds, they realize they are carrying a baby with moving arms and legs. Consequently, they are much less likely to end its life. In an article entitled *Saved by Sonogram* which appeared in *"Christianity Today,"* Mark Stricherz reported the following:

> Evidence that ultrasound helps to persuade women not to abort came in an unpublished study by Eric Keroack, medical director of "A Woman's Concern," a CPC in Boston. Keroack compared two 18-month periods in the crisis pregnancy center's history and kept data only on women who expressed interest in abortion. Without a sonogram, about 60 percent of 366 tracked women had abortions. But with a sonogram, 25 percent of 434 tracked women aborted. He estimated that 125 babies were born who would otherwise have been aborted.

Abortion providers prefer to keep women ignorant of what is going on inside of them. That is because **being truthful would mean less money in their pockets.** One woman at a Dallas Planned Parenthood clinic was told that she could not see her ultrasound because, "That will only make it harder on you." Why would viewing a blob of tissue make it harder for a woman to deal with an abortion?

The evidence, which abortion providers are very much aware of, indicates that a pregnant woman carries within her something much more than a blob of tissue. For instance:

> Immediately upon fertilization, cellular development begins. Before implantation the sex of the new life can be determined. At implantation, the new life is composed of hundreds of cells and has developed a protective hormone to prevent the mother's body from rejecting it as a foreign tissue.
>
> At 17 days, the new life has developed its own blood cells; the placenta is a part of the new life and not of the mother. At 18 days, there are occasional pulsations of a muscle which will become the heart. At 19 days, the eyes start to develop. At 20 days, the foundation of the entire nervous system has been laid down. At 24 days, the heart has regular beats or pulsations. At 28 days, 40 pairs of muscles are developed along the trunk of the new life; arms and legs are forming.
>
> At 30 days, there is regular blood flow within the vascular system; the ears and nasal development have begun. At 40 days, the heart energy output is reported to be almost 20% of an adults. At 42 days the skeleton is complete, and the reflexes are present. At 43 days, electrical brain wave patterns can be recorded. This is usually ample evidence that "thinking" is taking place in the brain. The new life may be thought of as a thinking person. At 49 days, the baby has the appearance of a miniature doll with complete fingers, toes, and ears.
>
> At 56 days all organs are functioning – stomach, liver, kidney, brain – all systems are intact. The baby has lines in its palms. All future development of new life is simply that of refinement and increase in

size which ends with full maturity (approximately 23 years). A new life exists with all of its parts needing only nourishment. This is approximately two months before "quickening."

In the 9th & 10th week, the baby squints, swallows and retracts its tongue. In the 11th & 12th week its arms and legs move, the baby sucks its thumb, inhales and exhales amniotic fluid, and nails begin appearing. At 16 weeks (four months), genital organs can be clearly differentiated; the baby grasps with its hands, swims, kicks and turns somersaults (still not felt by mother).

At 18 weeks, the vocal cords work. The baby can cry. At 20 weeks, hair appears on the head; weight – one pound; height – 12 inches. A fetus (little one, child, baby) is essentially no different at fertilization, ten weeks, twenty weeks, or thirty weeks. A person is a person, no matter how small.

(Adapted from "*Diary of an Unborn Child*" Knights of Columbus 1993)

Babies in the womb are responsive to pain and touch and cold and sound and light. They drink their amniotic fluid, more if it is artificially sweetened, less if it is given an unpleasant taste. They get hiccups and suck their thumbs. They wake and sleep (A. Liley, *A Case Against Abortion,* Liberal Studies Whitcombe & Tombs, Ltd., 1971).

Some say that we should not tell a woman what to do with her body. Fair enough. But we are not talking about the woman's body. We are talking about the baby's body. In an abortion a human baby is forced to die against its will. Others justify abortion by claiming that babies in the womb are not viable. They define viable as being capable of independent existence. By that definition a one-year-old baby is not viable, and neither are some handicapped adults. Such a standard should not be used as an excuse to end a life. A baby in the womb is fully alive and fully human and therefore should be allowed to live.

Abortion providers not only victimize babies but their mothers as well. It is not unusual for an abortion to cause physical complications. Complications such as infections, bleeding, blood clots, perforation of the uterus or bowel, and many others. Depression and lifelong guilt (Post-Abortive Syndrome) are also not uncommon.

Women who have abortions have a higher rate of premature births with subsequent pregnancies. When a baby is born full term, the cervix is soft and opens relatively easy. However, before the baby is full term the cervix is firm and must be forced open to perform an abortion. This can damage the cervix leaving it weaker for future pregnancies. It is true that measures are usually taken to avoid such damage, but they are not always successful. Full term delivery and adoption is still the safest route for the mother who carries an "unwanted" baby.

But what about women who become pregnant through rape? First, such instances are rare. Secondly, Re-victimizing the woman and killing her child is not the answer. As we saw earlier, abortion carries with it many dangers, both physical and psychological. Many rape victims who have had abortions end up being more depressed over the abortion than the rape. Professor Stephen Krason points out that "psychological studies have shown that, when given the proper support, most pregnant rape victims progressively change their attitudes about their unborn child from something repulsive to someone who is innocent and uniquely worthwhile" (*Abortion: Politics, Morality, and the Constitution*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984, p. 284).

God said to Jeremiah: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born, I dedicated you" (Jeremiah 1:5). That means you were a person in the womb. And what do you suppose He thinks of anyone who would rip you apart and dispose of you with the medical waste? He tells us in Matthew 25:40: "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."

Unfortunately, all too many of our elected officials support the abortion industry in the interest of getting elected. They knowingly and willingly cooperate in the business of misleading and victimizing young women. What a sad turn of events. At one time kissing babies would get you votes. Now killing them does.

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Cafeteria Catholics

Someone once told me that Catholicism is like a buffet. You take a little from here, and you take a little from there, but you do not have to take it all. Of course, this raises an obvious question, if I can reject some of it, why can't I reject all of it? But before we accept or reject anything, there is another question that we need to ask. Are the teachings of the Catholic Church true? Because if they are, I really do not have the option of rejecting any of them, at least not if I am going to act logically.

This whole buffet idea assumes that at least some of Gods directives are arbitrary and of no real value. But is that even possible? Jesus said: "One does not live by bread alone, but by EVERY WORD that comes forth from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). So, if we are Christians, that is, followers of Christ, we simply do not have the option to disregard anything that He says.

Every Church doctrine comes from God. Thus, a rejection of even one doctrine, is a rejection of God. Some doctrines come to us directly from Jesus via an explicit statement. Some are taught by the authors of the New Testament. Still others come to us through the Church. Concerning this last method, the Gospel of Luke records Jesus saying the following to His apostles: "He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects Him who sent me" (10:16). As Paul noted in 1 Timothy 3:15, the Church is "the pillar and foundation of truth." If we are to accept Christ into our lives, we must do so on His terms and not on our own. Catholic teaching may not always appeal to our fallen nature. However, it always holds up to honest scrutiny. And it is always authoritative.

Once we allow someone to alter the faith in one area, it becomes easy to alter the faith in other areas. And thus begins our journey down the slippery slope. When we decide what is to be believed, we rob the faith of its divine nature and thus its power. Or as G.K. Chesterton put it: "If you only follow the teachings of the Church that you like, and reject what you don't like, then it is not Christ and the Catholic Faith that you claim to believe in, but yourself."

Jesus said: "And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). He never says anything about opinions setting you free, and with good reason. The book of Romans tells us: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23). Who has never recalled an earlier time and said: "what was I thinking?" In other words, no one is perfect. The fact that we are fallible, disqualifies us from being the arbiters of truth. As Proverbs 3:5 tells us: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight."

Some fear that if they totally embrace the faith, they will be missing out on something. And in a sense that is true. But what we receive in return is far superior to what we give up. Essentially, we exchange destructive behaviors for life giving behaviors. It may not appear that way in the beginning, but that is always what we see in retrospect. Furthermore, the grace of God, if we are open to it, makes the exchange desirable. The key phrase here is; "if we are open to it."

In Hebrews 12:2, we are told that Jesus is the "pioneer and perfector of our faith." Some translations render this verse as: "the **author** and finisher of faith." Jesus alone determines how we are to live and believe. No one else is capable, as He is the source of all truth and the way to salvation.

Jude speaks of contending "for the faith which was **once delivered** to the saints" (Jude 3). It was delivered once and it was complete, there is no need to add or subtract from it. Paul expands on this idea:

> I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel – not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the Gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:6-8).

Make no mistake about it; rejecting any part of the Gospel, is creating a new gospel. It is the same as taking some of the ingredients out of a soup recipe, you end up with a different soup. A soup the original chef never intended. Perhaps not a tragedy where soup is concerned. But if we are to live by “EVERY WORD that comes forth from the mouth of God," it stands to reason that you’re not going to want to leave anything out. As the apostle James said: “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it” (James 2:10).

Pope Leo XIII was even more forceful in his encyclical "*On the Unity of the Church."* He wrote:

> If it be certain that something be revealed by God, and this is not believed, then nothing whatever is believed by divine faith…. He who dissents even in one point from divinely revealed truths absolutely rejects all faith, since he thereby refuses to honor God as supreme truth (9).

I wonder how Cafeteria Catholics would feel if their children adopted their philosophy. Imagine what it would be like if children decided which rules they should obey. A great many of them would stop going to school and I am sure more than a few would have ice cream for dinner every night. Jesus left us an authoritative Church for a reason; because adults are just taller children.

We think we know what is best for us, but in reality, we are just being led by our desires. We focus on the here and now. But God thinks long term. And so, His commands are ordered with that in mind. Once we understand this, we realize that we need to completely trust God. And of course, trusting God is the very definition of faith.

Since we are flawed by nature, putting our trust in God usually involves a "dying to self." As the Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). Therefore: "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

Being open to God’s grace is an absolute necessity. If we try to do it on our own the odds are against us. This is evidenced by the fact that most people will choose to go to Hell. And that is exactly what Jesus tells us in Matthew 7:13-14: "Enter by the narrow gate; for **the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few.**"

Some Cafeteria Catholics try to justify their non-acceptance of Church teachings by pointing to the writings of dissenting theologians. Theologians can help us to better understand our faith. But they have no authority. Whenever they find themselves opposed to Rome, they have effectively abandoned their calling. Theologians are people. And people are sinners. And sometimes sinners openly rebel against God and His Church. Jesus refers to them as wolves in sheep’s clothing (Matthew 7:15).

Pope John Paul II commented on the practice of Cafeteria Catholicism in a talk to the Bishops in Los Angeles back in 1987. He said:

> It is sometimes reported that a large number of Catholics today do not adhere to the teaching of the Catholic Church on a number of questions, notably sexual and conjugal morality, divorce and remarriage. Some are reported as not accepting the clear position on abortion. It has to be noted that there is a tendency on the part of some Catholics to be selective in their adherence to the Church's moral teaching. It is sometimes claimed that dissent from the Magisterium is totally compatible with being a "good Catholic," and poses no obstacle to the reception of the Sacraments. This is a grave error that challenges the teaching of the Bishops in the United States and elsewhere.

We would do well to remember that even when the truth does not appeal to us, it is still the truth. And as such, we ought to live by it.

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Women's Ordination

The Church's position on the ordination of women is not the product of prejudice or male chauvinism. Furthermore, the Catholic Church is not a human institution and as such its teachings are not subject to the whims of any human being, male or female. While her members are all capable of sinning, the Church, as an institution, can only teach what her founder wills her to teach. And the simple fact is that God chose men to be priests. This in no way implies that men are superior to women. It is merely a case of being chosen for different roles.

Are men inferior to women because they cannot bear children? Of course not. On occasion, God, who is perfectly just, determines that men and women are to have different roles. That is not sexism, that's diversity. Hence the Church rejects the radical feminist notion that women have no worth unless they are exactly like men.

It is not a question of ability. Women are the leaders of religious orders, television networks, retreat houses, schools, and charities. The Church recognizes that women are just as talented and capable as men. But the primary function of a priest is to be a priest – to offer sacrifice to God. Priests in the Old and New Testaments were exclusively male. Jesus chose twelve males to be His apostles and ultimately, they became His first priests (Luke 22:7-23). And they likewise chose male priests. If Jesus wanted women to be priests, He would have chosen some thus setting the precedent.

Some say Jesus was limited by cultural norms. But is that possible? He did several things that went against the customs of His day. He spoke to the woman at the well (John 4:1-42). At the time, Jewish men did not speak with women in public. And yet Jesus did. He also allowed "a sinful woman" to wash his feet in the house of a Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50). The Pharisees were scandalized by this. But Jesus did not care what others thought. And if He did not hold back when confronted by the Pharisees, why would anyone think He would hold back when instructing His Apostles? Jesus also said the Holy Spirit would lead the apostles into all truth (John 16:13). Did the Holy Spirit forget to tell them about women priests? Furthermore, if Jesus had chosen women to be priests, He would not have been breaking new ground as Greece and Egypt already had them.

In his "Apostolic Letter on Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone" (*Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*), Pope John Paul II noted the following: "The fact that **the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, received neither the mission proper to the Apostles nor the ministerial priesthood** clearly shows that the non-admission of women to priestly ordination cannot mean that women are of lesser dignity, nor can it be construed as discrimination against them. Rather, it is to be seen as the faithful observance of a plan to be ascribed to the wisdom of the Lord of the universe (no. 3).

The Church does not choose priests; rather, God calls them. The Church merely ratifies or authenticates a vocation. Only those who are called to the priesthood should be priests. This would exclude not only women, but the majority of men as well. Some women say they are called but the Church stands in the way. But the idea that every single pope rebelled against God and got away with it is ludicrous. And it would contradict what Jesus said in Matthew 16:18. **The only one who can prevent God's will from being accomplished in your life is you.**

Moses was able to free the Israelites from Egypt because God called him, and he said yes. At first, he refused, claiming that he was ill suited. He worried about his credibility with the people and his lack of eloquence as a speaker. But God told Moses that He would be with him (Exodus Chapters 3-4). **God called Moses for a purpose, Moses said yes and then God made it happen**. If God calls a woman to the priesthood and she says yes, God will make it happen. The fact that we have not had any women priests in the last two thousand years means one of two things. **Either God has not called any women to the priesthood, or He did and they all said no.**

Some recall that there were deaconesses in the Early Church. They reason that if women were allowed to be members of the clergy at that time they should also be allowed now. But the early deaconesses were not members of the clergy. As Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis wrote: "It is true that in the Church there is an order of deaconesses, but not for being priestess, nor for any kind of work of administration, but for the sake of the dignity of

the female sex, either at the time of Baptism, or of examining the sick or suffering, so that the naked body of a female may not be seen by men administrating sacred rites, but by the deaconess" (*Panarion* 79:3 **[A.D. 376]**).

If God were calling women to the priesthood, would it not be reasonable to expect that He would have called some of the women who were closest to Him? And yet when we examine the writings of women like St. Catherine of Siena, St. Teresa of Avila, and St. Elizabeth Ann Seton we do not find any claims of being called to the priesthood. We only find loyalty to God and His Church.

Proponents of women's ordination will often try to counter this point by referring to the writings of St. Therese of Lisieux. Here was a woman of great sanctity, they claim, who felt called to the priesthood. But is that really the case? The claim stems from a passage in her autobiography "*The Story of a Soul*." She writes:

> I feel as if I were called to be a fighter, a priest, an apostle, a doctor, a martyr; as if I could never satisfy the needs of my nature without **performing, for Your sake, every kind of heroic action at once.** I feel as if I'd got the courage to be a Crusader, a Pontifical Zouave, dying on the battlefield in defense of the Church. And at the same time, I want to be a priest; how lovingly I would carry You in my hands when you came down from heaven at my call; how lovingly I'd bestow You on men's souls! And yet, with all this desire to be a priest, I've nothing but admiration and envy for the humility of St. Francis; I would willingly imitate him in refusing the honor of the priesthood.

As has been pointed out by others, some of these desires are contradictory. St. Therese herself refers to them a few lines later as "fond imaginations" or as we might say, fantasies. Musings that obviously were not meant to be taken literally. In the same book she also said:

> I would like to travel all over the world, making your name known and planting your cross on heathen soil; only I should not be content with one particular mission, I would want to be preaching the gospel on all five continents and in the most distant islands, all at once. And even then, it would not do, carrying on my mission for a limited number of years; I should want to have been a missionary ever since the creation, and go on being a missionary till the world came to an end.

Do you suppose she also felt called by God to be a missionary on every continent simultaneously from the beginning of creation until the end of time? She was simply telling her Lord that she wished she could do everything that could ever be done to bring the world to Him. This is the language of love not theology. Later, she says:

> Love, in fact, is the vocation which includes all others; it is a universe of its own, comprising all time and space — it is eternal. Beside myself with joy, I cried out 'Jesus, my Love! **I have found my vocation, and my vocation is love!' I had discovered where it is that I belong in the Church, the place God has appointed for me.** To be nothing else than love, deep down in the heart of Mother Church; that is to be everything at once — my dream was not a dream after all.

That hardly sounds like a woman who felt cheated out of her "true vocation." Here she is acknowledging that she was what she was supposed to be. She was living the life she was called to live.

The most vocal of those who disagree with the Church on this issue also disagree with the Church on many other issues. And of course, this raises the question; why would they want to be part of a religion that they think is false? The obvious answer is that they do not. Their purpose is to attack and destroy.

So that there would be no ambiguity on this issue, Pope John Paul II said the following in his encyclical *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*: "**I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful**" (no. 4). In other words, the matter is closed.

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Radical Traditionalists

There are several radical traditionalist groups that reject the Second Vatican Council and the liturgical changes that followed. They refer to those who have accepted the changes as "The Conciliar Church." They somehow imagine that members of this "Conciliar Church" are no longer Catholic.

These groups understand that ecumenical councils have always spoken with authority. They try to get around this by claiming that Vatican II was a “pastoral” and not a “doctrinal” council. A pastoral council, they contend, can teach error, and thus does not require assent. But no such distinction exists. An ecumenical council is an ecumenical council. When Pope John XXIII called the council pastoral, he was referring to its approach. He was not creating a new non-binding class of council. What sense would that even make? Why summon 2600 bishops to Rome if their work would ultimately be meaningless?

Radical traditionalists prefer Councils like Trent, where anathemas were issued against heresies. They see Vatican II’s kind words to other religions as being contradictory to the work done at Trent. But that is simply not so. Trent was convened to address attacks on the faith by former Catholics (heretics). Thus, anathemas would be a natural part of their work. Vatican II was, among other things, concerned with bringing the message of Christ to the world. Thus, its pastoral approach. If you want to communicate the Gospel effectively you begin by drawing attention to what is good in others as the apostle Paul did in Acts 17:22-23. You do not foster effective communication with condemnations.

The "pastoral argument" becomes even more untenable when you consider two of the documents produced by the council. For instance: *"**Dogmatic** Constitution on the Church"* and *"**Dogmatic** Constitution on Divine Revelation*." Use of the word Dogmatic would seem to indicate that these documents were something more than opinions.

In its article on General Councils, the Catholic Encyclopedia of 1908 says the following: "All the arguments which go to prove the infallibility of the Church apply with their fullest force to the infallible authority of general councils in union with the pope." But even if the documents in question were not the product of an ecumenical council, they would still require assent as they were promulgated by Pope Paul VI. Any teaching promulgated by a pope is authoritative by virtue of the Church’s Ordinary Magisterium (Vatican I, session 3, chapter 3).

Radical traditionalists try to back up their arguments by quoting council documents out of context. For instance, I received the following concerning "*Lumen Gentium:"*

> But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place among these there are the Moslems, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind (*Lumen Gentium* No. 16).
>
> Ask any Moslem if he adores Jesus as God. He does not and therefore he denies the one true God. Therefore, Vatican II is in error when it equates Islam with Catholicism. Jesus established one Church and it has no equal.

There is no claim here of spiritual equality. Someone can acknowledge the Creator without sharing our belief that Jesus is God. This passage merely affirms the traditional Church teaching that those outside the Church can be saved under certain conditions. The subject is treated in greater detail a few sentences later: "Those who through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do His will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience – those too may achieve eternal salvation."

Those outside the Church who will be saved, will be saved despite their false beliefs not because of them. There is nothing new here. *Lumen Gentium* also taught:

1. All men are called to the union of the Catholic Church (1:3)
2. The Church has the mission to proclaim the kingdom of Christ to all peoples (1:5)
3. Christ is the one mediator (1:8)
4. The Church is necessary for salvation (2:14)
5. Whoever knows this and leaves the Church cannot be saved (2:14)

Radical traditionalists are scandalized by the liturgical abuses that plague many Catholic churches. They are appalled by Catholic universities that routinely alter Church doctrines to make them more acceptable. On these points their outrage is justified. Indeed, every Catholic should be outraged by such behavior. However, dissent by some never justifies schism by others. As someone once said, "You don't leave Peter because of Judas."

Some radical traditionalists are more creative than others. Within the movement there is a group known as Sedevacanists. This group realizes that Catholics are supposed to be obedient to the pope. And yet they have been at odds with every pope since the council. Their solution to this dilemma – they claim there has not been a pope since 1958. How do they know there has not been a pope since 1958? Because everyone who has occupied the office since that time has disagreed with them. Therefore, they must be heretics and thus not real popes.

There are a couple of things wrong with this argument. First, not agreeing with someone's private interpretation of Church documents does not constitute heresy. Second, even if they were guilty of heresy, they would still have been popes. Pope Pius XII, the last real pope according to Sedevacanists, tells us as much in his apostolic constitution *"Vacantis Apostolicae Sedis."* He wrote: "None of the cardinals may in any way, or by pretext or reason of any excommunication, suspension, or interdict whatsoever, or of any other ecclesiastical impediment, be excluded from the active and **passive election** of the supreme pontiff. We hereby suspend such censures solely for the purpose of the said election; at other times they are to remain in vigor" (no. 34).

Passive election refers to the cardinal himself being elected pope. This may seem odd at first glance. But it is necessary. Heresy can be a purely internal disposition without any outward manifestation. If a pope were a heretic and kept it to himself no one would know. If being a heretic would negate a papal election and you could never know for sure if a pope were a heretic, it follows that you could never know if we had a pope. If this were the case the Church would be in a constant state of chaos. We see this same principal applied to the Eucharist. The validity of the Eucharist does not depend on the worthiness of the priest. If it did you would never know if you were receiving a validly consecrated host. If a heretic became pope, the Church would be protected from his heresy by papal infallibility. We have Christ's word on that (Matthew 16:18).

As we saw earlier, some radical traditionalists believe that only Catholics can be saved. This idea was condemned by Pope Pius IX in his encyclical, *"Quanto Conficiamur Moerore,"* No. 7. Some believe that Christ died only for the elect. This idea was condemned by the Council of Trent, session 6, chapter 2. The late Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, a leader in the movement, even appointed his own bishops. This was condemned by Pope Pius XII in *"Ad Apostolorum Principis"* and it results in an automatic excommunication for all involved.

Radical Traditionalists need to answer one question; what verse of Scripture or what Church teaching gives them the authority to pass judgment on the Magisterium? If they cannot answer, they lose the argument. If they can, they still lose the argument. And that is because they have proven Martin Luther right and Jesus Christ wrong. And if Jesus is wrong, we are all wasting our time. But He is not wrong. Vatican I spoke clearly on the matter of obedience regarding Church discipline: "Both clergy and faithful … are bound to submit to this power [papal] by the duty of hierarchical subordination and true obedience, and this not only in matters concerning faith and morals, but also in those which regard the **discipline and government of the church**" (Session 4, chapter 3).

Radical traditionalists consider 2 Thessalonians 2:15 to be their guiding principle: "Therefore, brothers, stand firm and **hold fast to the traditions that you were taught**, either by an oral statement or by a letter of ours." But the question must be asked, exactly what Traditions are they holding fast to? By rejecting Papal authority, they reject the oldest Catholic Tradition (Matthew 16:18-19). Ironically this puts them in a position where they are advocates for the oldest Protestant tradition, a rejection of Church authority. And as Jesus so clearly said in Matthew 18:17: "If he refuses to listen even to the Church, then treat him as you would a gentile or tax collector."

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The Words of Consecration

Radical traditionalists consider the Mass of Pope Paul VI to be invalid. They specifically object to the words used in the consecration of the wine. In the Tridentine Mass (pre-Vatican II) the wording is as follows: For this is the chalice of my blood of the New and Eternal Covenant: the mystery of faith: which shall be shed for you and **for many** unto the forgiveness of sins." In Pope Paul's liturgy it is worded this way: "This is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and **for all** so that sins may be forgiven."

Both versions are based on Jesus' words at the Last Supper as recorded in Matthew 26:28 and Mark 14:24. The verse from Matthew reads: "For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." Traditionalists claim that Jesus used the word many because He was referring only to those who would accept His offer of salvation. They argue that changing the word to all would include the damned thus giving Jesus' statement a meaning He did not intend. But is that really the case?

Substituting the word all for many actually clarifies the meaning of the passage. The Last Supper was to be the fulfillment of all that Jesus taught His apostles concerning the New Covenant. A year earlier He had told them that they must eat His flesh and drink His blood or they would have no life in them (John 6:53). They did not understand but continued to follow Him. Later, He told them that He was to suffer and die (Mark 9:30-32). Once again, they did not understand but they continued to follow. Now, at the Last Supper, He would put it all together for them. He was to die for the sins of the world and they would be able to partake of His sacrifice by eating His body and blood in the Eucharist.

Other passages of Scripture attest to the fact that Christ died for all. For example: In John 3:16-17 we read: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, **but that the world might be saved through Him**." Second Corinthians 5:15 tells us that Christ died for all. Finally, 1 John 2:2 tells us virtually the same thing: "And He is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also **for the sins of the whole world**."

Radical traditionalists do believe that Christ died for all men. However, as we noted earlier, they believe that the words of consecration refer only to the elect (those who will be saved). Thus, they reason that if Jesus used the word many, He could not have meant all. But this is a false assumption. In the parable of the wedding feast, Jesus uses the word many when referring to all of mankind. He said: "For **many are called**, but **few are chosen**" (Matthew 22:14).

Elsewhere in Scripture the words all and many are used interchangeably. In Mark 10:45 we find: "For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give **His life as a ransom for many**." In 1 Timothy 2:5-6 we find: "For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself **as a ransom for all."** Thus, a ransom for many is a ransom for all.

The Catholic Church has always taught that the sacrifice of the Mass is not a new sacrifice. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and the sacrifice of the Mass are one and the same. If they are the same sacrifice, they must have the same purpose. If on the cross "Christ died for all" then in the Mass Christ's blood is offered for all.

There is another point that needs to be made here. Let us go back to Matthew 22:14 for a moment. Did you notice that the word Jesus used for everyone was "many" and the word He used for the elect was "few"? That is because a majority of mankind will choose hell over heaven. The word many can be used to refer to all or a majority but never to a few. And those who will be saved, relatively speaking, will be few and not "many." Jesus made this point earlier in Matthew 7:13-14 where He says:

Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are **many**. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are **few**." This refutes the argument that the word many, in the words of consecration, refers only to the elect. These two passages in Matthew show us that **Jesus refers to the elect as "the few" not "the many**."

Radical traditionalists will often quote "*Quo Primum*" to give their claims an air of authority. "*Quo Primum*" was a bull issued by Pope St. Pius V in 1570. Among other things it said that the Tridentine Liturgy was to be said in

perpetuity. Since Pope Paul VI authorized a new Liturgy in 1969, Traditionalists reason that he erred against the faith.

To properly understand "*Quo Primum*" we need to understand the type of document it was and the circumstances under which it was written. "*Quo Primum*" was a continuation of the work of the Council of Trent. The Council of Trent was convened for two reasons: First to address the errors of Protestantism and second to reform the interior life of the Church. Just prior to the Protestant Reformation and the Council of Trent, problems had developed within the clergy. There was a good deal of corruption and liturgical abuse. The canons and decrees of the council make this very clear. In session 22 chapter 9 we find the following:

> And because that many errors are at this time disseminated and many things are taught and maintained by divers persons, in opposition to this ancient faith, which is based on the sacred Gospel, the traditions of the Apostles, and the doctrine of the holy Fathers; the sacred and holy Synod, after many and grave deliberations maturely had touching these matters, has resolved, with the unanimous consent of all the Fathers, to condemn, and to eliminate from holy Church, by means of the canons subjoined, whatsoever is opposed to this most pure faith and sacred doctrine.

The Fathers then go on to present nine canons condemning errors regarding the Mass. "*Quo Primum*" took this a step further. It is important to note that "*Quo Primum*" was a disciplinary decree and not a doctrinal one. In fact, in its fourth paragraph "*Quo Primum*" allows for other forms of the liturgy. If "*Quo Primum*" were establishing doctrine this would not have been possible as doctrines are not subject to change. On the other hand, disciplinary decrees are subject to change. Pius V's intent was to stop priests from using illicit or unauthorized forms of the Mass. He was not restricting future popes as he had no authority to do so. He used the words "in perpetuity" for emphasis. All of this is further confirmed by Pope Pius XII in his encyclical "*Mediator Dei*" (*On the Sacred Liturgy*). While he was not commenting directly on "*Quo Primum*," His statements covered the same subject. In paragraph 58 he writes:

> It follows from this that the Sovereign Pontiff alone enjoys the right to recognize and establish any practice touching the worship of God, to introduce and approve new rites, as also to modify those he judges to require modification. … Private individuals, therefore, even though they be clerics, may not be left to decide for themselves in these holy and venerable matters, For the same reason no private person has any authority to regulate external practices of this kind, which are intimately bound up with Church discipline and with the order, unity and concord of the Mystical Body and frequently even with the integrity of Catholic faith itself.

Note that the "Sovereign Pontiff alone enjoys the right to recognize and establish **any practice touching the worship of God, to introduce and approve new rites, as also to modify those he judges to require modification.**" And that is exactly what we see several popes doing after "*Quo Primum*" was written. Father Joseph A. Jungman relates how Pope Clement VIII made changes to the liturgy in 1604, Pope Urban VIII made changes in 1634, and in 1920 Pope Benedict XV allowed changes based on the reform of Pope Pius X. Minor changes were made by Pope Clement XIII as well as Pope Leo XIII (*The Mass,* page 106). It should also be noted that Pope Pius XII made some changes to the liturgy.

I think it is clear that no one prior to Vatican II interpreted "*Quo Primum*" in the way that our Traditionalist friends do. I think we can confidently say that Pope Paul VI acted well within his authority when he promulgated the new liturgy. Note also that "*Mediator Dei*" only placed restrictions on clerics and lay people. The Traditionalists and their leaders certainly fall into this category.

Radical traditionalists claim to accept all that the Church taught prior to Vatican II. Certainly, there is no question that "*Mediator Dei*" was written prior to the council. So even when judged by their own standards, the Traditionalist argument fails.

Note: In December of 2011 the words "for all" were changed back to "for many." While the word "many" is literally closer to the original text, its meaning remains the same. Christ died for all. So says Scripture, and so says the Church established by Jesus Christ.

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Salvation Outside the Church?

The Catholic Church is the one true Church established by Jesus Christ. Therefore, some conclude, only Catholics can be saved. In a sense that sounds reasonable. However, it does not consider the mercy of God or Church teaching. The stricter view is based on a misreading of a papal bull written by Pope Eugene IV. It reads in part:

> The most Holy Roman Church firmly believes, professes and preaches that none of those existing outside the Catholic Church, not only pagans, **but also Jews and heretics and schismatics**, can have a share in life eternal; but that **they will go into the eternal fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels, unless before death they are joined with Her**; and that so important is the unity of this ecclesiastical body that **only those remaining within this unity can profit by the sacraments of the Church unto salvation**, and they alone can receive an eternal recompense for their fasts, their almsgivings, their other works of Christian piety and the duties of a Christian soldier. **No one, let his almsgiving be as great as it may, no one, even if he pours out his blood for the Name of Christ, can be saved, unless he remains within the bosom and the unity of the Catholic Church** (*Cantate Domino*)**.**

Cantate Domino was a document that came out of the Council of Florence. The Council of Florence was called to heal the schism between the Eastern and Western churches. Eugene IV was trying to bring back lost sheep. Twice he speaks of remaining in the Catholic Church. You can only remain in the Catholic Church if you are in her to begin with. When he condemns pagans, Jews, Heretics and Schismatics he is speaking to those who would leave the faith to join one of these groups. He even names some of them in the paragraphs preceding the above statement.

But if only the Catholic Church has the complete plan of salvation, how would it be possible for a non-Catholic to get to heaven? Vatican Council II addressed this point: **"Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do His will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience – those too may achieve eternal salvation"** (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* no. 16). Those who are *truly* unaware of what God requires of them are not held responsible; rather they are judged by what they did with the truth they had.

Some claim that Vatican II contradicted earlier councils. This is false. Catholic teaching remains the same. Before Vatican II, children were taught from the Baltimore Catechisms. The following is from *Catechism number 3*:

> **185. Who is punished in hell?** Those are punished in hell **who die in mortal sin;** they are deprived of the vision of God and suffer dreadful torments, especially that of fire, for all eternity.

> **69. What three things are necessary to make a sin mortal?** To make a sin mortal these three things are necessary: First, the thought, desire, word, action, or omission must be seriously wrong; second, **the sinner must know that it is seriously wrong; third, the sinner must fully consent.**

So, only a mortal sin can damn you to hell. And to be guilty of a mortal sin, you must know that you are committing one! **Hence, if you do not know, you are not guilty.** Jesus teaches us the same thing in John 9:40-41: "Some of the Pharisees near Him heard this, and they said to Him, 'Are we also blind?' Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say 'we see,' your guilt remains.'" In other words, because they knew better, they were guilty of sin. Likewise, if they did not know better, they would not be guilty.

Jesus makes the same point elsewhere. At the Last Supper He said to His apostles: “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But all this they will do to you on my account, because they do not know Him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, **they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin”** (John 15:22).

Prior to Vatican II Pope Pius IX said the following in, *"On Promotion of False Doctrines:"*

> **We all know that those who suffer from invincible ignorance** with regard to our holy religion, **if they carefully keep the precepts of the natural law** which have been written by God in the hearts of all men, if they are prepared to obey God, and if they lead a virtuous and dutiful life, **can, by the power of divine light and grace, attain eternal life. For God,** who knows completely the minds and souls, the thoughts and habits of all men, **will not permit,** in accord with His infinite goodness and mercy, **anyone who is not guilty of a voluntary fault to suffer eternal punishment** (no. 7).

He said essentially the same thing in "*On the Church in Austria:"*

> It must, of course, be held as a matter of faith that outside the apostolic Roman Church no one can be saved, that the Church is the only ark of salvation, and that whoever does not enter it will perish in the flood. **On the other hand, it must likewise be held as certain that those who are affected by ignorance of the true religion, if it is invincible ignorance, are not subject to any guilt in this matter before the eyes of the Lord** (no. 7).

The invincibly ignorant would not include those who think that all religions are the same. That would be indifference. Jesus said, **"I am the way"** (John 14:6), **not a way.** The person who is invincibly ignorant honestly believes, though erroneously, that he is going the right way.

St. Augustine's position is also consistent with Vatican II. **"When we speak of within and without in relation to the Church, it is the position of the heart that we must consider, not that of the body…. All who are within [the Church] in heart are saved in the unity of the ark** (*On Baptism, Against the Donatists 5:28 [39]* [A.D. 394]*).*

Clement of Rome wrote, **"Let us go through all generations** and learn that in generation after generation the Master has given a place of repentance for **those willing to turn to him.** Those who repented for their sins, appeased God in praying, and **received salvation, even though they were aliens to God"** *(Letter to the Corinthians, no. 7* [A.D. 95]*).*

Paul clearly teaches that we are judged by our intentions. "Therefore, do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose **the purposes of the heart.** Then every man will receive his commendation from God" (1 Corinthians 4:5).

He expands on this in Romans 2:13-16, "For it is not the hearers of the Law who are righteous before God, but **the doers of the Law** who **will be justified. When Gentiles who have not the Law do by nature what the Law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the Law. They show that what the Law requires is written on their hearts**, while their conscience also bears witness and **their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them** on that day when, according to my gospel, **God judges the secrets of men** by Christ Jesus."

Their conflicting thoughts would accuse them if they suspected but ignored the fact that God required them to be members of His Church. Not wanting to know the truth is just as bad as knowing it and rejecting it. As Vatican II put it **"Hence, those cannot be saved, who knowing that the Catholic Church was founded through Jesus Christ, by God, as something necessary, still refuse to enter it or remain in it"** (*Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity* no. 7). Their conflicting thoughts would excuse them if they truly sought God but were unaware of this requirement.

Dissenting Catholics would do well to read the letter of the Holy Office concerning Fr. Leonard Feeney, who dissented on this issue back in 1949. It states in part, **"But this dogma [No Salvation outside the Church] is to be understood as the Church itself understands it. For our Savior did not leave it to private judgment to explain what is contained in the deposit of faith, but to the doctrinal authority of the Church."**

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Keeping Up with the Times

I have been told the Church does not keep up with the times. To which I respond; Should the Church keep up with the times? As Christians we follow Jesus. And Jesus is God. And God is the source of all truth. Furthermore: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). God does not change; truth does not change. People and situations change. The truth may be applied to these new situations. But the truth can never contradict itself.

No one likes to be seen as odd. Consequently, following the crowd can seem like the right thing to do. But the worlds standards differ from God’s standards. And that is because God is perfect and man is not. That is why He calls us to: "be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2). Yes, we live in the world, but we should never be led by it. Rather we should be a light to it (Matthew 5:14-16). Or, as the apostle John said:

> Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever (1 John 2:15-17).

The same God who is the author of all truth, established a Church and ordained that it would operate in a certain way. It was God who created man. And it is God who is to be worshipped and obeyed. We should never reduce our Creator to some advisor who presents suggestions, some of which are good, and others not so good. When we reject anything ordained by God, we make ourselves His equal.

Jesus promised to guide and protect His Church:

> And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; **and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age**.” (Matthew 28:18-20).

Thus, Church teachings come from a perfect God. The ever-changing beliefs of the world come from flawed human beings. But some may protest: “We do not challenge Jesus. We are only opposed to the ‘man-made rules.’” Many of the teachings that are said to be man-made, are teachings that come directly from Jesus. But let us set that aside for a moment. There are some Church teachings that Jesus does not mention specifically. Can we disregard them by referring to them as “man-made”? Certainly, an omnipotent God would have anticipated such a question. Logically then, His promise to safeguard the Church would need to take that into account. And it does. At the Last Supper, He said the following to His apostles:

> **I have yet many things to say to you**, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, **He will guide you into all truth;** for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for **He will take what is mine and declare it to you** (John 16:12-15).

So, according to Jesus, He did not tell them everything. He says there is more to come. And the Holy Spirit will guide them into all truth. Jesus taught with authority, His apostles taught with authority, and it stands to reason that their successors would also need to teach with authority. Scripture is clear; Jesus gave His Church the power to legislate: “Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19). Jesus also said, if you reject the Church, you reject Him: “He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects the one who sent me” (Luke 10:16).

Regardless of the importance you place on any one of the issues addressed by the so called “man-made rules,” there is a larger issue at play here. And that is the issue of obedience. Remember that Adam and Eve were thrown out of the garden for eating a piece of fruit. The Gospel of John tells us: “He who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him” (John 3:36). The teachings or disciplines in question may be “man-

made," but they are authorized and enforced by God. Also, no Church teaching is arbitrary. Upon close examination we find that they all work for our benefit.

We know that God is the source of all truth. We also know that He communicates those truths through His Church. But what does the world have to offer? When we say, "keeping up with the times," we are usually talking about following societal trends. Not surprisingly, societal trends tend to be more permissive than the mandates from God. Trend setters are often motivated by self-interest as opposed to the common good.

The apostle Paul refers to worldly wisdom as "folly" (1 Corinthians 3:18). Proverbs 14:12 tells us: "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death." James brings the point home even more forcefully: "Unfaithful creatures! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4).

The Bible warns us about adopting human traditions:

> See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. For in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness of life in Him, who is the head of all rule and authority (Colossians 2:8-10).

Human judgement is famously unreliable. In the 1930's, the Nazis enjoyed widespread support in Germany. Did that make Nazism a good thing? In the 18th and 19th centuries, slavery was generally accepted as the norm by a majority of the people in the American south. Did that make slavery a good thing? I am not comparing anyone to Nazis or slave owners. The point here is, if human beings can be misled on such a grand scale, how much more can they be misled on issues that are not so obvious.

Jesus specifically warns us not to follow the crowd. In Matthew 7:13-14 He says: "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few." If you follow societal trends there is a good chance you are on the broad road that leads to destruction.

Bad habits can be hard to break. Consequently, we may choose to ignore God. We seek ways to rationalize our behavior. Finding support from like-minded people puts us at ease. But Christians are called to a higher standard. In Romans 7:21-25 Paul writes of his own struggle and reveals the solution to all our struggles:

> So, I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Elsewhere he says: "I can do all things through Him [Jesus] who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). Once we die to self and allow Jesus to work in us, we become a "new creation," the "old has passed away" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

God can create anything that can be created. One thing He cannot create is love. For love to be genuine it must be freely given. Thus, we have been given free will. Do we love God? Do we want to spend eternity with Him? How we live our lives, is how we answer those questions.

When working with volatile chemicals, certain protocols must be observed. Every detail of the safety procedures must be adhered to. Failure to do so can result in physical death. Likewise, when working out our salvation, every command of God must be adhered to. Failure to do so can result in spiritual death. If we are careful with that which is temporary, how much more should we be careful with that which is eternal?

As we have already noted, Jesus, (God) promised to guide and protect His Church. And we know that God keeps His promises. To remove all doubt, He said as much in Isaiah 55:11: "So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I sent it." Therefore, to say the Church should keep up with the times, is to argue that God should obey men. And of course, that would be wrong.

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Catholic Dissent

Cafeteria Catholicism and Catholic Dissent are often thought of as the same thing. I do not have a problem with that. But for my purposes I prefer to keep the terms separate. I like to think of Cafeteria Catholics as those individuals who either do not understand what the Church teaches, or they do not care. For the most part their dissent is a personal thing. Dissenters, to my mind, are at war with the Church. They never miss an opportunity to publicly attack or humiliate her.

Dissenters rationalize their actions in several ways. Some claim Church teachings are either out of date or impractical. They claim that requiring people to follow them is unrealistic and an unnecessary burden. Others feel that their above average intelligence (real or imagined) entitles them to ignore Church teaching. Since they can think for themselves, they reason, they do not need a Church telling them what to do. But even the most intelligent among us is a fallen, sinful creature. Scripture teaches us that Christ died for all men (2 Corinthians 5:15). Nowhere does it say that he only died for people with low IQs.

Intelligence can be an important tool. But like any other tool, it can be used for good or evil. The critical difference is not our intelligence but rather God's grace working in us. With the help of God's grace none of His commands are burdensome. With God's grace we see the wisdom in what He requires of us. Christianity is not a do-it-yourself project. Jesus understood human nature and so He left us a hierarchical Church with Himself as the head. Authentic Christian teaching comes from the top down and not the other way around.

There are organizations with Catholic sounding names that specialize in publicly attacking the Church. One group publishes its own newspaper. They run stories that portray the Church in a negative light. They are also famous for attacking the orthodoxy of Catholics who are faithful to the Church. And of course, they portray themselves as the only group you can go to for the truth. In some cases, retreat houses have become platforms for dissent. Friendly speakers will present dissenting views in the most pleasant of terms. Those who do not have a good understanding of their faith can be easily misled. Those responsible would do well to heed the words of our Savior: "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6).

Catholic universities that were once bulwarks of the faith have in some cases abandoned it. Professors openly reject Church teaching while at the same time choosing to embrace the values of a declining culture. This of course is a betrayal of their mission. And all of this is done in the name of academic freedom. However, true freedom carries with it the responsibility to be honest.

Sadly, it is also possible to find a priest or a bishop promoting dissenting views. History records many such occasions. Most of the heresies from the early church were formulated and propagated by members of the clergy. The Protestant reformation was started by a priest. When members of the clergy stray, it can have a devastating effect. Because they occupy positions of authority, what they say is given more credence. Thus, it has the potential to cause more harm. We must always remember that our first allegiance is to Jesus Christ. Our relationship with Him must never take a back seat to our relationship with anyone else be they priest or teacher.

Those who oppose the Church are fond of using dissenters to their advantage. Whenever the Church is in the news, media outlets will seek out prominent dissenters to get the "Catholic side of the story." Of course, what is presented is oftentimes a mischaracterization of the faith. This perpetuates an inaccurate view of Catholicism.

Dissenters will sometimes accuse loyal Catholics of not being able to think for themselves. But it is not a matter of thinking or not thinking for oneself. It is a matter of being loyal to Jesus. But since we are on the subject let us think about this for a minute. Even dissenters will tell you that they worship God. You only worship a being that is superior to yourself. If a superior being tells you that something should be done in a certain way, logically that is the way it should be done. To conclude otherwise is, without a doubt, not the product of independent thought.

Dissenters also like to characterize loyal Catholics as being legalistic or mean spirited. They prefer to think of themselves as being compassionate. One dissenter told me he prefers to; "Put people before rules." But what if the "rules" are God's idea? Is it really compassionate to lead people into rebellion against their Creator? Before He ascended into heaven Jesus said to His apostles: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you**; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

The Church is to teach all that Christ commanded. She is not free to add anything to it, or leave anything out. We know that she will be faithful in what she teaches because Christ has promised to be with her until the end of the age. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). Logic tells us that any Church established by such a God would have to exhibit the same attributes if it were to continue His work. And history has shown us that such is the case. In its 2000-year history the teachings of the Catholic Church have not changed and they never will.

One point needs to be made here. There is a difference between Church teaching (doctrine) and Church law (discipline). Disciplines deal with how we do certain things while doctrines deal with what we believe (faith and morals). Disciplines are subject to change, but doctrines are not. I say this because there are dissenters who see changes in discipline as a precedent for changes in doctrine.

Dissenters will often scoff at apologetics. That is because apologetics supplies us with the evidence for our faith. Evidence gives us certainty. If we have certainty, dissenters have a problem. They prefer to believe that, when it comes to doctrine, there are a lot of "gray areas." And of course, if there are gray areas, they can do as they please. Gray areas are usually created by constructing arguments that ignore one or more critical facts. But to leave out critical facts is to misrepresent. To misrepresent is to lie. And if your cause is just, the truth should suffice.

Facts matter because they give us an accurate understanding of reality. Thus equipped, we are enabled to make good decisions. Satan is the father of all deception. And his fondest desire is to separate us from God. We should do everything in our power to oppose him. When we are less than honest in representing the faith, we become his ally. That may not be our intent, but effectively speaking, that is what we become.

The Church does not oppose dissent because she does not like being questioned. On the contrary the Church goes to extraordinary lengths to demonstrate the reasons for her teachings. And we are always free to question. However, an honest question assumes you are open to an honest answer. I cannot tell you how many people I have talked to who want to criticize the Church but do not want to hear a word in her defense. Is this honest? Is this fair? I do not think so.

Some try to justify their rebellion by claiming that Jesus Himself was a dissenter. This is laughable at best. Jesus was an observant Jew. He upheld orthodoxy. He did not question the teachings of Judaism. He challenged cultural norms and misinterpretations of the Law. In other words, He was opposed to the dissenters of His time. He turned over the tables of the money changers because they were making a mockery of the temple (Matthew 21:12-13). He challenged the Scribes and the Pharisees when they abandoned the commandments of God in favor of their own traditions (Mark 7:8-9). But despite all their misbehavior, Jesus recognized their God given authority. Listen to what He says in Matthew 23:1-3: "Then said Jesus to the crowds and to his disciples, 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so, practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice.'" Once again, He criticized bad behavior, not Church teaching. And we should do likewise.

Dissent provides a rationalization for sin. While the truth can be intellectually compelling, it does not always influence our actions. Because of our fallen nature, sin can appear attractive. Given enough time we can commit even the most serious sins without the least bit of guilt. With no guilt there is no repentance. With no repentance there can be no forgiveness. With no forgiveness, there is no salvation. And salvation is the whole point of Christianity.

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The Orthodox Churches

The Orthodox Churches claim that: “The Patriarch (bishop) of Rome broke away from the other four Apostolic Patriarchates (Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem), by unilaterally altering the Nicene Creed and considering himself to be the universal head of the Church.” The argument is then given that before this time all the bishops shared power equally. They further claim to have preserved the teachings of the early Church. However, unlike the Orthodox Churches, the Early Church believed in the primacy of Rome. Church Fathers from two of the four Patriarchates that split with Rome attest to this:

Clement of Alexandria

[T]he blessed Peter, the chosen, the preeminent, the first among the disciples, for whom alone with himself the Savior paid the tribute [Matt. 17:27], quickly grasped and understood their meaning. And what does he say? "Behold, we have left all and have followed you" [Matt. 19:2 7, Mark 10:28] (*Who is the Rich Man That is Saved?* 21:3-5 [A.D. 200]).

Cyril Bishop of Jerusalem

In the power of the same Holy Spirit, Peter, both **the chief of the apostles** and the keeper of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, in the name of Christ healed Aeneas the paralytic at Lydda, which is now called Diospolis [Acts 9 ;3 2-3 4] (*Catechetical Lectures* 17;27 [A.D. 350]).

Church Fathers from the west agreed with their eastern brothers:

Irenaeus Bishop of Lyon

…the greatest and most ancient church known to all, founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles. Peter and Paul, that church which has the tradition and the faith which comes down to us after having been announced to men by the apostles. **With that church, because of its superior origin, all the churches must agree, that is, all the faithful in the whole world,** and it is in her that the faithful everywhere have maintained the apostolic tradition *(Against Heresies* 3:3:2 [inter A.D. 180-190]).

Cyprian Bishop of Carthage

With a false bishop appointed for themselves by heretics, they dare even to set sail and carry letters from schismatics and blasphemers to **the Chair of Peter and to the principal church [at Rome], in which sacerdotal unity has its source"** (*Epistle to Cornelius* [Bishop of Rome] 59:14 [A.D. 252]).

The “Filioque Clause” is a phrase in the Creed that states that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the father and the Son. The Orthodox Church believes that the Holy Spirit only proceeds from the Father. Once again, the Orthodox Churches are at odds with their own tradition. Listen to what these eastern fathers had to say:

St Epiphanius of Salamis

For the Only-Begotten Himself calls Him "the Spirit of the Father," and says of Him that "He proceeds from the Father," and "will receive of mine," so that He is reckoned as not being foreign to the Father nor to the Son, but is of their same substance, of the same Godhead; He is Spirit divine... of God, and He is God. For he is Spirit of God, Spirit of the Father and Spirit of the Son, not by some kind of synthesis, like soul and body in us, but in the midst of Father and Son, of the Father and of the Son, a third by appellation. ... The Father always existed and the Son always existed, and **the Spirit breathes from the Father and the Son**; and neither is the Son created nor is the Spirit created (*The Man Well Anchored* [A.D. 374]).

St. Cyril of Alexandria

> Since the Holy Spirit when He is in us effects our being conformed to God, and **He actually proceeds from Father and Son**, it is abundantly clear that He is of the divine essence, in it in essence and proceeding from it. [Thesis 34] (*Treasury of the Holy and Consubstantial Trinity* [A.D. 424])

The east was the birthplace of several heresies such as Arianism, Nestorianism and Monophysitism. Severus, a prominent Monophysite was Patriarch of Antioch. Nestorius, the originator of the Nestorian heresy was Archbishop of Constantinople. How can these bishops be considered equal in authority with Rome when their official teachings were erroneous?

The Orthodox Churches dispute the existence of Purgatory. Once again, they part company with the Early Church:

> **Clement of Alexandria**
>
> The believer through discipline divests himself of his passions and passes to the mansion which is better than the former one, passes to the greatest torment, taking with him the characteristic of repentance for the faults he may have committed after baptism. He is tortured then still more, not yet attaining what he sees others have acquired. The greatest torments are assigned to the believer, for God's righteousness is good, and His goodness righteous, and though **these punishments cease in the course of the expiation and purification of each one**, "yet" etc . . . (*Patres Groeci*. IX, col. 332 [**A.D. 150-215**]).
>
> **John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople**
>
> Let us help and commemorate them. If Job's sons were purified by their father's sacrifice [Job I:5), why would we doubt that our offerings for the dead bring them some consolation? **Let us not hesitate to help those who have died and to offer our prayers for them** (*Homilies on First Corinthians* 41:5 [A.D. 392]).

The Bible and the early fathers (both east and west) condemn divorce and remarriage. For instance:

> **Justin Martyr**
>
> In regard to chastity, [Jesus] has this to say: If anyone look with lust at a woman, he has already before God committed adultery in his heart. "And, whoever marries a woman who has been divorced from another husband, commits adultery." **According to our Teacher, just as they are sinners who contract a second marriage, even though it be in accord with human law,** so also are they sinners who look with lustful desire at a woman. He repudiates not only one who actually commits adultery, but even one who wishes to do so; for not only our actions are manifest to God, but even our thoughts (*First Apology* 15 [A.D. 151]).
>
> **Clement of Alexandria**
>
> That Scripture counsels marriage, however, and never allows any release from the union is expressly contained in the law: "You shall not divorce a wife, except for reason of immorality." **And it regards as adultery the marriage of a spouse, while the one from whom a separation was made is still alive. "Whoever takes a divorced woman as wife commits adultery,"** (*Miscellanies* 2:23:145:3 [A.D. 208]).

Once again, the Orthodox Churches allow the practice. The more we learn about the Orthodox Churches the less tenable is the claim that they are the champions of doctrinal purity. The Catholic Church alone has remained unchanged in her teachings. And as the Orthodox Churches will tell you, that is the mark of the true Church.

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The Word of Faith Movement

The Word of Faith Movement, sometimes referred to as the Positive Confession Movement or the Prosperity Gospel, has been making inroads into mainline Christianity. Although it primarily affects Protestant churches, it has managed to influence some Catholics. Faith teachers include Kenneth Hagin, Benny Hinn, Oral Roberts, Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, Robert Tilton, Paul and Jan Crouch, John Avanzini, Paul Billheimer, Charles Capps, Morris Cerullo, David Cho, Hobart Freeman, Norvel Hayes, Marilyn Hickey, T. L. Osborn, Frederick Price, Jerry Savelle and Joel Osteen.

Faith teachers are not all the same. Some wander farther from the truth than others. However, they have a lot in common. For instance, they all teach that faith is a force. They also teach that fear is a force. Faith activates God and fear activates Satan. Words are the containers of faith or fear. Whatever is said with the mouth creates reality. If you speak words of faith, God *must* act on your behalf. If you speak negatively God *cannot* act on your behalf and Satan is given license to work against you. Consequently, Faith teachers claim there is no reason for a believer to be sick. Kenneth Hagin declares: "I believe that it is the plan of God our Father that no believer should ever be sick…It is not – I state boldly – it is not the will of God my Father that we should suffer with cancer and other dread diseases which bring pain and anguish. No! It is God's will that we be healed" (*Healing: The Father's Provision*, *Word of Faith,* August 1977, page 9).

If there is not any reason to be sick, surely there is not any reason to take medicine. Frederick Price speaks of medicine as a crutch for the immature believer. He states: "When you have developed your faith to such an extent that you can stand on the promises of God, then you won't need medicine." (*Faith Foolishness,* page 88).

The Faith teachers look to Isaiah 53:5 to support their claims: **"But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities;** upon Him was the chastisement that made us whole, **and with His stripes we were healed."** The beginning of the verse sets the context: **"He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities."** The healing spoken of here is spiritual not physical healing. This is made abundantly clear in 1 Peter 2:24: "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, **that we might die to sin** and live to righteousness. **By His wounds you have been healed."**

During His ministry Jesus did heal the sick. But Scripture nowhere claims that this would always be the case. In fact, we find evidence to the contrary. When confronted by the Pharisees on His associating with sinners, Jesus said: **"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick."** (Matthew 9:12). If Jesus came to abolish the need for physicians, He surely would not have used them to illustrate a point and risk misleading His followers. Sirach 38:1-4 is more explicit: **"Honor the physician** with the honor due him…**The Lord created medicines** from the earth and **a sensible man will not despise them."**

Perhaps the greatest example in the New Testament is that of Paul the apostle. Certainly, Paul was a man of faith. And yet he was afflicted with a physical ailment. He writes of it in 2 Corinthians 12:7-9: "And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, **a thorn was given me in the flesh,** a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated**. Three times I besought the Lord** about this, that it should leave me; **but He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness'."**

No one knows for sure what Paul's thorn in the flesh was. But many scholars believe that it was an eye ailment. The Greek word rendered as thorn in 2 Corinthians 12:7 is skolops (σκόλοψ), which means withered at the front. It is derived from two other words, skelos (σκέλος), meaning to parch and optanomai (ὀπτάνομαι), meaning to gaze.

When someone in the movement does get sick, they simply deny that they are sick. They claim that what appears to be an ailment is just a symptom put on them by the devil. This they claim is done in order to fool them into believing that they are sick when they are not. The danger here is obvious. Ignoring symptoms can lead to greater problems – sometimes, even death.

Larry and Lucky Parker paid a high price for their dedication to the Faith teachers. In their book *We Let Our Son Die,* they tell how, in accordance with the teachings of the Word of Faith Movement, they withheld insulin from their diabetic son. He lapsed into a coma and died.

A recent news report revealed the following: “A Benny Hinn crusade … became a tragedy for four people – including a baby and a young child – who died while awaiting a miracle healing from Hinn. All had been hospitalized but had left the hospital to attend the crusade" (*Religious News Service*, May 8, 2000). Unfortunately, these are not the only examples.

The Faith teachers themselves are not immune to sickness. Kenneth Hagin has suffered at least four cardiovascular crises including one full-scale heart stoppage. Paul Crouch also suffers from heart problems. Fred Price's wife has been stricken with cancer and has thanked her doctors for radiation and chemotherapy. And yet they continue to teach falsely.

The same logic applied to health is applied to wealth. Jerry Savelle claims that you can speak your world into existence (*Framing Your World with the Word of God, Part 2)*. Marilyn Hickey shows us how this is done. She said the following:

> What do you need? Start creating it. Start speaking about it. Start speaking it into being. Speak to your billfold. Say, "You big thick billfold full of money." Speak to your checkbook. Say, "You, checkbook, you. You've never been so prosperous since I owned you. You're just jammed full of money" (*Claim Your Miracles*).

The Faith teachers' obsession with wealth runs counter to the teachings of Scripture. Paul tells Timothy that **"The love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith"** (1 Timothy 6:10). Jesus Himself warns us about such attachments. He said: **"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth,** where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, **but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven,** where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. **For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also"** (Matthew 6:19-21).

Faith teachers use their bizarre theology to prey on people in need. Robert Tilton claims God wants you to flourish financially and physically. But you need faith. To prove your faith, you need to make a vow of faith. A vow of faith is usually a large donation to Robert Tilton's ministry.

Some Faith teachers claim equality with God. Kenneth Hagin says: "Man…was created on terms of equality with God, he could stand in God's presence without any consciousness of inferiority…He made us the same class of being that He is Himself" (*Zoe: The God-Kind of Life*). Morris Cerullo is a bit more direct. He once proclaimed: "You're not looking at Morris Cerullo; you're looking at God" (*The End Time Manifestation of the Sons of God,* tape 1). Benny Hinn, John Avanzini, Kenneth Copeland, and Charles Capps have all made similar claims.

Some Faith teachers do not deal very well with criticism. In 1992, Benny Hinn threatened the Christian Research Institutes staff members and their families with the following statement:

> You're attacking me on the radio every night – you'll pay, and your children will. Hear this from the lips of God's servant. You are in danger, Repent! Or God Almighty will move His hand. Touch not my Anointed…

Millions have heard the false gospel of the Faith teachers. How many of them have rejected Christianity thinking it to be nothing more than a con game?

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Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses claim to be "God's Visible Organization." They also claim to be "His prophet." They say that Jesus inspected their organization in 1919 and found a "faithful and discreet slave class, dispensing fine spiritual food to true believers" (*Yearbook 1975,* page 88). So, what type of spiritual food have they been dispensing? In *"The Finished Mystery"* published in 1917, they claimed that in 1918 God would destroy the churches and church members by the millions, and Christendom would go down into oblivion. They also predicted that there would be worldwide anarchy in the fall of 1920. In 1920 they claimed that the Bible foretold the resurrection of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and other faithful ones of old. It was written that they would arrive in 1925 (*Millions Now Living Will Never Die*, page 81). They have predicted that the world would end in 1914, 1918, 1920, 1925, 1941, and 1975. Obviously, none of their predictions have come true. Are we to believe that this is "fine spiritual food?"

They believe that Jesus and Michael the Archangel are one and the same. They do not vote in elections, and they will not salute the flag or serve in the armed forces. They teach that it is wrong to celebrate birthdays, Christmas, and Easter. And they believe that the Bible prohibits blood transfusions. Ricarda Bradford was seriously injured in an automobile accident. She was in desperate need of a blood transfusion. Her father, a devout Jehovah's Witness, refused to allow it and as a result Ricarda died on her sixth birthday.

Jehovah's Witnesses claim that the Church's doctrine on the Trinity is false. However, even their version of the Bible supports it. In Genesis 1:26 God says, "Let **us** make man in **our** image." In the next verse we read that "God proceeded to make man in **His** image." So, God alone created man, and yet more than one person was involved. This is the doctrine of the Trinity. It is true that in some places the Scriptures speak of Jesus as being subordinate to the Father, but this is perfectly natural and necessary to the Christian view. Jesus is fully human and fully divine. In His human nature He is subject to the Father. In His divine nature He is equal to the Father. By taking on a human nature Jesus lowered himself to our level. As we are told in the book of Hebrews: For a little while, Jesus "was made lower than the angels …" (2:9) and: "He had to be made like his brethren in every respect …" (2:17). That would include being subordinate to the Father.

The apostle Paul is even more explicit. He said: "Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:5-8).

Jesus' divinity, and thus His equality with the Father, is illustrated in John 2:18-21, where we read, "Therefore, in answer, the Jews said to Him, 'What sign have you to show us, since you are doing these things?' In answer **Jesus said to them, 'Break down this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'** Therefore, the Jews said, 'This temple was built in forty-six years, and you will raise it up in three days?' **But He was talking about the temple of His body."** Acts 5:30 tells us that "The **God** of our forefathers **raised up Jesus."** So, the Bible tells us that Jesus raised His own dead body. It also tells us that the one who raised Him was God. Therefore, Jesus is God.

Isaiah 9:6 predicts the birth of Jesus. Note what it calls Him: "For there has been a child born to us, there has been a son given to us, and the princely rule will come to be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, **Mighty God, Eternal Father,** Prince of Peace.

Jehovah's Witnesses are taught that the Holy Spirit is not a person but God's active force. He is likened to "electricity, a force that can be adapted to perform a great variety of operations." But this is not what the Bible teaches. The Bible not only tells us that the Holy Spirit is a person, but a divine one as well. In Acts 13:2 we read, "As they were ministering to Jehovah and fasting, **the Holy Spirit said,** 'Of all persons **set Barnabas and Saul apart for me** for the work to which **I have called them.'"** And again, **"The Holy Spirit aptly spoke** through Isaiah the prophet" (Acts 28:25). If the Holy Spirit is an impersonal force, how is it that it can speak and refer to itself in a personal way? The divinity of the Holy Spirit is also revealed in Acts 5:3-4: "But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan emboldened you to **play false to the Holy Spirit…You have played false not to men, but to God.'"**

Jehovah's Witnesses claim that the doctrine of the Trinity derives no support from any Christian writers for three centuries after the birth of Christ (*Should You Believe in the Trinity? page 7)*. Among the early writers mentioned are Tertullian, Origen, and Theophilus of Antioch. However, Tertullian wrote, "And at the same time the mystery of the oikonomia is safeguarded, for the unity is distributed in a **trinity.** Placed in order, the three are **the Father, the Son, and the Spirit"** (*Against Praxeas 2:1,* 213 A.D.).

Origen wrote, "For we do not hold that which the heretics imagine, that some part of the substance of God was converted into the Son, or that the Son was procreated by the Father from non-existent substances, that is, from a substance outside Himself, so that there was a time when He [the Son] did not exist…For it is **the Trinity** alone which exceeds every sense in which not only temporal but even eternal may be understood. It is all other things, indeed, which are outside **the Trinity,** which are to be measured by time and ages" (*On First Principles 4:4:1,* 220 A.D.). Finally, Theophilus of Antioch: "The three days before the luminaries were created are types of **the Trinity, God, His Word, and His Wisdom"** (*To Autolycus 2:15,* 181 A.D.).

Jehovah's Witness theology concerning hell is also problematic. They teach that the Biblical terms used to describe hell are merely symbolic; that after death the damned will no longer exist. The idea of eternal torment is flatly rejected. But the Scriptures teach otherwise. In Matthew 25:41 we read, "Then He will say, in turn, to those on his left, 'Be on your way from me, you who have been cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels.'" Notice how the everlasting fire is a place that was prepared. If it were not an actual place, no preparation would be needed. Further evidence is found in Revelation 21:8: "But as for the cowards and those without faith, and those who are disgusting in their filth, and murderers and fornicators, and those practicing Spiritism and idolaters, and all the liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur. This means the second death." There could only be a second death if those in question were still in existence after the first one.

Hell-fire cannot be symbolic of non-existence, as it would defeat the purpose of symbolism. The purpose of symbolism is to teach by way of illustration. Whenever symbolic language is used, there is always a parallel principle involved. For instance, if I said that I had an ocean of water in my basement, would you think that it was flooded or bone dry? Most people would think that it was flooded. An ocean is a large body of water, so it would symbolize an excessive amount of water. It would never be used to describe an absence of water. Similarly, hell-fire would never be used to describe non-existence. There are no two concepts more radically opposed. Non-existence is a total absence of reality, while fiery torture is the most vivid form of reality. How could one symbolize the other?

Consider what Jesus said about Judas in Matthew 26:24: "Woe to that man through whom the Son of man is betrayed! It would have been finer for him to have never been born." Why would it have been finer for him to have never been born? If he were never born, he would be non-existent. If he died unrepentant and went to a symbolic hell, he would be equally non-existent. If such were the case, Jesus' statement would be foolish. It would only make sense if Judas went to a hell of eternal punishment.

Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Jesus was resurrected as a spirit. But the Bible disagrees. Luke 24:38-39 records the following: "So He [Jesus] said to them, **'A spirit does not have flesh and bones just as you behold that I have.'"** In response, we are told that Jesus materialized a body for Himself. But that cannot be true. Once again, we appeal to John 2:18-21 where Jesus says that He will raise His then present body. He says nothing about creating a new one.

As we have seen, the Jehovah's Witnesses have a history of false claims and faulty theology. When they are shown Bible verses that contradict their theology, their responses generally imply that the Bible does not really mean what it says. This hardly qualifies them to be "God's visible organization," let alone "His Prophet."

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Seventh Day Adventists

The main difference between Seventh Day Adventists and other Protestants is their adherence to Sabbath worship. They reason that since Exodus 20:19 establishes Saturday as the Jewish Sabbath, Christians ought to worship on Saturday. They rightfully claim that the Catholic Church changed the day of worship from the Sabbath (Saturday) to the Lord's Day (Sunday). However, they wrongfully claim that such an act was illicit.

Scripture speaks of an Old Covenant and a New Covenant. The Old Covenant was in effect until the coming of the Messiah [Jesus]. Once Jesus came, He established a New Covenant. In Matthew 16:19 Jesus gives Peter the power to legislate in Church matters: "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." Under the New Covenant many things would change. For example, baptism would replace circumcision (Colossians 2:11-12), divorce would no longer be permitted (Mark 10:2-12), and animals would no longer need to be sacrificed (Hebrews 9:1-14). The day of worship would also change.

At first, the main day of worship for Christians was on Saturday. That is because the first Christians were Jews. At some point the Christians were expelled from the temple because they were seen as being divisive. Consequently, they began to meet in their homes. Eventually Church leaders decided that Sunday would be the Christian day of worship in honor of our Lord's resurrection.

While the New Testament does not explicitly command Christians to meet and worship on Sunday, it seems to indicate that such was the practice. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 16:2 we read: "**On the first day of every week**, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that contributions need not be made when I come." And in Acts 20:7 we see that the early Christians gathered to break bread on Sunday. "**On the first day of the week**, when we were gathered together **to break bread**, Paul talked with them…" The term "to break bread" refers to the Eucharistic celebration.

One thing the New Testament is clear on is that Christians are not to be judged for not observing the Jewish Sabbaths and feast days. "…having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross… Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a **festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.**" (Colossians 2:14-16). And that is because: "When there is a change in the priesthood [Jesus], there is necessarily a change in the law" (Hebrews 7:12).

Paul considers adherence to the Jewish days of observance as possible evidence that the Galatians have strayed from the faith. He writes: "but now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days, and months, and seasons, and years! I am afraid I have labored over you in vain" (Galatians 4:9-11). Paul says this because Christians are no longer bound by the Jewish ceremonial law (Romans 6:14).

There are many early Church writings that confirm Sunday as the Christian day of worship. Two are notable because of their early date. The first quote comes from "*The Didache."* It reads in part: "But every **Lord's Day** . . . gather yourselves together and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one that is at variance with his fellow come together with you until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be profaned" (*Didache* 14 [A.D. 70]).

Next was Ignatius of Antioch who was a contemporary of the apostles. He wrote: "[T]hose who were brought up in the ancient order of things [i.e., Jews] have come to the possession of a new hope, **no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day…"** (*Letter to the Magnesians* 8 [A.D. 110]).

Another belief that separates Seventh Day Adventists from other Protestants is their view of the afterlife. They believe that upon death we go into an unconscious sleep. At the final judgment we will all be resurrected. The just will go off to eternal life with God. Those consigned to hell will burn until they die. At this point they will cease to exist. Adventists believe that the fires of hell are eternal. However, they do not believe that the punishments received there are eternal. To support their claims, they will appeal to various Old Testament verses. For instance:

> I said in my heart with regard to the sons of men that God is testing them to show them that they are but beasts. For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts; for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again. **Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward, and the spirit of the beast goes down to the earth** (Ecclesiastes 3:18-21)?
>
> For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward; but the memory of them is lost… Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10).

All the ideas expressed in Ecclesiastes are not necessarily God's. Even the verse used in chapter three to promote the Adventist view begins with the author saying: "I said in my heart." Also, look at what verse 21 says: "**Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward, and the spirit of the beast goes down to the earth."** Obviously, these are the musings of the author and not biblical doctrine. God knows all. He does not need to wonder about anything. Elsewhere in Ecclesiastes, Solomon acknowledges that God has a plan but that he does not know exactly what it is. Consider the following:

> He has made everything beautiful in its time; also, he has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

The purpose of the book of Ecclesiastes is not to reveal the mind of God but to show us that earthly solutions are inadequate. For Solomon, the obvious answer to all our problems is God. The book of Ecclesiastes anticipates the coming of the Messiah. The lesson for Christians is that one should rely on Christ rather than self.

Many of the things that were not so clear in the Old Testament become clear in the New. The Bible itself tells us this: "… our savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and **brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel"** (2 Timothy 1:10).

And what does the Gospel say about the nature of hell? Matthew 25:46 says: "And they will go away into **eternal punishment,** but the righteous into eternal life." If the damned cease to exist, the punishment would not be eternal. Incidentally, if the occupants of hell are not eternal, why would the fires of hell be? Once everyone who was destined to go there went off into nonexistence, the flames would no longer be needed. The fact that the fires of hell are eternal indicates that the punishments received there are eternal. That there might be no doubt as to the true nature of hell; Peter borrows a word from Greek mythology to describe it. In 2 Peter 2:4 the word rendered as hell is Tartarus (Τάρταρος). Tartarus, is a place of eternal torment.

The early Church had no problem understanding the nature of hell. Justin Martyr wrote:

> No more is it possible for the evildoer, the avaricious, and the treacherous to hide from God than it is for the virtuous. Every man will receive the **eternal punishment** or reward which his actions deserve. Indeed, if all men recognized this, no one would choose evil even for a short time, knowing that he would incur **the eternal sentence of fire.** (*First Apology* 12 [**A.D. 151**]).

Luke 16:19-31 addresses the Adventist claim that the dead are unconscious in the grave until the second coming. In verse 22 both men die. In verse 23 we see that Lazarus is conscious and in heaven. We also see that the rich man is conscious and in hell. Adventists may be sincere in what they believe. But the evidence does not support their claims.

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Mormons

Mormonism was founded by Joseph Smith (1805-1844) who claimed to have had a vision from God when he was a young man. He claims he asked God which church was the true church. Supposedly God told him that they were all corrupt and that he was being chosen to restore the Christian church. A few years later he claims to have discovered some golden plates written in what he called reformed Egyptian. God enabled him to translate them and shortly thereafter, in 1830, he organized the Mormon Church. Once the plates were translated an angel took them back. The translated plates are what constitute the book of Mormon.

Mormons will tell prospective converts that "we must find and accept the truth." On this we agree. But how can we be sure that something is true? Brigham Young once challenged his detractors with the following words: "Take up the Bible, compare the religion of the Latter-day Saints with it, and see if it will stand the test" (*Journal of Discourses* 16:46). I accept Mr. Young's challenge!

Among other things, the book of Mormon claims an Israelite family came to America about 600 BC. In time they multiplied into the millions. After His ascension, Jesus supposedly came to America to preach the "Gospel" to them. First, there is no archeological evidence to support this. Even Mormon leaders cannot agree on where in America all this took place. This is in stark contrast with the mountain of archeological evidence that bears witness to the events recorded in the Old and New Testaments. Second, it contradicts the Bible. The Bible tells us that Jesus ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9-11), He is only coming back once (1 Thessalonians 4:15), He must stay in heaven until that time (Acts 3:19-21), and when He comes, he will judge the living and the dead (Matthew 25:31-46). The living and the dead have not been judged. Hence Jesus has not come back yet.

Mormons believe that God the Father is a physical being. They believe that he was once like us in every respect. He was born of human parents and lived a faithful Mormon life. Consequently, after he died, he was resurrected by his own god and became a god himself. This gave him the right to create planets of his own. Together with his heavenly wives (resurrected Mormon women) he created spirit children who were then placed into the physical bodies of children born on earth. Mormons believe that they can follow the same path to godhood.

Psalm 93:2 refutes this idea when it refers to God as being eternal. John 4:24 refutes this idea when it proclaims, "God is Spirit." And Numbers 23:19 proclaims: "God is not man, that he should lie, neither the son of man that he should repent." Mormons are polytheists. That is, they believe there is more than one god. However, they only worship the god of this world. They see Jesus and the Holy Spirit as being subordinate gods to God the Father. But the Bible says there is only one God: "I am the first and I am the last: there is no God but me" (Isaiah 44:6).

Mormons believe that marriages sealed in a Mormon temple go on into eternity. But when asked about this very issue Jesus said that those in heaven "neither marry nor are given in marriage" (Luke 20:27-35). Curiously enough Mormons can have their eternal marriages unsealed so they can divorce. This is also a contradiction of Scripture. In Mark 10:10-12 Jesus calls divorce and remarriage adultery.

The present Mormon teaching on abortion not only contradicts the Bible but previous Mormon teaching as well. As late as 1988 they taught that abortion is wrong except to save the life of the mother. In 1992 they allowed women to procure abortions for cases of incest and in cases where the fetus is known to have severe defects.

The Book of Mormon teaches that being born with dark skin is a curse or punishment:

> And it came to pass that I beheld, after they had dwindled in unbelief, they became a dark, and loathsome, and a filthy people, full of idleness and all manner of abominations (*1 Nephi 12:23)*

That does not sound like divine revelation to me. It sounds more like Joseph Smith adopted an unfortunate but popular prejudice of his time (early 1800's). While blacks have been allowed into the Mormon priesthood as of 1978, nothing has been said to change the teaching that black skin is a punishment for sins committed in a pre-

existent state. The passages in the Book of Mormon and other Mormon Scriptures that deal with the issue remain. For those who might think such passages are figurative, consider the comments of Brigham Young:

> You see some classes of the human family that are black, uncouth, uncomely, disagreeable, and low in their habits, wild, and seemingly deprived of nearly all the blessings of the intelligence that is generally bestowed upon mankind. The first man that committed the odious crime of killing one of his brethren will be cursed the longest of any one of the children of Adam. Cain slew his brother. Cain might have been killed, and that would have put a termination to that line of human beings. This was not to be, and the Lord put a mark upon him, which is the flat nose and black skin (*Journal of Discourses* 7:290).

Concerning contradictions in Mormon teaching, we are told that the Mormon church is continuously receiving revelations from God. Church members are required to adhere only to current teachings. Apparently, Mormons believe that sometimes, God gets it wrong. Why else would He have to correct Himself?

Modern-day Mormons would not agree with Brigham Young's Scripture challenge. While they will appeal to Scripture, ultimately their proof lies in their feelings or their testimony as they put it. However, truth is verified by facts not by feelings, especially when you consider the fact that feelings are very easily manipulated. A young person may feel that smoking and drinking is right because it makes him feel independent or accepted by his peers. But the fact remains that those are bad choices that can produce some very negative consequences.

Verifying the truth of your beliefs with your feelings is a very clever tactic. How can you argue with someone's feelings? It's like telling them that they really don't like their favorite song. However, if you rely on facts alone your position can be shown to be true or false. And if the goal is to "find and accept the truth" as our Mormon friends tell us, it becomes the only legitimate means for verifying the truth.

Mormons are "in good standing" if they pay a 10% tithe to the church and refrain from coffee, tea, tobacco, and alcohol. They practice baptism for the dead so that even the deceased can become Mormons. They believe that Jesus and Lucifer are spirit brothers. For a time, polygamy was a permitted practice. In fact, it was seen as a duty. After secretly practicing polygamy for years Joseph Smith proclaimed that God had revealed this teaching to him. The teaching was changed due to pressure from the federal government in 1890.

Mormons believe that there are three levels to heaven. The top level is for faithful Mormons. The middle level is for not so faithful Mormons and non-believers who have led good lives. The bottom level is for those who have led evil lives. All three heavens will be filled with joy and peace though to different degrees. There is a place of outer darkness for Mormons who have been convinced of Mormon truth and then turned their backs on it. However, unrepentant murderers, rapists, and thieves will be going to the lowest heaven.

Some of what the Mormon leadership has taught is just silly. Such as the sun and the moon being inhabited (*Journal of Discourses* 13:270-271). I doubt that there are any Mormons who still believe this. However, this information originated from the same "divine authority" which established all the other teachings of Mormonism. At this point an old saying comes to mind: "consider the source." I suppose we could go on but I think we have seen enough to determine the following:

1. Mormonism contradicts the Bible
2. Mormonism contradicts itself
3. There is no archeological evidence for Mormonism's historical claims
4. Mormonism teaches and has taught reprehensible doctrines in the name of God

To claim that Mormonism was established by God is false. I believe that we can confidently conclude that Mormonism, rather than being a restoration of Christianity, is in fact a perversion of it.

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Freemasons

The Catholic Church and Freemasonry have been at odds for centuries. Eight popes have condemned it. Most Christian denominations have condemned it as well. Christianity and Freemasonry hold contrary beliefs. Consequently, Catholics are forbidden to join the Lodge in the strongest of terms. The Church's position is expressed in its *"Declaration on Masonic Associations."* It states in part: "Therefore the Church's negative judgment in regard to Masonic associations remains unchanged, since their principles have always been considered irreconcilable with the doctrine of the Church, and therefore membership in them remains forbidden. The faithful who enroll in Masonic associations are in a state of grave sin and may not receive Holy Communion."

Despite the Church's rejection of Freemasonry, Catholics are told that joining the Lodge will not compromise their faith. This is patently false. Freemasonry is itself a religion. To quote the *New Catholic Encyclopedia:* "Freemasonry displays all the elements of religion, and as such it becomes a rival to the religion of the Gospel. It includes temples and altars, prayers, a moral code, worship, vestments, feast days, the promise of reward and punishment in the afterlife, a hierarchy, and initiative and burial rites" (vol. 6, page 137).

Masons claim that they are forbidden to even discuss religion. One might be inclined to believe that such a rule exists for the sake of keeping religion out of the Lodge. But it actually serves to keep Masons from challenging the unorthodox teachings of Freemasonry. Much of what is taught to Masons is of a religious nature. One could only challenge it from a religious standpoint. But Masons are not allowed to discuss their religion. As a result, their teachings are never questioned. This, of course, creates a problem. The longer someone is exposed to an ideology, the more likely it is that they will accept it. Thus, the danger of a Christian compromising his faith in Jesus, while a Mason, is very real.

Masonic authorities, such as Albert Mackey, Albert Pike and Henry Coil, all admit that Freemasonry is a religion.

> In Albert G. Mackey's "*Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*," you will find the following: "The religion of Masonry is cosmopolitan, universal…" (volume 1, page 301).
>
> Henry Wilson Coil writes: "Many Freemasons make this flight [to heaven] with no other guarantee of a safe landing than their belief in the religion of Freemasonry" (*A Comprehensive View of Freemasonry* page 186).
>
> "*Morals and Dogma*" has been called "the most profound Masonic work written in the U.S." In it, Albert Pike proclaims: "Every Masonic Lodge is a temple of religion and its teachings are instructions in religion" (page 213). And, "Masonry…is the universal, eternal, immutable religion" (page 219).

One of the religious principles taught by Freemasonry that is unacceptable to Christians is the idea that all religions are the same (Indifferentism). At the front of a Masons Bible there is an article titled *"The Great Light in Masonry"* written by Joseph F. Newton. It states: "For Masonry knows what so many forget, that **religions are many, but religion is one…** Therefore it [Masonry] invites to its altar men of all faiths, knowing that if they use different names for the nameless one of a hundred names, **they are yet praying to the one God and Father of all."** But Masonic writings reject the God of the Bible.

> Albert Pike writes: "If our conceptions of God are those of the ignorant, narrow minded, and vindictive Israelite…we feel that it is an affront and an indignity to [God]" (*Morals and Dogma* page 223).
>
> Coil refers to the biblical God as "a partisan tribal God" and implies that such a God-concept is far inferior to the "God of Masonry" (*Coils Masonic Encyclopedia* page 516).

If men of all faiths worship the same God, why denounce the God of the Bible? Maybe what the Lodge really means to say is that men of all faiths will worship one god once they have been hoodwinked into embracing the so

called "god of Masonry." Of course, this would be a violation of the first Commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3).

Those outside of Masonry are said to be in "darkness." Through Masonry one is supposedly brought to "light." Light, among other things, refers to "truth and wisdom" (*The Encyclopedia of Freemasonry* by Albert Mackey, Volume 1, page 446). However, Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would lead the apostles into all truth (John 16:13). He also told them to preach it to the world (Mark 16:15), not to keep it secret.

In the higher degrees of the Scottish Rite, "light" consists of a Mason being exposed to Pagan beliefs and practices. "For example, he is introduced to the Egyptian deities Osiris, Isis, Horus, and Amun; to the Scandinavian deities Odin, Frea and Thor; to Hindu, Greek and Persian deities and to Jewish Kabbalism [i.e. occultism] …" (*A Study of Freemasonry,* Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1993).

The ritual for the 30th degree of the Scottish Rite, Southern Jurisdiction, is the most problematic for Catholics. During the ritual candidates are told, "And, finally, keep aloof from uniting yourself with any sectional, political, or sectarian religious organization whose principles can in any way bias your mind or judgment, or in the slightest degree trammel with obligations and the vows you have just made." The Catholic Church forbids membership in Masonic associations. Certainly, this would tend to "bias your mind or judgment," or "trammel with the obligations and the vows you have just made" (*Christianity and American Freemasonry* by William J Whalen, page 92). To honor his oath, a Catholic Mason would have to leave his Church.

After the oath is taken, the candidate is shown a papal tiara (the pope's ceremonial headdress). He is then told the following: "This represents the tiara of the cruel and cowardly Pontiff, who sacrificed to his ambition, the illustrious order of those Knights Templar of whom we are the true successors. A crown of gold and precious stones ill befits the humble head of one who pretends to be the successor, the Vicar, of Jesus of Nazareth. It is therefore the crown of an impostor, and it is in the name of him who said, 'Neither be ye called masters' that we trample it under our feet." The candidates are then invited to trample on the papal tiara. All do so while brandishing daggers and shouting "Down with imposture" (*Christianity and American Freemasonry* by William J Whalen, page 92).

Upon achieving each degree, Masons must promise to keep the secrets of the Lodge under pain of the most hideous tortures. For example, upon receiving his first degree a Mason swears "in the presence of Almighty God" to keep the secrets of Masonry, binding himself "under no less penalty than that of having my throat cut across, my tongue torn out by its roots, and my body buried in the rough sands of the sea." The taking of such oaths is always wrong for a Christian. If he means what he says, he is guilty of serious sin. If he does not, he is taking the Lord's name in vain in violation of the second commandment (Exodus 20:7).

Many Masons join the Lodge for social reasons. They are unaware of or do not care about the religious aspects of Freemasonry. However, by virtue of their membership they lend support to the promotion of Masonic principals, and as previously noted they run the risk of unconsciously adopting some of those principals. For Catholics, there is also the ban on receiving communion. That in itself is tragic. Remember that Jesus said you must drink His blood and eat His flesh or you have no life in you (John 6:53). Freemasonry denies you that life.

And so, we find that any Catholic who becomes a Mason cannot help but compromise his faith. He violates it if he joins, because the Church forbids it. He violates it when he takes his first oath, because he disobeys the second Commandment. He violates it if he accepts the god of Freemasonry, because he disobeys the first Commandment. He violates it if he swears an oath against the pope, because he rejects the Vicar of Christ. Is it really possible that Masonic authorities are unaware of this?

To their credit, Masons are responsible for many works of charity. They operate homes for elderly Masons and their wives, as well as several children's hospitals that offer free medical care for those in need. For this they should be commended. But charity does not excuse deception and idolatry. Charity can and should be practiced apart from such acts.

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Divination

Ouija Boards, psychic hotlines, Tarot Cards, and ESP are some of the more common forms of Divination. We are told that these occult practices are nothing more than harmless entertainment. Some people even see them as a source of great comfort. But inevitably, these practices can produce a great deal of harm. How can that be, you may ask. What is wrong with letting people know that a deceased relative or friend is happy and in a better place? Isn't the ability to see the future a gift from God?

We know none of these practices are gifts from God. If they were, He would have told us so. We would also see those closest to Him utilizing these so-called gifts. But we see none of that. Instead, we see Him condemning these practices. The Scriptures are clear; for instance: "**Do not go to the mediums or consult fortune tellers**, for you will be defiled by them. I the Lord am your God" (Leviticus 19:31). The command is repeated later with more detail in the book of Deuteronomy:

> When you come into the land which the LORD, your God, is giving you, you shall not learn to imitate **the abominations of the peoples there**. Let there not be found among you anyone who immolates his son or daughter in the fire, **nor a fortune-teller, soothsayer, charmer, diviner, or caster of spells, nor one who consults ghosts and spirits or seeks oracles from the dead. Anyone who does such things is an abomination to the LORD, and because of such abominations the LORD, your God, is driving these nations out of your way** (18:9-12).

There is no ambiguity here. Fortune telling, consulting the dead etc.… "is an abomination to the Lord." An abomination is something that is sinful and disgusting. I think it is safe to say that God's gifts are not sinful and disgusting.

Occult practices are condemned in the New Testament as well. It also reveals the power behind them. In Acts 16:16-18 Paul encounters a slave girl who practiced divination. I believe this passage tells us all we need to know about the subject:

> As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave **girl who had a spirit of divination** and brought her owners much gain by soothsaying. She followed Paul and us crying: "These men are servants of the most-high God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." And this she did for many days. But **Paul was annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I charge you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.**

The girl was possessed by a spirit (demon) of divination, which Paul cast out. So according to Paul, divination is not a gift of God but an action of the devil. Unfortunately, many are deceived by the seeming pleasantness of their occult encounters. But that is nothing more than a deception. As the Scriptures tell us:

> …for **even Satan masquerades as an angel of light**. So, it is not strange that his ministers also masquerade as ministers of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds (2 Corinthians 11:14-15).

> False messiahs and false prophets will arise, and **they will perform signs and wonders** so great as to deceive, if that were possible, even the elect (Matthew 24:24).

The Early Church Fathers were unanimous in their condemnation of occult practices. One example comes from the writings of Lactantius:

> [Demons] brought to light astrology, and augury, and divination; and though these things are in themselves false, yet they themselves, the authors of evils, so govern and regulate them that they are believed to be true. . .. Thus, by their frauds they have drawn darkness over the human race, that truth

> might be oppressed, and the name of the supreme and matchless God might be forgotten (*Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 28 [A.D. 317]).

The seeming benefits of occult practices are what I would call "the worm on the hook." If you did not put a worm on a hook, you would never catch any fish. Satan is not stupid. He meets you where you are. Most people would not respond to the temptation to rob a bank or commit a murder. But they might accept an invitation to talk to their Uncle Fred who has been dead for ten years. If Satan cannot get you to submit to his influence willingly, he will try to get you to submit unwittingly.

On the surface talking to Uncle Fred does not seem harmful. But that is a false perception because you are not talking to Uncle Fred. You are talking to a demon who is impersonating Uncle Fred, a demon who was around during Uncle Fred's lifetime. That is how he knows things that you thought only you and Uncle Fred knew. Whenever you open yourself to demonic influences, you are traveling in dangerous territory. Once you develop an appreciation for something, it is much easier to be drawn deeper into it. The deeper you are drawn into the occult the farther you are from God and the more likely it is that your faith will be harmed.

Interest in the occult is understandable. Man has a natural curiosity to know the future. However, "Knowledge of the future belongs to God alone. To ask it directly or indirectly from demons is to attribute to them a divine perfection and to ask them aid is to offer them a species of worship" (*Catholic Encyclopedia,* volume 5, page 50, © 1909). And of course, that would constitute idolatry. And the practice of idolatry is a violation of the first commandment: "I am the Lord your God: You shall not have strange Gods before me."

It is important to remember that Satan:

1. Uses the occult to pull people away from God
2. Is smarter than you
3. Knows your weak points
4. Is dedicated to your eternal damnation

Prolonged participation in occult practices can lead to demonic oppression or even possession. Furthermore, your involvement could be seen by others as an endorsement which may result in their becoming involved. Occult practices include but are not limited to:

Ouija Boards	Astrological Horoscope	Fortune Telling
Psychic Hotlines	Past Life Regression	Numerology
ESP	Reading Tea Leaves	Crystal Gazing
Séances	Palm Reading	Clairvoyance

Any practice that seeks hidden knowledge via the spiritual realm can be included on this list. Needless to say, any occult practice, no matter how benign in appearance, should be avoided at all costs. The Catechism of the Catholic Church sums it up well:

> **All forms of divination are to be rejected**: recourse to Satan or demons, conjuring up the dead or other practices falsely supposed to 'unveil' the future. Consulting horoscopes, astrology, palm reading, interpretation of omens and lots, the phenomena of clairvoyance, and recourse to mediums all conceal a desire for power over time, history, and, in the last analysis, other human beings, as well as a wish to conciliate hidden powers. They contradict the honor, respect, and loving fear that we owe to God alone (*CCC* 2116).

In the end we have two choices. We can submit to a loving God or we can submit to the one who seeks our destruction.

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Reincarnation

Depending on the denomination, between 24% and 29% of Christians living in the US believe in reincarnation (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2009 survey). I find that odd as the idea that someone can come back and live another life is incompatible with anything found in Scripture or Christian thought. It is a foundational teaching of Christianity that we are born, we die, and then we are judged. After judgment, it's off to our eternal destination.

In Hebrews 9:27 we read: "Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." In Luke 23:39-43, one of the criminals crucified with Jesus admits that he was guilty of a crime and deserving of his punishment. And yet Jesus says to him: "Today you will be with me in paradise." No mention of him needing to work out his karma. You need to get it right the first time, or it's game over.

The Bible is very explicit as to what happens to those who make the wrong choices in life:

> Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

Different versions of reincarnation are taught depending on who you follow. Some believe reincarnation takes place immediately upon death. Others say it takes hundreds of years. In an interview with a South African reporter, Swami Bhaktivedanta of India explained some of his teaching on reincarnation. He said that: "Each individual gets another body at the moment of death, but that the body may not be a human one." The swami further explained:

> There are 8,400,000 different forms of life, and an individual can enter any one off them according to his or her mental condition at death. "If we cultivate the mode of goodness, then we are promoted to the higher planetary system, where there is a better standard of life. If we cultivate the mode of passion, then we will remain at the present stage. But if out of ignorance we commit sinful activities and violate natures laws, then we will be degraded to animal or plant life. Then again, we must evolve to the human form, a process that may take millions of years (*Back to Godhead* II. 2, pg. 5).

In the U.S., you can get a sanitized version of reincarnation. And we are told; we can benefit from the knowledge gained in our other incarnations for a fee. A special practitioner can help us retrieve this information. Brandi Fleck, a life coach from Tennessee, highly recommends past life regressions. She said in part:

> Some argue that a past life is really a parallel life because the true nature of time isn't real or linear. I tend to agree. The nature of a soul incarnating is such that you could incarnate in this modern-day life first before incarnating to an ancient civilization (even on a different planet or in a different galaxy), and in each current life you experience, you can call on the knowledge from any of the others because they're all connected by your soul.

Apparently, Americans can only reincarnate as people or space aliens. That makes sense. Who wants to pay a hefty fee only to find you were a cabbage or a dung beetle in a past life. Not very impressive, and probably not too good for business either.

So, what is the purpose of reincarnation? One view contends the goal is for the soul to reach full self-realization. Your karma is then obliterated. Once fully aware you can choose the next stage of your spiritual evolution. And that could include entering the birth and rebirth cycle to help others. Another view holds that your passions will be extinguished, and you will be liberated from all suffering. You will no longer experience the birth and rebirth cycle.

How does karma work? We are told it is a fundamental law of the universe. A law implies a lawgiver. Who or what enforces this universal law? Who or what is keeping track of millions of life forms and determining their next move? If reincarnation is a natural process, how is it that it is happening now? Karma, we are told, is an evolutionary journey. It takes a certain amount of time to complete the process. The amount of time may vary from one person to the next. But it is always a finite process. And that presents us with a problem.

Time is infinite. That means it has no beginning or end. All finite processes need a day one. There is no day one. Therefore, no matter how far back in time you went, any natural finite process would be in the past. Thus, it can never exist in the present. But you might say, we are finite beings and we exist in the present. That is true. And it is possible because an all-powerful eternal being put us here. We call Him God. He is the supreme lawgiver. And He enforces the laws that He creates. For God there is evidence, for reincarnation there is not.

But many claim there is evidence. They will point to the above-mentioned past life regression sessions. The process reveals information that the person could not have known on their own. Intimate details and experiences of people who died long before they were born. There is also the claim that ancient yogis were able to achieve high states of consciousness where they could actually perceive many of the processes that happen after death. They wrote about these revelations and passed them on.

Isn't that proof? No, it is not. It is called divination. The information comes from demons. And we know that because, divination, in all its forms, is a major cause of demonic oppression, demonic obsession, and demonic possession. When such individuals submit to an exorcism, the demons have to reveal themselves. Once revealed, they have no choice but to acquiesce to the demands of the exorcist. And that is because: At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Philippians 2:10-11).

To be clear, believing in reincarnation is not divination. Seeking confirmation through occult practices is. The main tool used for discovering past lives is a form of hypnotherapy. Submitting to any type of hypnosis is dangerous as it opens up spiritual doors. Doors that demons can access. In the Old Testament, practicing divination is called sin (1 Samuel 15:23). In the New Testament, divination is described as an interaction with demons (Acts 16:16-18). God warned the Israelites not to indulge in such practices:

> When you come into the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, **anyone who practices divination**, a soothsayer, or an auger, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, **or a medium**, or a wizard, **or a necromancer**. For whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord (Deuteronomy 18:9-12).

In India, karma is used to justify the caste system. Members of the lower castes have no hope of bettering themselves. The upper castes see no need to help the unfortunate members of the lower castes. To do so would interfere with their karma. So, watching members of a lower caste starve is seen as acceptable. But Jesus teaches us that we must feed the poor and clothe the naked or face judgment (Matthew 25:31-46). Belief in karma also creates a false sense of security. Why be virtuous now when I can take care of it in the next life?

Taken to its logical conclusion, this belief in karma gets even more disturbing. Should we stop prosecuting rapists? Are rape victims just working out their karma? Should we be thinking: "Better she gets it over with now. This way here she won't have to deal with it in the next life." Is the rapist committing an evil act, or is he performing a service for karma?

In John 9:1-12 we read of an occasion where Jesus and His disciples came upon a man who was born blind. "And His disciples asked Him, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him."

Some have speculated that belief in reincarnation is the result of man's feeling that there must be more to our existence than the short time we spend between birth and death. I believe that is a reasonable assumption. However, reincarnation is not the answer. Jesus Christ is the answer. As St. Augustine said: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you" (*Confessions* [A.D. 397-400]). Therefore: Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31).

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Scandals in the Church

In January 2002, the Catholic Church was rocked by a horrific scandal. It would eventually be revealed that several Catholic priests were guilty of raping minors under their supervision. Understandably, the public was outraged. Lawsuits were filed, Church assets were sold off to settle claims, and some people left the Church. The actions of the guilty were unthinkable and indefensible. To be sure, anyone found guilty of such crimes should be locked up until God comes for them. These individuals have caused tremendous harm to their victims and to the cause of Christ. Their actions were outrageous, and no effort should be spared to prevent this sort of thing from ever happening again.

I was recently asked how I could be so committed to the Catholic faith in light of the scandals. I responded by saying that the scandals actually strengthened my faith. In fact, I think that this is a perfectly reasonable reaction. To begin with, my faith is in God and not men. Sometimes I think we forget that priests are human and thus sinners. At the end of the day, they are just as capable of offending God as the rest of us. Do not get me wrong, most of the priests I know are very dedicated to their work and are prayerful, holy men. But being a priest does not guarantee anything. And as we all learned from Judas, not even being hand-picked by Jesus guarantees anything.

So why would the sins of a small group of priests strengthen my faith? These individuals graduated from seminaries where they studied Scripture and theology. In other words, they knew more about God than most people. And yet they still committed some of the vilest acts imaginable. It is only by the grace of God that we become the people that God wants us to be. Obviously, these men had rejected God's grace. I came to the realization that if those who know the most about God cannot make it without His grace, no one can.

The requirements to become an astronaut are tough. And very few applicants are accepted. But even if the smartest astronaut attempts a spacewalk without being tethered to the spacecraft, he will be lost. And so are we without God's grace. And the best place to receive that grace, is in the Church He established.

The Bible tells us that God sent His only Son to die for our sins? Practically speaking, what does that mean? First, it means that we are all sinners. Second, it means that we all need to be saved from our sins. How is that done? Once again, by the grace Jesus offers us from the cross. The same grace that saves us from sins committed in the past can help us to avoid sins in the future. As the Scripture says "For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. **Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need**" (Hebrews 4:15-16).

God respects everyone's free will. If you accept Him and allow Him to work in you, you will be who He wants you to be. If you reject Him, you are on your own. And that is not a good place to be. Lucifer was the most intelligent being that God ever created. And yet he fell from grace due to his pride. Solomon was given more wisdom than any other human being and yet he sinned grievously due to the influence of others. If the smartest and the wisest of God's creation cannot make it on their own, once again, no one can.

Some critics have said that the scandal is the result of clerical celibacy. But that argument does not make any sense. Let us assume for a moment that at least a part of their premise is correct. Suppose we have all these priests who want women but cannot have them. Wouldn't that make them long for women? How does not having a woman make a man want a boy? I thought being a homosexual would cause that? Besides, we are talking about rape here. Anyone who has a rape mentality has a problem that has nothing to do with being married or not being married. Rape is a crime of violence; it is not an act of love.

The presence of hypocrites in the Church is disturbing, but it should not totally shock us. Jesus Himself told us that they would be with us until the end:

> Another parable he put before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. So, when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared

> also. And the servants of the householder came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then has it weeds?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he said, 'No; lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'" (Matthew 13:24-30).

Now that does not mean we should not send abusers to jail once they are discovered. By all means, lock them up. We have an absolute duty to protect the innocent. The message here is that God is not going to hurl down a bolt of lightning every time someone betrays Him. But rest assured, God is very much aware of who the weeds are. And no matter what anyone thinks, justice will be served. He will see to that. In the meantime, we are still called to walk with Him in the manner that He prescribed.

No one is forced to be a priest. Furthermore, the issue of celibacy is discussed during the discernment process. Any man who feels he cannot live without a woman would be kept out of the seminary. I personally believe that the offending priests were not at all interested in women. I also do not believe they were good men gone bad. I believe they were men who had serious problems long before they were priests. I suspect they just used the Church as a place to hide and prey on those entrusted to their care.

While betrayal by church leaders is a great disappointment, it should never cause us to abandon Jesus or His Church. To do so would be like condemning hospitals because people get sick. The logical response to sickness should be to embrace the cure. Likewise, the logical response to sin should be to embrace the cure. And as we said before, the cure for sin is God's grace. And we receive grace through His Church. Denying ourselves God's gift of grace serves no good purpose. And it certainly does not hurt the abusers. In fact, it pleases the father of all abusers (Satan).

If men fall and our faith fails it is because our faith was in men and not in God. Benedict Arnold was a trusted American general during the Revolutionary War. He attempted to betray the United States and was caught. His treason was a discredit to himself and not the American cause. Likewise, those who are guilty of abusing their positions in the Church are a discredit to themselves and not to the cause of Christ. By choosing the path he did Benedict Arnold ceased being a servant of the United States and instead he became an agent of the enemy. Likewise, by choosing the path they did the abusing priests ceased being ambassadors for Christ and instead became agents of the enemy. For all intents and purposes, they were no longer Catholic. For they have become, by their own choice, sons of Judas.

Were these men hypocrites? Absolutely! Were these men criminals? Absolutely! But let us not fall into the demonic trap of judging the faith by the actions of those that do not practice it. Look instead at those who embrace the faith to see what authentic Catholicism really is. Father Maximilian Kolbe volunteered to take the place of another man who was condemned to death in Auschwitz. Fr. Damien of Molokai worked with lepers in Hawaii until he himself died from the disease. And then there are the countless other priests who tirelessly serve their parishes. Is their work to be discarded because of those who pretend to be shepherds, but in reality, are ravenous wolves?

Jesus said that we should judge a tree by its fruit. So, what is the fruit of Catholicism practiced? The hungry are fed; the poor are clothed and sheltered. We find the sick being comforted and cared for. And this does not just happen in our own neighborhoods. Some go off to the mission fields where they forgo family and the comforts of home for the sole purpose of helping those in need.

On the spiritual front there are many who have given their lives to preach the life-giving news of the Gospel. Those who truly embrace the faith find that the grace of God compels them to see others in the same loving way that that God sees them. When practiced, Catholicism produces some truly wonderful fruit. The vile acts of a few criminals can never be justified. But how much more tragic would their crimes become if we allowed them to rob us of our faith.

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Hypocrites in the Church

As a child I looked for any excuse I could find to get out of doing some of the things that were expected of me. Almost any excuse would do. "Other kids don't have to do it" was one of my favorites. And, of course, there were many others. As I got older my human nature did not change. However, my excuses got more sophisticated. I learned that with a little creativity you can pretty much justify anything. However, once I got serious about my relationship with God, things begin to change. The old excuses just did not work anymore.

One of the excuses people give for leaving or rejecting the Church is that there are hypocrites in it. And of course, that is true, there are some hypocrites among us. But none of this should be a surprise as Jesus predicted that such would be the case:

> Not everyone who says to me" Lord, Lord" shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers" (Matthew 7:21-23).

Admittedly, not everyone who leaves the Church because of the hypocrites is looking for an excuse. Some are genuinely hurt and confused. They do not realize that hypocrisy is a weapon Satan uses to attack the Church and thus them. They feel compelled to leave and so they do. But we should not view hypocrisy any differently than we do other serious sins. No one abandons his Church because the guy in the next pew robbed a bank. And that is because we realize, at least in this case, that an individual is responsible for his crime and not his church.

Let us look at this another way. Imagine you are out of shape and a bit overweight. You realize you need to exercise and reduce your fat and sugar intake. However, due to human nature you decide to do this with other like-minded people. The mutual support will help everyone stick to the plan. You approach some of your neighbors and some enthusiastically agree to join you. Others want no part of it because they prefer to enjoy their lives without any thought of the future.

And so, with great hopes you begin your new adventure. The new system, is simple but it is not without its challenges. And that is because eating the unhealthy foods was enjoyable. No one forgot how good it was to eat a hot fudge sundae or a giant piece of cheesecake after a pasta dinner. And sitting on a couch watching videos is so much more fun than sweating and exercising. But despite this, everyone in the group seemed positive and the new enterprise got off to a good start. As time went on, you began to see some positive changes. You noticed that you were losing weight and starting to feel better. You also noticed that some of the others were doing well.

As time went on, it was discovered that some of the people in your group had been cheating. One lady was caught raiding a secret stash of chocolate. A man was found gorging himself on cheesecake. The most disturbing violation was the discovery that one of the men who helped you organize the group was secretly eating a pound of bacon and a dozen jelly donuts for breakfast every morning. Worse yet, he had not been seen at the gym in months. The diet hypocrites began to put on weight. When the non-group members saw this, some of them assumed the new diet and exercise program was a waste of time. Others who had been struggling with the program used this as an excuse to cheat, or in some cases, to quit the group altogether.

Would it make any sense for people to claim that the new diet and exercise program had been discredited? Of course not. Those who gained weight were no longer participating and thus only discredited themselves. What speaks to the credibility of the diet and exercise program are the results attained by those who were actually on it. Likewise, what speaks to the credibility of Christianity are the results attained by those who actually practice it.

Sin, just like the unhealthy food, is enjoyable. And so, we struggle. Some just give up and embrace sin while pretending to be believers. These are the hypocrites. Others seek God for help. Consequently, they overcome sin

and they produce much good fruit. To the honest seeker this constitutes a compelling reason to embrace the faith. To the person looking for an excuse to abandon or reject the faith, all that matters is the hypocrite.

But why would anyone even want to be a hypocrite? Why not just leave the Church and embrace some other life style? I think there are a couple of reasons for this. I think for some, it never was a part of their plan. As life went on, they just succumbed to temptation and, for the most part, kept it secret.

Others have never been committed to the Church. They purposely infiltrate her with the purpose of discrediting her. They know they cannot change the Church's teachings, so they try to tarnish her image. The Bible refers to people in this second category as "wolves in sheep's clothing" (Matthew 7:15).

Because we are all fallen creatures, we all sin to some degree. As the saying goes, nobody is perfect. Some will object to being classified as fallen creatures. But if you are not perfect it means there is something wrong with you. A true follower of Christ admits that he is a sinner and seeks the help of his God in putting to death the sin that is in him. He may struggle and fall but He always gets up and reaches for the hand of God. These are not hypocrites. A hypocrite is one who embraces his sin privately but portrays himself publicly as a faithful Christian.

The Church is not a society of perfect people. It is an organization that was created to help imperfect people. It can be likened to a spiritual hospital. And like any hospital you have minor cases and major cases. You also have some patients who accept and some who refuse treatment. But the bottom line is that we all need the treatment. Is your local church full of hypocrites or maybe even run by hypocrites? Find another church if you must. But do not leave Jesus because of Judas.

While our little story concerning the diet is useful in illustrating the situation in the Church, we must admit that it is not a perfect analogy. With the diet, avoiding the unhealthy foods was a matter of one's own will power. In Christianity, avoiding sin is accomplished through the power of God's grace. He does it all. We just open our hearts to Him. In Hebrews 12:15 we read: "See to it that no one fail to obtain the grace of God."

Those who isolate themselves from the Church have a much harder time getting to heaven. It is not that it is impossible, it is just harder. A wise priest once told me that "all human relationships are about one thing; getting each other to heaven." And despite the hypocrites, the Church does the best job of equipping us for that.

It is one thing to reject Christianity based on a misunderstanding. Such individuals may not be culpable. But it is quite another thing for someone to use the bad behavior of another person as an excuse to abandon or reject the faith. An excuse is not a reason. An excuse is something we use consciously or unconsciously to justify a bad decision or behavior. And just what is in the heart of a man who uses excuses? Keep in mind that we are judged by what is in our hearts. The apostle Paul tells us as much:

> Therefore, do not pronounce judgement before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then every man will receive his commendation from God (1 Corinthians 4:5).

Being honest with ourselves and God is always the best policy. Reality will always be reality even if we deny it. Remember that the Church was established to continue Jesus' mission to save sinners. Despite any problems she may have, she continues in her mission. To quote St. Thomas Becket: "Remember then how our fathers worked out their salvation; remember the sufferings through which the Church has grown, and the storms the ship of Peter has weathered because it has Christ on board."

So, despite the presence of hypocrites, the Church still has Christ as its head. And as such she remains a sure guide.

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Our Debt to the Catholic Church

I make no secret of the fact that I am a Catholic. When speaking to friends and acquaintances, the subject inevitably comes up. A few years back a friend and I went to lunch. As we were sitting down, she said: “How was your weekend? What did you do?” I told her that I had attended an event at my church. I did not elaborate nor did I say that she should have been there. She was silent for a moment and then she said, a bit defensively: “Well maybe Christianity works for you but it does not work for me. Do not judge me.”

I was surprised by her response. She knew from past conversations that I was active in my church. I said to her: “I am not judging you. I just answered your question.” I said no more and the conversation shifted to other subjects. As the day wore on, I began to think about what she said. I had heard it many times before. When people say that Christianity does not work for them, what they really mean is that they do not want to be a part it. Whether or not it “works for them” is another subject altogether.

Before Jesus came along, women and children were the property of men. If I were to ask my friend which system worked better for her, what do you suppose she would say? I would wager that she prefers the present system. I would also assume that she appreciates the fact that there are hospitals available to provide for her medical needs. The Catholic Church established the first hospitals in response to the Biblical mandate to care for the sick. Thomas E. Woods notes that by the fourth century most cities had church sponsored hospitals. Even monasteries served as providers of medical care (*How the Catholic Church Built Western Civilization* page 176*)*.

For centuries people lived hard lives with few creature comforts. But today, thanks to science, we live lives that people in the distant past could not even imagine. Before the Catholic Church came along beliefs concerning nature and the world around us were, for the most part, nothing more than superstition. But the Church changed all that. You see, the Bible tells us that the universe in which we live is governed by laws. For instance; When speaking to Job God said the following: "Do you know the ordinances of the heavens; can you put into effect their plan on the earth?" (Job 38:33). And in the book of Wisdom, we read: "But you [God] have disposed all things by measure and number and weight" (Wisdom 11:20).

Now if God created the universe to operate according to rational laws, it seemed only natural that those laws could be understood and harnessed. Consequently, Catholics began to discover, study, and use the laws of nature that Scripture alluded to. And thus, the study of science began. The Jesuits contributed heavily to the study of science. In *"The Jesuits: Missions, Myths and Histories"* Jonathan Wright notes:

> They had contributed to the development of pendulum clocks, pantographs, barometers, reflecting telescopes and microscopes, to scientific fields as various as magnetism, optics, and electricity. They observed, in some cases before anyone else, the colored bands on Jupiter’s surface, the Andromeda nebula and Saturn’s rings. They theorized about the circulation of the blood (independently of Harvey), the theoretical possibility of flight, the way the moon affected the tides, and the wave-like nature of light.

The Jesuits were wise enough to record the results of their research into encyclopedias. Thus, others were able to benefit from their work. The Jesuits were responsible for spreading scientific knowledge to China, India, Lebanon, The Philippines, Africa, South America, and Central America.

Thomas E. Woods relates that "Roger Bacon, a Franciscan who taught at Oxford, was admired for his work in mathematics and optics, and is considered to be a forerunner of the modern scientific method" (*How the Catholic Church Built Western Civilization,* page 94).

After the fall of Rome, it was the Catholic Church that preserved literacy and education. The barbarians who ruled after the fall of Rome had no interest in preserving education or any of the ancient literature. Monasteries produced thousands of books and preserved many others. Schools were established in cathedrals. These cathedral schools

would become the first universities complete with degrees and accreditation. Many convents and monasteries established their own schools.

From the beginning of its existence the Catholic Church has led the way in charitable giving. This of course is the natural result of Christ's call to care for the less fortunate. In a column for the *National Catholic Register* Andrew McNair revealed some interesting statistics. He writes in part:

> Every year, more than 9.5 million Americans in need turn to one of 1,400 charitable organizations run by the Catholic Church.
>
> The Church runs more than 600,000 soup kitchens and stocks more than 2 million food banks and pantries. The Church provides temporary shelter for children and families, battered women, senior citizens, and others. At present, about 110,858 people depend on these shelters for help.
>
> Catholic counselors and counseling agencies help close to 700,000 families, individuals, and groups.… Catholic housing services help around 67,000 homeless find and keep a permanent place to live. And Catholic neighborhood-support services sponsor youth centers, summer camps, sports programs, and senior citizens centers; at present, nearly 300,000 people are enrolled in these services. Close to 80,000 girls and women are being served by Catholic pregnancy services.

In the 12th century the Church began to develop its system of canon law. This would eventually provide the foundation for Western Law. Prior to this, law in medieval Europe consisted of custom and some statutory law. Western Law was based on rules of evidence and rational procedures. Later, in the 16th century, and in response to the mistreatment of natives in the New World (North America), Fr. Francisco de Vitoria established the basis for international law. This reflected the biblical teaching that all men are created equal (Galatians 3:28).

Fr. Nicholas Steno is credited with formulating most of the principles of modern geology. Catholic monks were the movers and shakers in developing agriculture. The Benedictines made great strides in this area. They turned swamps into fertile land. Through their effort's peasants learned about irrigation. Thomas E. Woods notes that "The monks were also the first to work toward improving cattle breeds" (*How the Catholic Church Built Western Civilization,* page 31).

The Church was instrumental in the development of Astronomy, Mathematics, Banking, Chemistry, Architecture, Economics, Culture and Art. Pope Sylvester II is responsible for the Christian world throwing out Roman Numerals in favor of the Hindu-Arabic numbers that we use today. He also invented the clock so that we would no longer have to rely on sundials. Space does not permit me to list all the contributions that the Church has made to Western Civilization. Suffice it to say, the list, as Mr. Woods and others so ably illustrate, is quite long. It is important to note that the Church's contributions to Western Civilization were a direct result of its beliefs and practices.

Despite all this, attacks on the Catholic Church have never been in short supply. The Church's critics have been maligning her and predicting her demise for centuries. While those same critics fade off into history one by one, the Church continues her mission, sometimes shaken, but never defeated.

The miracles performed by Jesus give credence to His message. In like manner the Church's tremendous contributions to Western Civilization give credence to her teachings. Jesus said we should judge a tree by its fruit (Matthew 7:15-20). I think it is clear at this point that the Catholic Church produced some pretty good fruit. Fruit that advanced the cause of mankind. And that should work for anyone.

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Knowledge is Not Enough!

Addressing a crowd of 40,000 people, Pope John Paul II said the following: "Through the Holy Spirit, Christians are brought into a **personal relationship with God**" (General Audience September 20, 2000). Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, speaking to a group of religion teachers and catechists stressed the same point. He said: "Catechesis is not so much a matter of transmitting knowledge as it is a question of leading people to **a relationship with Jesus**." Later as Pope he said:

> We can be witnesses only if we know Christ first hand, and not only through others—from our own life, **from our personal encounter with Christ**. (Pope Benedict XVI, Vatican City, January 20th, 2010).

Pope Francis has made similar statements, he wrote: "I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed **personal encounter with Jesus Christ**, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; **I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day**" (*Evangelii Gaudium* 3).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church is just as explicit:

> Great is the mystery of the faith!" The Church professes this mystery in the Apostles' Creed and celebrates it in the sacramental liturgy, so that the life of the faithful may be conformed to Christ in the Holy Spirit to the glory of God the Father. This mystery, then, requires that the faithful believe in it, that they celebrate it, and **that they live from it in a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God** (*CCC* 2558).

The apostle John tells us that those who worship God must worship Him: "in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). So, a proper understanding of the truth is vital but in no way is it enough. Christianity is much more than a collection of facts. The loving God who created us desires to be in a relationship with us. When asked which commandment was the greatest, Jesus replied: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37).

You can read about, or be told about someone and come to appreciate who they are. However, you can't truly love them solely based on what you know. You need to meet them and get to know them in a personal way. In the same way you can't really love God unless you get to know Him in a personal way. Paul refers to the Church as "the bride of Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2). Paul's marriage analogy is a good one as it illustrates the type of relationship that should exist between God and Man. A true marriage is a covenant. A covenant involves a total giving of oneself to another. And that is just what Jesus did on the cross. We return that love by humbly submitting our lives to Him.

Some people understand the importance of having a relationship with God. But unfortunately, they stop there. I have actually heard people say: "I have no need of doctrine. All I need is Jesus." Yes, all you need is Jesus. But Jesus is a person who taught many things. And you cannot separate Him from what He taught. As the Scripture says: "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). And of course, that would include all the teachings contained in Scripture. Paul warns Timothy about a time in the future when people would "**not tolerate sound doctrine**" (2 Timothy 4:3). He tells Titus to: "**Exhort with sound doctrine** and refute opponents" (Titus 1:9). And again to: "**Teach what befits sound doctrine**" (Titus 2:1).

This idea of "No doctrine, just Jesus" often results in people being led by their feelings rather than the Holy Spirit. While the Holy Spirit certainly does guide us in a personal way, it is sound doctrine that confirms that the guidance is from the Holy Spirit and not from those who would deceive or manipulate us. When we focus on our feelings we can end up with a god of our own making, a god who is subject to our desires rather than a God who: "leads us in paths of righteousness" (Psalm 23:3). We have only two choices in life; We can say yes to God or we can say no to God. But under no circumstances can we ever tell Him how to be God. And that is just what we do when we ignore sound doctrine. Remember the last thing Jesus said to his apostles was: "Go therefore and make disciples of all

nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you**; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

In Psalm 42:1, David expresses his need for God: "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God." It is perfectly natural for those who have a relationship with God to long for Him. But where does such longing come from? Paul gives us the answer in Philippians 4:13, where he says, "I can do all things in Him [Christ] who strengthens me." That would include everything that is expected of the believer. Not only avoiding sin and being charitable, but even the simple act of recognizing and desiring God. We are enabled to obey Christ by His grace working in us. We do nothing that God requires of us on our own. Indeed, Jesus tells us as much in John 15:5: "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, **for apart from me you can do nothing."**

How do we abide in Christ? As we saw earlier Pope John Paul II said that we are brought into a relationship with God through the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit is free for the asking. Jesus tells us as much in Luke 11:9-13:

> And I tell you, ask, and it will be given you, seek, and you will find, knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent, or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him! (Luke 11:9-13).

Now it is true that we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit at Baptism. However, like any gift, it is useless if it remains unused. For instance, there are some who claim to embrace the faith. However, it seems to have little or no impact on their lives. Faith demands a response. We must consciously cooperate with the grace received at Baptism as well as the grace we receive through the sacraments and prayer. Only then can we become "a new creation in Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Bottom line: the more open we are to God's grace the more He manifests His power in our lives.

We are often inspired by the lives of the great saints. We sometimes tend to think that they are different from us. That somehow, they had a special invitation to holiness that the rest of us have not received. But that is not true. We are not only called to holiness; we are also called to a special purpose. We may not all be called to do the same thing, but we are all called to do something. Blessed John Henry Newman wrote:

> Realize it, my brethren; - everyone who breathes, high and low, educated and ignorant, young and old, man and woman, has a mission, has a work. We are not sent into this world for nothing; we are not born at random; . . . God sees every one of us; He creates every soul, He lodges it in the body, one by one, for a purpose. He needs, He deigns to need, every one of us. He has an end for each of us; we are all equal in His sight, and we are placed in our different ranks and stations, not to get what we can out of them for ourselves, but to labor in them for Him. As Christ has His work, we too have ours. (*Discourses to Mixed Congregations* 6:111).

Knowledge apart from grace can be harmful. If we have the wrong attitude while witnessing to others we can turn them away from Christ. Evangelization should always be an act of love. It should never include anything which belittles another. The Holy Spirit enables us to see things as God sees them and to love people as He loves them. We will never be perfect in this life. But with the aid of the Holy Spirit, we will be the best that we can be.

So, what's the secret? How does one go about establishing a dynamic, personal relationship with God? You can pray for it. But the sentiments expressed in your prayer must exist in your heart. Realize that you are a sinner and humble yourself before your God. Ask for His forgiveness and guidance. If your prayer is genuine, God will come into your life in a dynamic way. If you truly desire Him, you will find Him. And when you do, you will know "the peace of God that surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7).

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The Early Church Fathers

The Early Church Fathers were the men who led the Church after the apostles died. Their writings are widely available, and are considered to be authentic by Catholic and non-Catholic scholars alike. Thus, they provide common ground for establishing the beliefs and practices of the early Church.

The earliest of the fathers are known as the “Apostolic Fathers.” They were the immediate successors to the Apostles. Four of them were disciples of one or more of the Apostles. Clement of Rome was a disciple of the apostles Peter and Paul. Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna were disciples of the Apostle John. Papias knew the apostle John and was a companion of Polycarp. Naturally we would expect that those who were personally taught by the Apostles would themselves believe and teach correctly.

A popular Protestant theory claims the church became corrupted shortly after 312 A.D. That is when the emperor Constantine converted and made Christianity the state religion. It is said that pagan converts came into the Church, bringing with them many of their pagan beliefs and practices. Consequently, the accepted pagan beliefs became the distinctive doctrines of Catholicism. Thus, the Catholic Church was born, and true Christianity was lost until the Reformation. But the Early Church Fathers tell us a different story.

In reading the Early Fathers we see a Church with bishops in authority over priests and deacons. We see a church that baptized infants and believed in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. We see a Church that believed in the primacy of Rome, the intercession of the saints in heaven, and the Immaculate Conception of Mary. Thus, we are led to the inescapable conclusion that the early Church, was the Catholic Church.

As you can imagine, the writings of the Early Fathers are especially helpful in refuting the Protestant claim that many Catholic doctrines were invented in later years. Although they are wrong concerning the age of Catholic doctrines, their reasoning is sound. If a teaching appears after the apostolic age without evidence of previous support, it must be false. Curiously enough they abandon this line of reasoning when it comes to many of their own beliefs. For instance, the doctrine of Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone) was created by Martin Luther in the mid 1500’s. The Protestant teaching on the Rapture was first taught in the late 1800’s, and the use of artificial contraception was first allowed in 1930.

It is important to note that some Catholic teachings existed in a primitive form during the early years. These teachings would develop over time. One example is the Doctrine of the Trinity. All its elements were present at the beginning, but it was not clearly defined the way it is today. This would not make it a late teaching as all the information was there from the beginning. Other doctrines were developed in this same way.

Also worthy of note is the fact that the Early Fathers occasionally disagreed on minor issues that were not yet settled by the Church. This does not present us with a problem as we do not claim that the fathers were infallible. While they were not infallible, they were unmistakably Catholic. Their writings clearly illustrate the fact that the early Church bore no resemblance to Protestantism.

John Henry Newman was one of the more famous converts to Catholicism. After studying the Early Fathers, he wrote: "The Christianity of history is not Protestantism. If ever there were a safe truth it is this, and Protestantism has ever felt it so; to be deep in history is to cease to be a Protestant" (*An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*).

Christianity was started by Jesus Christ 2000 years ago and it has existed for 2000 years. It did not go away for 1200 years and then come back. Indeed, that would have rendered Jesus’ words impotent. In Matthew 16:18 as He was establishing His Church, Jesus gave us a guarantee. He said: "I will build my Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." If the Protestant theory is correct, the gates of hell did some serious prevailing. And that would make Jesus Christ a liar. But of course, such is not the case.

As we noted above, the writings of the Early Church Fathers are considered to be authentic by Catholic and non-Catholic scholars alike. That is the good news. The bad news is that all too many Protestants read the Early Fathers in the same way they read the Bible; selectively. They focus on passages that appear to support their

arguments while ignoring those that do not. For example, the following passage authored by Athanasius is used to support the claim that he was a proponent of Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone):

> The Catholic Christians will neither speak nor endure to hear anything in religion that is a stranger to Scripture; it being an evil heart of immodesty to speak those things which are not written (*Exhort. ad Monachas*).

Note that Athanasius says, “nor endure to hear anything in religion that is a stranger to Scripture.” He is talking about doctrines that would contradict Scripture. Those are the things that he condemns that “are not’ written.” Sacred Tradition would not be included in that because Scripture tells us to “Hold Fast” to the Church’s oral traditions (2 Thessalonians 2:15). But you do not have to take my word for it. We can ask Athanasius about it.

Me: Is it true that you believe in the doctrine of Sola Scriptura?

Athanasius: Beyond these [Scriptural] sayings, let us look at the very tradition, teaching and faith of the Catholic Church from the beginning, which the Lord gave, the Apostles preached, and the Fathers kept. (*Four Letters to Serapion of Thmuis* 1:28 [A.D. 360]).

Me: Okay, so you are saying that it is from Sacred Tradition and Scripture that we learn those doctrines which were ordained by God for those who follow Him. But what is wrong with people interpreting the Scriptures for themselves?

Athanasius: But since they allege the divine oracles and force on them a misinterpretation, according to their private sense, it becomes necessary to meet them just so far as to vindicate these passages, and to show that they bear an orthodox sense, and that our opponents are in error (*Discourse Against the Arians* I:37 [A.D. 362]).

Me: You are right, people can and do misinterpret the Scriptures. In fact, now that you mention it, I seem to remember Peter telling us that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation (2 Peter 1:20). Logically then, an outside authority would be needed to assure us that we are interpreting the Scriptures properly. However, I still have people telling me they can do it completely on their own without the aid of a visible church.

Athanasius: Take thought of the Church, lest many of the little ones be injured on your account, and the others be given an occasion of withdrawing.... But if the organizing of the Churches is distasteful to you, and you do not think the ministry of the episcopate has its reward, why, then you have brought yourself to despise the Savior that ordered these things. I beseech you, dismiss such ideas, nor tolerate those who advise you in such a sense.... For the order the Lord has established by the Apostles abides fair and firm.... For if all were of the same mind as your present advisers, how would you have become a Christian, since there would be no bishops? Or if our successors are to inherit this state of mind, how will the Churches be able to hold together? Or do your advisers think that you have received nothing, that they despise it? If so surely, they are wrong (Letter 49:3-4 [A.D. 354]).

Me: A good point! How would the Churches be able to hold together if they abandon that one Church established by Christ. I believe the fractured state of Protestantism proves your point most convincingly. Would you like to expand on that?

Athanasius: So that for the future all men everywhere may say, “One Lord, one faith” (Ephesians 4:5). For as the psalmist says, what is so good or pleasant as for brethren to dwell in unity. But our dwelling is the Church, and our mind ought to be the same. For thus we believe that the Lord also will dwell with us, who says, 'I will dwell with them and walk in them ' and 'Here will I dwell for I have a delight therein.' But by 'here' what is meant but there where one faith and religion is preached? (*Letter to the People of Antioch* 1 [A.D. 362]).

Me: I agree, Church unity is an important part of God’s plan.

Athanasius: What then I have learned myself, and have heard men of judgment say, I have written in few words; but do you, remaining on the foundation of the Apostles, and holding fast the traditions of the Fathers, pray that now at length all strife and rivalry may cease, and the futile questions of the heretics may be condemned (*De Synodis* 3:54 [A.D. 359]).

Me: Another good point. I wonder how many people have rejected Christianity because of all the strife and rivalry within its ranks. We have thousands of denominations all claiming authority from the Bible and yet disagreeing on what it teaches. That is not the result Jesus intended when He prayed that we would be one as He and the Father are one (John 17:21). He obviously meant for us to be one united Church.

Athanasius: For if this be done, all evil suspicion will be removed on all hands, and the faith of the Catholic Church alone be exhibited in purity (*Letter to the People of Antioch* 3 [A.D. 362]).

Me: Well said. Thank you, Athanasius.

Spaghetti is good! Does that mean that rice is not? The statement “spaghetti is good” does not even address the issue of rice, and thus it does not rule it out. Likewise, when the Early Fathers extol the virtues of Scripture, they are not ruling out the role of Sacred Tradition or Church authority.

And so, once again we say that the early Church was the Catholic Church. The Early Fathers even called it that. But, say our critics, when the Early Fathers used the word catholic, they were referring to the nature of the church and not to any one Christian body. In this they are partly right. Catholic means universal. And it signifies the church’s mission of proclaiming the Gospel to all men. But the label catholic is something more than a general description. It was then, as it is now, the name of the one church established by Jesus Christ. Let us consider just three of the Church Fathers who referred to the Church as Catholic. Note what else they believed and taught:

Very early in Church History, Ignatius of Antioch, wrote the following in his *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*: "Where the bishop is present, there is the **Catholic Church**" (8:2 [A.D. 110]). Elsewhere he writes about the primacy of Rome, apostolic succession, the Mass, and the fact that the Eucharist is the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ.

Justin Martyr wrote: For the men of former generations, who instituted private and public rites in honor of such as were more powerful, caused forgetfulness of **the Catholic faith** to take possession of their posterity (*On the Sole Government of God* 1 [inter A.D. 151-155]). Elsewhere he wrote: Those who apostatize are cast into eternal fire. In order to apostatize, you must first be a Christian. You only become an apostate by abandoning the faith you once had. Thus, no assurance of salvation. He also wrote we are regenerated by baptism and baptism is synonymous with being born again. He says the celebration of the Mass along with the Eucharist is the pure offering spoken of in Malachi 1:10-11.

Irenaeus wrote: The truth is to be found nowhere else but in **the Catholic Church**, the sole depository of apostolical doctrine. Heresies are of recent formation and cannot trace their origin up to the apostles (*Against Heresies* 3:4 **[A.D. 189]**). Note he says “the sole depository of apostolical doctrine.” That precludes the possibility of other denominations as other denominations would naturally have different doctrines. Elsewhere he speaks out against the idea of private interpretation. Specifically, he said: “For in this way no one will possess the rule of truth” (*ibid* 2:27). He spoke of the universal [Catholic] Church getting its tradition from the Apostles. Like Ignatius, he spoke of the primacy of Rome, and Apostolic Succession. His writings clearly refute Martin Luther’s doctrine of “Assurance of Salvation.”

He equated the sacrament of Baptism with being born again. He also speaks of Baptism for infants and young children. Just like Justin Martyr, he sees the Mass and the Eucharist as the perfect sacrifice spoken of in Malachi 1:10-11. And of course, Jesus is the perfect sacrifice. Thus, the Eucharist is the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ. He spoke of Eve’s disobedience [sin] and compared it to Mary’s obedience [no sin] (The Immaculate Conception). He said: “Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary” (ibid 3:22:24 [A.D. 189]).

> Tertullian wrote: “For it is evident that those men lived not so long ago – in the reign of Antoninus for the most part – and that they at first were believers in **the doctrine of the Catholic Church, in the church of Rome** under the episcopate of the blessed Eleutherus, (*The Prescription Against Heretics* 22, 30 [A.D.200]).
>
> Elsewhere he wrote that heresies are made possible by the false interpretation [private interpretation] of the Scriptures. He believed in the primacy of Rome. To that effect he wrote: “Upon you, [Peter] he says, I will build my Church; and **I will give to <u>you</u> the keys, <u>not to the Church</u>;** and **whatever <u>you</u> shall have bound or <u>you</u> shall have loosed, <u>not what they</u> shall have bound or they shall have loosed** (*Modesty* 21:9-10 [A.D. 220]).
>
> He believed in Apostolic Succession; he equated baptism with being born again and the role it plays in salvation. He believed that salvation could be lost by those who fall out of grace. He believed in the Church’s power to forgive sins (Confession). He believed in praying for the dead and the existence of Purgatory. Finally, he believed in the legitimate use of sacred images.

Many other examples could be given, such as, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Cyprian of Carthage etc.… Clearly the Catholic Church of the Fathers is the same Catholic Church which is identical in belief and practice as the modern-day Catholic Church. And that is because they are one and the same. If the God of the universe creates something and says it will last until the end of the age, then logic demands that it be so. If He says: “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, it can be no other way. Her members may sin. But that is to be expected. As the apostle Paul noted: “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). But as a Church she is holy (set apart) and a sure guide in matters of faith and morals.

Keeping in mind that the Church established by Jesus Christ is the “Pillar and foundation of truth” (1 Timothy 3:15) and was to endure “until the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20), a question must be asked. If it is not the Catholic Church, then who? There is no Christian body that I am aware of, that even claims to be that Church. And if we were to find another contender, what would they present for evidence? Or as Tertullian put it:

> If there be any [heresies] bold enough to plant themselves in the midst of the apostolic age, so that they might seem to have been handed down by the Apostles because they were from the time of the Apostles, we can say to them: let them show the origin of their Churches, let them unroll the order of their bishops, running down in succession from the beginning, so that their first bishop shall have for author and predecessor some one of the Apostles or of the apostolic men who continued steadfast with the Apostles (*The Prescription Against Heretics* 32:1 [A.D. 200]).

As we saw above, the Church of Jesus Christ was to endure forever, that is, from the moment He established it until He returned. Jesus, who is God, gave us His word on that. And the Father, who is God, said the following concerning His word: “So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11). So, what do we see when we look out across the Christian landscape? With the evidence provided by the Early Fathers, we see the Catholic Church whose teachings have not changed for 2000 years. On the other hand, we have the assertion that it took Jesus 1500 years to finally get His message through via Protestantism. And once He got it through, those receiving it could not agree on what it meant. So, they split up into thousands of groups. To make matters worse, many of those groups are in the habit of changing their doctrines from time to time to match societal trends. Which of these two scenarios do you suppose is the fulfillment of God’s infallible promise?

When Marcion of Pontus began propagating his novel theories about the Old Testament, his sect was called the Marcionite Church (144 A.D.). The Church established by Jesus was still called the Catholic Church.

When the followers of Nestorius separated from the Church for theological reasons, they were called Nestorians (circa 435 A.D.). The Church established by Jesus was still called the Catholic Church.

When Martin Luther’s followers organized in the 1520’s, they were called Lutherans. The Church established by Jesus was still called the Catholic Church. And it will be called the Catholic Church until the Second Coming.

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The Early Church Fathers on Creation Out of Nothing

The Early Fathers taught that God created everything out of nothing. They were not superstitious. They could see the miracle that life was. They also knew that the world around them was anything but simple. They believed that our complex universe was the creation of an intelligent being and not the result of a series of random accidents. They were also familiar with Scripture. In the book of 2 Maccabees, we read: "I beseech you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed. Thus, also mankind comes into being" (7:28).

Hermas

Believe first of all that God is one, that he created all things and set them in order and brought out of nonexistence into existence everything that is, and that he contains all things while he himself is uncontained (*The Shepherd*, 2:1:1 [**A.D. 80]**).

Clement of Rome

By the word of His majesty did He establish all things; and by His word He is able to destroy them (*Letter to the Corinthians* **[A.D. 95]**).

Aristides

Let us proceed, then, 0 king, to the elements themselves, so that we may demonstrate concerning them that they are not gods but corruptible and changeable things, produced out of the nonexistent by him that is truly God, who is incorruptible and unchangeable and invisible, but who sees all things and changes them and alters them as he wills (*Apology 4* **[A.D. 140]**).

Justin Martyr

Is there any intelligent person who will dispute the contention that we are not atheists, when we worship the creator of everything that exists? (*First Apology* 13 **[inter A.D. 148-155]**).

Tatian the Syrian

Our God has no introduction in time. He alone is without beginning and is Himself the beginning of all things. God is a spirit, not attending upon matter, but the maker of material spirits and of the appearances which are in matter. He is invisible and untouchable, being Himself the Father of both sensible and invisible things (*Address to the Greeks 4* **[ca. A.D. 165-175]**).

Theophilus of Antioch

Furthermore, inasmuch as God is uncreated, he is also unchangeable; so also, if matter were uncreated, it would be unchangeable and equal to God. That which is created is alterable and changeable, while that which is uncreated is unalterable and unchangeable. What great thing were it, if God made the world out of existing matter? Even a human artist, when he obtains material from someone, makes of it whatever he pleases. But the power of God is made evident in this, that he makes whatever he pleases out of what does not exist, and the giving of life and movement belongs to none other but to God alone (*To Autolycus* 2:4 **[A.D. 181]**).

Irenaeus

Men indeed are not able to make something from nothing but only from existing material. God, however, is greater than men first of all in this: that when nothing existed beforehand, he called into existence the very material for his creation (*Against Heresies* 2:10:4 **[A.D. 189]**).

Tertullian

The object of our worship is the one God, who, by the word of his command, by the reason of his plan, and by the strength of his power, has brought forth from nothing for the glory of his majesty this whole construction of elements, bodies, and spirits (*Apology* 17:1 **[A.D. 197]**).

Clement of Alexandria

God creates all things by the Word ... And how could creation take place in time, seeing time was born along with things which exist (*Stromata* 6:16 **[A.D. 208]**).

Hippolytus

Then shall the righteous answer, astonished at the mighty and wondrous fact that he, whom the hosts of angels cannot look upon openly, addresses them as friends, and shall cry out to him, "Lord, when saw we you hungry, and fed you? Master, when saw we you thirsty, and gave you drink? You Terrible One, when saw we you naked, and clothed you? Immortal, when saw we you a stranger, and took you in? You friend of man, when saw we you sick or in prison, and came to you? You are the ever-living One. You are without beginning, like the Father, and co-eternal with the Spirit. You are he who made all things out of nothing" (*Discourse on the End of the World* 43 **[A.D. 217]**).

Origen

The specific points which are clearly handed down through the apostolic preaching are these: First, that there is one God who created and arranged all things and who, when nothing existed, called all things into existence (*On First Principles* 10:4 **[A.D. 225]**).

Cyprian

[The mother of the seven Maccabean martyrs said:] '0 son, pity me that bore you [nine] months in the womb, and gave you milk for three years, and nourished you and brought you up to this age; I pray you, 0 son, look upon the heaven and the earth; and having considered all the things which are in them, understand that out of nothing God made these things and the human race (*Exhortation to Martyrdom* 11 **[A.D. 253]**).

Methodius

All things are placed under you [God] as their cause and author, as he who brought all things into being out of nothing, and gave to what was unstable a firm coherence; as the connecting band and preserver of that which has been brought into being; as the framer of things by nature different; as he who, with wise and steady hand, holds the helm of the universe (*Oration on Simeon and Anna* 6 **[A.D. 305]**).

Lactanius

Let no one inquire of what materials God made those so great and wonderful works, for he made all things out of nothing. Without wood a carpenter will build nothing, because the wood itself he is not able to make. Not to be able is a quality of weak humanity. But: God himself makes his own material, because he is able. To be able is a quality of God, and, were he not able, neither would he be God. Man makes things out of what already exists, because he is... of limited and moderate power. God makes things from what does not exist, because he is strong; because of his strength, his power is immeasurable, having neither end nor limitation (*Divine Institutes* 2:8:8 **[A.D. 307]**).

The Apostolic Constitutions

For you [Father] are eternal knowledge, everlasting sight, unbegotten hearing, untaught wisdom, the first by nature, and the measure of being, and beyond all number; who brought all things out of nothing into being by your only begotten Son, but begot him before all ages by your will, your power, and your goodness, without any instrument, the only begotten Son, God the Word (8:2:12 **[A.D. 400]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Scripture

The Scriptures are inspired, infallible and not subject to private interpretation. The early church believed that the Scriptures were materially sufficient. Material Sufficiency simply means that everything that is necessary for our faith is contained in the pages of Scripture. However, this does not rule out the role of the Church or Sacred Tradition as they are both found in Scripture (1 Timothy 3:15 and 2 Thessalonians 2:15). Material Sufficiency differs from the Protestant idea of Formal Sufficiency. Formal sufficiency is the idea that a Christian only needs a Bible. No interpreter is needed. This, of course, contradicts 2 Peter 1:20: “No prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation.”

Clement of Rome

Look carefully into the Scriptures, which are the true utterances of the Holy Spirit (*Letter to the Corinthians* 45 **[A.D. 98]**).

Justin Martyr

But when you hear the utterances of the prophets spoken as it were personally, you must not suppose that they are spoken by the inspired themselves, but by the Divine Word who moves them (*First Apology* 36 **[A.D. 155]**).

Irenaeus

Since, therefore, the tradition from the apostles does thus exist in the Church, and is permanent among us, let us revert to the Scriptural proof furnished by those apostles who did also write the Gospel, in which they recorded the doctrine regarding God, pointing out that our Lord Jesus Christ is the truth, and that no lie is in Him (*Against Heresies* 3:5:1 **[A.D. 189]**).

Clement of Alexandria

But they, safeguarding the true tradition of the blessed teaching, which comes straight from the Apostles Peter, James, John and Paul and transmitted from father to son have come down to us with the help of God to deposit in us those ancestral and apostolic seeds (*Stromata* 1:11 [A.D. 202]).

For those are slothful who, having it in their power to provide themselves with proper proofs for the divine Scriptures from the Scriptures themselves, select only what contributes to their own pleasures. And those have a craving for glory who voluntarily evade, by arguments of a diverse sort, the things delivered by the blessed apostles and teachers, which are wedded to inspired words; opposing the divine tradition by human teachings, in order to establish the heresy (*ibid* 7:16 **[A.D. 202]**).

Hippolytus of Rome

They have treated the Divine Scriptures recklessly and without fear. They have set aside the rule of ancient faith... But how daring this offense is, it is not likely that they themselves are ignorant. For either they do not believe that the Divine Scriptures were spoken by the Holy Spirit, and thus are unbelievers, or else they think themselves wiser than the Holy Spirit, and in that case what else are they than demoniacs? (*Against Artemon* **[A.D. 230]**). Fragment in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5:28:15:18 [A.D. 325]).

Cyril of Jerusalem

But in learning the Faith and in professing it, acquire and keep that only, which is now delivered to thee by the Church, and which has been built up strongly out of all the Scriptures. (*Catechetical Lectures* 5:12 **[A.D. 350]**).

Athanasius of Alexandria

But since they allege the divine oracles and force on them a misinterpretation, according to their private sense, it becomes necessary to meet them just so far as to vindicate these passages, and to show that they bear an orthodox sense, and that our opponents are in error. (*Discourse Against the Arians* I:37 **[A.D. 356-360]**).

Antony of Egypt

Observe the traditions of the fathers, and chiefly the holy faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, which you have learned from the Scripture, and of which you have often been put in mind by me (Athanasius, *The Life of Antony* 10 **[A.D. 356-362]**).

Hilary of Poitiers

It behooves us not to withdraw from the Creed which we have received...nor to back off from the faith which we have received from through the prophets ... or to back-slide from the Gospels. Once laid down, it continues even to this day through the tradition of the Fathers (Ex. Oper. Hist. Fragment 7, 3 **[A.D. 365]**).

Epiphanius of Salamis

But for all the divine words, there is no need of allegory to grasp the meaning; what is necessary is study and understanding to know the meaning of each statement. We must have recourse to Tradition, for all cannot be received from the divine Scriptures. That is why the holy Apostles handed down certain things in writings but others by Traditions. As Paul said:" Just as I handed them on to you." (*Panarion* 61:6 **[A.D. 376]**).

Basil the Great

Of the beliefs and practices whether generally accepted or publicly enjoined which are preserved in the Church some we possess derived from written teaching; others we have received delivered to us in a mystery by the tradition of the apostles; and both of these in relation to true religion have the same force (*On the Holy Spirit* 27:66 **[A.D. 375]**).

John Chrysostom

As a trusty door, Scripture shuts out heretics, securing us from error... *(Joann*. 58).

"So, then brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word, or by epistle of ours" (2 Thessalonians 2:15). Hence it is manifest, that they did not deliver all things by epistle, but many things also unwritten, and in like manner both the one and the other are worthy of credit. Therefore, let us think the tradition of the Church also worthy of credit. It is a tradition, seek no farther (*Homilies on Second Thessalonians* **[circa A.D. 400]**).

Augustine of Hippo

For Holy Scripture fixes the rule for our doctrine, lest we dare to be wiser than we ought. (*On the Good of Widowhood* 2 **[A.D. 414]**).

But those reasons which I have here given, I have either gathered from the authority of the church, according to the tradition of our forefathers, or from the testimony of the divine Scriptures (*On the Holy Trinity* 4:6:10 **[A.D. 400-416]**).

Vincent of Lerins

We must, the Lord helping, fortify our own belief in two ways; first, by the authority of the Divine Law, and then, by the Tradition of the Catholic Church (*Commonitory* 2:4 **[A.D. 434]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on The Canon of Scripture

The Early Church Fathers understood the canon of Scripture was set by God. They also knew that God communicated this fact through the Catholic Church as many of them lived during the period when this was done. There was no consensus as some seem to think. Eusebius tells us that the book of 1 Clement was read in the churches from the early days until his own time (*Church History* 3:16 [A.D. 325]). So clearly a lot of churches considered it to be the word of God. Elsewhere, he includes the books of James, 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, and Revelation on the list of disputed works (ibid 3:25). And yet, 1 Clement never made it into the canon but the others did. And that is because the Catholic Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, decided it would be that way.

Muratorian Canon

For the blessed apostle Paul himself, following the rule of his predecessor John, writes only by name to seven Churches in the following order–to the Corinthians a first…there is a second to the Corinthians and to the Thessalonians, yet one Church is recognized as being spread over the entire world…Howbeit to Philemon one, to Titus one, and to Timothy two were put in writing…to be in honor however with the Catholic Church for the ordering of ecclesiastical discipline…one to the Laodicenes, another to the Alexandrians, both forged in Paul's name to suit the heresy of Marcion, and several others, which cannot be received into the Catholic Church; for it is not fitting that gall be mixed with honey. The Epistle of Jude no doubt, and the couple bearing the name of John, are accepted by the Catholic Church…But of Arsinous, called also Valentinus, or of Militiades we receive nothing at all (**inter A.D. 180-200**).

Hippolytus

What is narrated here [in the story of Susannah] happened at a later time, although it is placed at the front of the book [of Daniel], for it was a custom with the writers to narrate many things in an inverted order in their writings. . .. [W]e ought to give heed, beloved, fearing lest anyone be overtaken in any transgression and risk the loss of his soul, knowing as we do that God is the judge of all and the Word himself is the eye which nothing that is done in the world escapes. Therefore, always watchful in heart and pure in life, let us imitate Susannah (*Commentary on Daniel* **[A.D. 204]**).

Tertullian

The same authority of the apostolic churches will afford evidence to the other Gospels also, which we possess equally through their means, and according to their usage–I mean the Gospels of John and Matthew–whilst that which Mark published may be affirmed to be Peter's whose interpreter Mark was. For even Luke's form of the Gospel men usually ascribe to Paul (*Against Marcion* 4:5 **[inter A.D. 207-212]**).

Origen

In his [Origen] first book on Matthew's Gospel, maintaining the Canon of the Church, he testifies that he knows only four Gospels, writing as follows: Among the four Gospels, which are the only indisputable ones in the Church of God under heaven, I have learned by tradition that the first was written by Matthew, who was once a publican, but afterwards an apostle of Jesus Christ, and it was prepared for the converts from Judaism, and published in the Hebrew language. The second is by Mark, who composed it according to the instructions of Peter, who in his Catholic epistle acknowledges him as a son, saying, 'The church that is at Babylon elected together with you, saluteth you, and so doth Marcus, my son.' And the third by Luke, the Gospel commended by Paul, and composed for Gentile converts. Last of all that by John (*Commentary on Matthew*, fragment in Eusebius *Church History* 6:25:3 **[A.D. 244]**).

Cyril of Jerusalem

Learn also diligently, and from the Church, what are the books of the Old Testament, and what those of the New. And, pray, read none of the apocryphal writings: for why do you, who know not those which are acknowledged among all, trouble yourself in vain about those which are disputed? (*Catechetical Lectures* 4:33 **[A.D. 350]**).

Council of Hippo

Besides the canonical Scriptures, nothing shall be read, in the church under the title of divine writings. The canonical books are: — Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, the four books of Kings, the two books of Paraleipomena (Chronicles), Job, the Psalms of David, the five books of Solomon, the twelve books of the (Minor) Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Tobias, Judith, Esther, two books of Esdras, two books of the Maccabees. The books of the New Testament are: — the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, thirteen Epistles of S. Paul, one Epistle of S. Paul to the Hebrews, two Epistles of S. Peter, three Epistles of S. John, the Epistle of S. James, the Epistle of S. Jude, the Revelation of S. John. Concerning the confirmation of this canon, the transmarine Church shall be consulted (Canon 36 **[A.D. 393]**).

Athanasius

I beseech you to bear patiently, if I also write, by way of remembrance, of matters with which you are acquainted, influenced by the need and advantage of the Church. In proceeding to make mention of these things [the canon], I shall adopt, to comment my undertaking, the pattern of Luke…to reduce into order for themselves the books termed apocryphal, and to mix them up with the divinely inspired Scripture, concerning which we have been fully persuaded, as they who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word, delivered to the fathers; it seemed good to me also, having been urged thereto by true brethren, and having learned from the beginning, to set before you the books included in the Canon (*Festal Letters* 39 **[A.D. 397]**).

Council of Carthage

[It has been decided] that nothing except the Canonical Scriptures should be read in the church under the name of the Divine Scriptures. But the Canonical Scriptures are: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Josue, Judges, Ruth, four books of Kings, Paralipomenon two books, Job, the Psalter of David, five books of Solomon, twelve books of the Prophets, Isaias, Jeremias, Daniel, Ezekiel, Tobias, Judith, Esther, two books of Esdras, two books of the Maccabees. Moreover, of the New Testament: Four books of the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles one book, thirteen epistles of Paul the Apostle, one of the same to the Hebrews, two of Peter, three of John, one of James, one of Jude, the Apocalypse of John (Canon 47 **[A.D. 397]**).

Augustine

The authority of our books [Scriptures], which is confirmed by agreement of so many nations, supported by a succession of apostles, bishops, and councils, is against you (*Reply to Faustus the Manichean* 13:5 **[A.D. 400]**).

Council of Toledo

If anyone shall say, or shall believe, that other Scriptures, besides those which the Catholic Church has received, are to be esteemed of authority, or to be venerated, let him be anathema (Canon 12 **[A.D. 400]**).

Pope Innocent

A brief addition shows what books really are received in the canon. These are the desiderata of which you wished to be informed verbally: of Moses five books, that is, of Genesis, of Exodus, of Leviticus, of Numbers, of Deuteronomy, and Josue, of Judges one book, of Kings four books, also Ruth, of the Prophets sixteen books, of Solomon five books, the Psalms. Likewise of the histories, Job one book, of Tobias one book, Esther one, Judith one, of the Maccabees two, of Esdras two, Paralipomenon two books. Likewise of the New Testament: of the Gospels four books, of Paul the Apostle fourteen epistles, of John three, epistles of Peter two, an epistle of Jude, an epistle of James, the Acts of the Apostles, the Apocalypse of John (*Letter to Exsuperius Bishop of Toulose* 6:7:13 **[A.D. 405]).**

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The Early Church Fathers on The Catholic Bible

Catholic Bibles have an Old Testament that is longer than the one found in Protestant Bibles. There are seven additional books as well as some additions to the books of Esther, Jeremiah, and Daniel. Catholics refer to these books and passages as Deuterocanonical which means that they are a part of the canon of Scripture. Protestants refer to them as Apocryphal which basically means they do not place them on the same level as Scripture. Catholics accept them because they are part of the Septuagint. The Septuagint was the version of the Old Testament that was used by Jesus, the Apostles, and the Early Christians. The extra books are: Tobit, Judith, Wisdom (Wisdom of Solomon), Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Baruch, 1 Maccabees, and 2 Maccabees.

Clement of Rome

By the word of his might [God] established all things, and by his word he can overthrow them. “Who shall say to him, ‘What have you done?’ or who shall resist the power of his strength?” [Wisdom 12:12] (*Letter to the Corinthians* 27:5 **[A.D. 95]**).

Tertullian

For they remembered also the words of Jeremias writing to those over whom that captivity was impending: “And now you shall see borne upon (men's) shoulders the gods of the Babylonians, of gold and silver and wood, causing fear to the Gentiles. Beware, therefore, that you also do not be altogether like the foreigners and be seized with fear while you behold crowds worshipping those gods before and behind, but say in your mind, our duty is to worship You, O Lord” [Baruch 6:3-5] (*Scorpians Antidote* 8 **[A.D. 211]**).

Hippolytus

But they make use also of other testimonies, and say, thus it is written: "This is our God, and there shall none other be accounted of in comparison of Him. He hath found out all the way of knowledge, and hath given it unto Jacob His servant (son), and to Israel His beloved. Afterward did He show Himself upon earth and conversed with men." [Baruch 3:36-38] (*Against Noetus* 2 **[A.D. 205]**).

Irenaeus of Lyon

And Jeremiah the prophet has pointed out, that as many believers as God has prepared for this purpose, to multiply those left upon earth, should both be under the rule of the saints to minister to this Jerusalem, and that [His] kingdom shall be in it, saying: [quotes Baruch 4:26 et seq.] “Look around Jerusalem towards the east, and behold the joy which comes to you from God Himself… For God shall go before with joy in the light of His splendor, with the pity and righteousness which proceeds from Him” [Baruch 4:36-5:9] (*Against Heresies* 5:35:1 **[A.D. 189]**).

Clement of Alexandria

“A fool raises his voice in laughter,” says the Scripture; “but a clever man smiles almost imperceptibly” (Sirach 21:20). The clever man in this case he calls wise, inasmuch as he is differently affected from the fool. But, on the other hand, one needs not be gloomy, only grave. For I certainly prefer a man to smile who has a stern countenance than the reverse; for so his laughter will be less apt to become the object of ridicule (*The Instructor of Children* 2:5 **[A.D. 191]**).

Those, then, will not escape the curse of yoking an ass with an ox, who, judging certain things not to suit them, command others to do them, or the reverse. This Scripture has briefly showed, when it says, “What you hate you shall not do to another” [Tobit 4:15] (*Stromata* 2:23 **[A.D. 202]**).

Origen

But that we may believe on the authority of holy Scripture that such is the case, hear how in the book of Maccabees, where the mother of seven martyrs exhorts her son to endure torture, this truth is confirmed; for she says, "I ask of thee, my son, to look at the heaven and the earth, and at all things which are in them, and beholding these, to know that God made all these things when they did not exist" [2 Maccabees 7:28] (*On First Principles* 2:1:5 **[A.D. 225]**).

Cyprian of Carthage

And again, where the sacred Scripture speaks of the tortures which consecrate God's martyrs, and sanctify them in the very trial of suffering: "And if they have suffered torments in the sight of men, yet is their hope full of immortality; and having been a little chastised, they shall be greatly rewarded: for God proved them, and found them worthy of Himself. As gold in the furnace has He tried them, and received them as a sacrifice of a burnt-offering, and in due time regard shall be had unto them. The righteous shall shine, and shall run to and fro like sparks among the stubble. They shall judge the nations, and have dominion over the people; and their Lord shall reign forever" [Wisdom 3:4-8] (Letter 80:2 [**A.D. 250]**).

Holy Scripture meets and warns us, saying: "And fear not the words of a sinful man, for his glory shall be dung and worms. Today he is lifted up, and tomorrow he shall not be found, because he is turned into his earth, and his thought shall perish" [1 Maccabees 2:62-63] (*Letter* 54:3 **[A.D 251-253]**).

Methodius

And that you may not take refuge behind a safe wall, bringing forward the Scripture which says, "As for the children of the adulterers, they shall not come to their perfection" (Wisdom 3:16). He will answer you easily, that we often see those who are unlawfully begotten coming to perfection like ripe fruit (*The Banquet of the Ten Virgins* 2:3 [circa **A.D. 311]**).

Athanasius

But of these and such like inventions of idolatrous madness, Scripture taught us beforehand long ago, when it said: "The devising of idols was the beginning of fornication, and the invention of them, the corruption of life… for men serving either calamity or tyranny, did ascribe unto stones and stocks the incommunicable Name" [Wisdom 14:13] (*Against the Heathen* 1:11:1 **[A.D 326]**).

Hilary of Poitiers

For all things, as the Prophet says, were made out of nothing [2 Maccabees 7:28] it was no transformation of existing things, but the creation into a perfect form of the non-existent (*On the Trinity* 4:16 **[A.D. 356-360]**).

Ambrose of Milan

Justly, then, is he wise who has received of the Lord to know when he ought to speak. Wherefore the Scripture says well:" A wise man will keep silence until there is opportunity" [Sirach 20:76] (*On the Duties of the Clergy* 1:2:5 **[A.D. 391]**).

We have spoken of its beauty, and proved it by the witness of Scripture. It remains to show on the authority of Scripture that there can be no fellowship between it and vice, but that it has an inseparable union with the rest of the virtues. "It has a spirit sagacious, undefiled, sure, holy, loving what is good, quick, that never forbids a kindness, kind, steadfast, free from care, having all power, overseeing all things." And again: "She teacheth temperance and justice and virtue" [Wisdom 7:22-24] (ibid 2:13:65).

John Cassian

Wherefore, as Scripture says, "when you go forth to serve the Lord stand in the fear of the Lord, and prepare your mind" [Sirach 2:1] (*The Institutes* 4:37 **[A.D. 425-430]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Scripture Alone

One of the foundational pillars of the Protestant Reformation is the doctrine of Sola Scriptura or Scripture Alone. It is the belief that all one needs is a Bible. It is reasoned that all necessary doctrines are contained therein, and no outside authority is needed to interpret it. Of course, this overlooks the fact that an outside authority (the Catholic Church) was needed to obtain the Bible in the first place. Ironically the doctrine of Sola Scriptura is not found in the Bible. So according to the Doctrine of Sola Scriptura, the Doctrine of Sola Scriptura cannot be believed. So, on a theological level it fails. On a practical level it also fails as a belief in this doctrine has resulted in thousands of churches all claiming authority from the Bible and all disagreeing with one another on what it teaches. That does not sound like a plan that an all-knowing God would put into place. And the early Church understood this all too well.

Irenaeus

But to apply expressions which are not clear or evident to interpretations of the parables, such as everyone discovers for himself as inclination leads him, [is absurd.] For in this way no one will possess the rule of truth; but in accordance with the number of persons who explain the parables will be found the various systems of truth, in mutual opposition to each other, and setting forth antagonistic doctrines, like the questions current among the Gentile philosophers (*Against Heresies* 2:27:1 **[A.D. 189]**).

Tertullian

Now it is no matter of surprise if arguments are captiously taken from the writings of (the apostle) himself, inasmuch as there "must needs be heresies;" but these could not be, if the Scriptures were not capable of a false interpretation (*On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 40 **[A.D. 209-211]**).

Cyprian of Carthage

Nor let any deceive themselves by a futile interpretation, in respect of the Lord having said, "Wheresoever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Corrupters and false interpreters of the Gospel quote the last words, and lay aside the former ones, remembering part, and craftily suppressing part: as they themselves are separated from the Church, so they cut off the substance of one section. ... He taught that we should agree firmly and faithfully. But how can he agree with anyone who does not agree with the booty of the Church itself, and with the universal brotherhood? (*On the Unity of the Church* 12 **[A.D. 251]**).

Council of Ganga

We wish that all things which have been delivered by the Holy Scriptures and the Apostolical traditions, may be observed in the Church (*Epilogue* **[A.D. 343]**).

Athanasius

But beyond these [Scriptural] sayings, let us look at the very tradition, teaching and faith of the Catholic Church from the beginning, which the Lord gave, the Apostles preached, and the Fathers kept. (*Four Letters to Serapion of Thmuis* 1:28 **[A.D. 360]**).

Jerome

We ought to remain in that Church which was founded by the Apostles and continues to this day. If ever you hear of any that are called Christians taking their name not from the Lord Jesus Christ, but from some other, for instance, Marcionites, Valentinians, Men of the mountain or the plain, you may be sure that you have there not the Church of Christ, but the synagogue of Antichrist. For the fact that they took their rise after the foundation of the Church is proof that they are those whose coming the Apostle foretold. And let them not flatter themselves if they think they

have Scripture authority for their assertions, since the devil himself quoted Scripture, and the essence of the Scriptures is not the letter, but the meaning (*Against the Luciferians* 28 **[A.D. 382]**).

Yet although he had the book in his hand and took into his mind the words of the Lord, nay even had them on his tongue and uttered them with his lips, he still knew not Him, whom – not knowing – he worshipped in the book. Then Philip came and shewed him Jesus, who was concealed beneath the letter. These instances have been just touched upon by me (the limits of a letter forbid a more discursive treatment of them) to convince you that in the holy Scriptures you can make no progress unless you have a guide to shew you the way (Letter 53:5-6 **[A.D. 394]**).

Gregory of Nyssa

[S]eeing, I say, that the Church teaches this in plain language, that the Only-begotten is essentially God, very God of the essence of the very God, how ought one who opposes her decisions to overthrow the preconceived opinion… And let no one interrupt me, by saying that what we confess should also be confirmed by constructive reasoning: for it is enough for proof of our statement, that the tradition has come down to us from our fathers, handled on, like some inheritance, by succession from the apostles and the saints who came after them (*Against Eunomius* 4:6 **[A.D. 382]**).

John Chrysostom

So then, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye were taught, whether by word, or by Epistle of ours.' Hence it is manifest, that they did not deliver all things by Epistle, but many things also unwritten, and in like manner both the one and the other are worthy of credit. Therefore, let us think the tradition of the Church also worthy of credit. It is a tradition, seek no farther (*Homily on 2nd Thessalonians* 4:2 **[A.D. 404]**).

Augustine

For many things lay hid in the Scriptures: and when heretics had been cut off, with questions they troubled the Church of God: then those things were opened which lay hid, and the will of God was understood … in order that they that knew how to treat of and solve these questions (lest the weak should perish vexed with the questions of the ungodly), by their discourses and disputations should bring out unto open day the dark things of the Law (*Exposition on Psalm 55* 21 **[A.D. 392-416]**).

This Mediator, having spoken what He judged sufficient first by the prophets, then by His own lips, and afterwards by the apostles, has besides produced the Scripture which is called canonical, which has paramount authority, and to which we yield assent in all matters of which we ought not to be ignorant, and yet cannot know of ourselves (*City of God* 11:3 **[inter A.D. 413-426]**).

Vincent of Lérins

But here someone perhaps will ask, since the canon of Scripture is complete, and sufficient of itself for everything, and more than sufficient, what need is there to join with it the authority of the Church's interpretation? For this reason — because, owing to the depth of Holy Scripture, all do not accept it in one and the same sense, but one understands its words in one way, another in another; so that it seems to be capable of as many interpretations as there are interpreters. For Novatian expounds it one way, Sabellius another, Donatus another, Arius, Eunomius, Macedonius, another, Photinus, Apollinaris, Priscillian, another, Iovinian, Pelagius, Celestius, another, lastly, Nestorius another. Therefore, it is very necessary, on account of so great intricacies of such various error, that the rule for the right understanding of the prophets and apostles should be framed in accordance with the standard of Ecclesiastical and Catholic interpretation (*Commonitory* 2:5 **[A.D. 434]**).

John of Damascene

So, then, in expectation of His coming we worship towards the East. But this tradition of the apostles is unwritten. For much that has been handed down to us by tradition is unwritten (*Exposition of the Faith* 3:12 **[A.D. 712]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Private Interpretation of Scripture

The Church has always viewed the Bible in the same way that the Bible views itself. It is the inspired Word of God, (2 Timothy 3:16-17) it is not to be privately interpreted, (2 Peter 1:20) and it is on an equal basis with Sacred Tradition (2 Thessalonians 2:15). It also tells us that the Church and not the Bible is the pillar and foundation of truth (1 Timothy 3:15). There is no contradiction here as it was the Church that gave us the Bible. Yes, it is the Word of God. But God chose to give it to us through the Church He established. This view of the Early Church kept the power where it belonged; with God, and not men. As we are told in Proverbs 3:5: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not rely on your own insight." And trusting in the Lord would mean living by His divine plan. And that would include the verses of Scripture quoted above.

Clement of Alexandria

For those are slothful who, having it in their power to provide themselves with proper proofs for the divine Scriptures from the Scriptures themselves, select only what contributes to their own pleasures. And those have a craving for glory who voluntarily evade, by arguments of a diverse sort, the things delivered by the blessed apostles and teachers, which are wedded to inspired words; opposing the divine tradition by human teachings, in order to establish the heresy (*Stromata* 7:16 **[A.D. 202]**).

Origen

Now the cause, in all the points previously enumerated, of the false opinions, and of the impious statements or ignorant assertions about God, appears to be nothing else than the not understanding the Scripture according to its spiritual meaning, but the interpretation of it agreeably to the mere letter. And therefore, to those who believe that the sacred books are not the compositions of men, but that they were composed by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, agreeably to the will of the Father of all things through Jesus Christ, and that they have come down to us, we must point out the ways (of interpreting them) which appear (correct) to us, who cling to the standard of the heavenly Church of Jesus Christ according to the succession of the apostles (*First Principles* 4:1:9 **[A.D. 230]**).

When heretics show us the canonical Scriptures, in which every Christian believes and trusts, they seem to be saying: 'Lo, he is in the inner rooms [the word of truth] '(Matt 24.6). But we must not believe them, nor leave the original tradition of the Church, nor believe otherwise than we have been taught by the succession in the Church of God (*Homilies on Matthew 46*, PG 13:1667 **(ante A.D. 254)**.

Cyril of Jerusalem

A most precious possession therefore is the knowledge of doctrines: also, there is need of a wakeful soul, since there are many that make spoil through philosophy and vain deceit. The Greeks on the one hand draw men away by their smooth tongue, for honey drops from a harlot's lips: whereas they of the Circumcision deceive those who come to them by means of the Divine Scriptures, which they miserably misinterpret though studying them from childhood to all age and growing old in ignorance. But the children of heretics, by their good words and smooth tongue, deceive the hearts of the innocent, disguising with the name of Christ as it were with honey the poisoned arrows of their impious doctrines: concerning all of whom together the Lord said, take heed lest any man mislead you. This is the reason for the teaching of the Creed and for expositions upon it (*Catechetical Lectures* 4:2 **[A.D. 350]**).

Hilary of Poitiers

The Church, ordained by the Lord and established by His Apostles, is one for all; but the frantic folly of discordant sects has severed them from her. And it is obvious that these dissensions concerning the faith result from a distorted mind, which twists the words of Scripture into conformity with its opinion, instead of adjusting that opinion to the words of Scripture. And thus, amid the clash of mutually destructive errors, the Church stands revealed not only by her own teaching, but by that of her rivals (*On the Trinity* 7:4 **[inter A.D. 356-359]**).

Athanasius

But since they allege the divine oracles and force on them a misinterpretation, according to their private sense, it becomes necessary to meet them just so far as to vindicate these passages, and to show that they bear an orthodox sense, and that our opponents are in error (*Discourse Against the Arians* I:37 **[A.D. 362]**).

Basil

To refuse to follow the Fathers, not holding their declaration of more authority than one's own opinion, is conduct worthy of blame, as being brimful of self-sufficiency (*Letter to the Canonicae* 52:1 **[A.D. 370]**).

Ephraim the Syrian

While (the sects) mutually refute and condemn each other, it has happened to truth as to Gideon; that is, while they fight against each other, and fall under wounds mutually inflicted, they crown her. All the heretics acknowledge that there is a true Scripture. Had they all falsely believed that none existed, someone might reply that such Scripture was unknown to them. But now that have themselves taken away the force of such plea, from the fact that they have mutilated the very Scriptures. For they have corrupted the sacred copies; and words which ought to have but one interpretation, they have wrested to strange significations. Whilst, when one of them attempts this, and cuts off a member of his own body, the rest demand and claim back the severed limb…It is the church which perfect truth perfects. The church of believers is great, and its bosom most ample; it embraces the fullness (or, the whole) of the two Testaments (*Against Heresies* **[ante A.D. 373]**).

Gregory of Nyssa

Wherefore he says, "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life," showing that often the obvious interpretation, if it be not taken according to the proper sense, has an effect contrary to that life which is indicated by the Spirit …whereto if any one applies himself according to the obvious sense, he will make the Scripture a doctrine of death (*Against Eunomius* 7:1 **[A.D. 382]**).

Ambrose

Wherefore all other generations are strangers to truth; all the generations of heretics hold not the truth: the church alone, with pious affection, is in possession of the truth (*Commentary on Psalm* 118:19 **[A.D. 387]**).

Augustine

But when proper words make Scripture ambiguous, we must see in the first place that there is nothing wrong in our punctuation or pronunciation. Accordingly, if, when attention is given to the passage, it shall appear to be uncertain in what way it ought to be punctuated or pronounced, let the reader consult the rule of faith which he has gathered from the plainer passages of Scripture, and from the authority of the Church, and of which I treated at sufficient length when I was speaking in the first book about things (*On Christian Doctrine* 3:2:2 **[A.D. 397]**).

For heresies, and certain tenets of perversity, ensnaring souls and hurling them into the deep, have not sprung up except when good Scriptures are not rightly understood, and when that in them which is not rightly understood is rashly and boldly asserted. And so, dearly beloved, ought we very cautiously to hear those things for the understanding of which we are but little ones, and that, too, with pious heart and with trembling, as it is written, holding this rule of soundness, that we rejoice as in food in that which we have been able to understand, according to the faith with which we are imbued (*On the Gospel of John, Homily* 18:1 **[A.D. 416]**).

Vincent of Lerins

[A]ll heresies, that they evermore delight in profane novelties, scorn the decisions of antiquity, and …make shipwreck of the faith. On the other hand, it is the sure characteristic of Catholics to keep that which has been committed to their trust by the holy Fathers (*Commonitory of the Anitquity and Universality of the Catholic Faith* 24:63 **[A.D. 434]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Tradition

Scripture tells us that the Church's oral tradition, is equal in authority with its written tradition (Scripture). And that is because both came to us from God. As Paul said it: “hold fast to the traditions that you were taught, either by an oral statement or by a letter of ours” (2 Thessalonians 2:15). And why would Paul want us to hold fast to the Church’s oral traditions? He gives us the answer in 1 Thessalonians 2:13: "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God…”

Papias

Whenever anyone came my way, who had been a follower of my seniors, I would ask for the accounts of our seniors: What did Andrew or Peter say? Or Phillip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew, or any of the Lord’s disciples? I also asked: What did Aristion and John the Presbyter, disciples of the Lord say. For, as I see it, it is not so much from books as from the living and permanent voice that I must draw profit (*The Sayings of the Lord* [between A.D. 115 and 140] as recorded by Eusebius, *Church History*, 3:39 **[A.D. 325]**).

Irenaeus

For even creation reveals Him who formed it, and the very work made suggests Him who made it, and the world manifests Him who ordered it. The Universal [Catholic] Church, moreover, through the whole world, has received this tradition from the Apostles (*Against Heresies* 2:9 **[A.D. 189]**).

Tertullian

For wherever both the true Christian rule and faith shall be shown to be, there will be the true Scriptures, and the true expositions, of all the true Christian traditions (*The Prescription Against Heretics* 19 **[A.D. 200]**).

Origen

Seeing there are many who think they hold the opinions of Christ, and yet some of these think differently from their predecessors, yet as the teaching of the Church, transmitted in orderly succession from the Apostles, and remaining in the churches to the present day, is still preserved, that alone is to be accepted as truth which differs in no respect from ecclesiastical and apostolic tradition (*On First Principles* Bk. 1 Preface 2 **[circa A.D. 225]**).

Athanasius

What then I have learned myself, and have heard men of judgment say, I have written in few words; but do you, remaining on the foundation of the Apostles, and holding fast the traditions of the Fathers, pray that now at length all strife and rivalry may cease, and the futile questions of the heretics may be condemned (*De Synodis* 3:54 **[A.D. 359]**).

Eusebius

While [Ignatius of Antioch] was making the journey through Asia under the strictest military guard, he strengthened the diocese in each city where he stayed by spoken sermons and exhortations, and he especially exhorted them above all to be on their guard against the heresies which then for the first time were prevalent and he urged them to hold fast to the tradition of the Apostles to which he thought it necessary, for securities sake, to give form by written testimony (*Church History*, 3:36 **[A.D. 325]**).

Basil

Of the beliefs and practices whether generally accepted or publicly enjoined which are preserved in the Church some we possess derived from written teaching; others we have received delivered to us "in mystery" by the tradition of the Apostles; and both of these in relation to true religion have the same force. And these no one will contradict; - no one, at all events, who is even moderately versed in the institutions of the Church. For were we to attempt to reject such customs as have no written authority, on the ground that the importance they possess is small, we should unintentionally injure the Gospel in these matters… (*On the Holy Spirit* 27 **[A.D. 375]**).

Jerome

Don't you know that the laying on of hands after baptism and then the invocation of the Holy Spirit is a custom of the Churches? Do you demand Scripture proof? You may find it in the Acts of the Apostles. And even if it did not rest on the authority of Scripture the consensus of the whole world in this respect would have the force of a command. For many other observances of the Churches, which are due to tradition, have acquired the authority of the written law (*The Dialogue Against the Luciferians* 8 **[A.D. 382]**).

John Chrysostom

"So, then brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word, or by epistle of ours" (2 Thessalonians 2:15). Hence it is manifest, that they did not deliver all things by epistle, but many things also unwritten, and in like manner both the one and the other are worthy of credit. Therefore, let us think the tradition of the Church also worthy of credit. It is a tradition, seek no farther (*Homilies on 2 Thessalonians* **[circa A.D. 400]**).

Vincent of Lerins

I have often then inquired earnestly and attentively of very many men eminent for sanctity and learning, how and by what sure and so to speak universal rule I may be able to distinguish the truth of Catholic faith from the falsehood of heretical pravity; and I have always, and in almost every instance, received an answer to this effect: That whether I or anyone else should wish to detect the frauds and avoid the snares of heretics as they rise, and to continue sound and complete in the Catholic faith, we must, the Lord helping, fortify our own belief in two ways: first, by the authority of the Divine Law, and then, by the Tradition of the Catholic Church (*Commonitory* 2 **[A.D. 434]**).

Theodoret

I have ever kept the faith of the Apostles undefiled… So have I learnt not only from the Apostles and the Prophets but also from the interpreters of their writings, Ignatius, Eustathius, Athanasius, Basil, Gregory, John, and the rest of the lights of the world; and before these from the holy Fathers in council at Nicaea, whose confession of the faith I preserve in its integrity, like an ancestral inheritance [styling corrupt and enemies of the truth all who dare to transgress its decrees] (Letters no. 89 **[circa A.D. 443]**).

Augustine

But in regard to those observances which we carefully attend and which the whole world keeps, and which derive not from Scripture but from Tradition, we are given to understand that they are recommended and ordained to be kept, either by the apostles themselves or by plenary [ecumenical] councils, the authority of which is quite vital in the Church (Letter 54:1 **[A.D. 400]**).

John Damascene

So, then, in expectation of His coming we worship towards the East. But this tradition of the apostles is unwritten. For much that has been handed down to us by tradition is unwritten (*Exposition of the Faith* 3:12 **[A.D. 712]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on The Divinity of Christ

Jesus Christ is the second person of the Trinity. As such He was one in being with the Father. In other words, He was fully God. While engaged in His ministry He spoke with the authority of God and did things that only God could do. He forgave sins, healed the sick, and raised the dead of His own power. The apostle Paul refers to Him as “Our great God and Savior” (Titus 2:13). When Stephen was being stoned to death, “he called out, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit’” (Acts 7:59). If Jesus were not God, this prayer would make no sense. Jesus Himself proclaims that He will judge all of mankind (Matthew 25:31-46). The Scribes and Pharisees were aware of what Jesus was communicating to them. And that is why they accused Him of Blasphemy. And that is why they wanted Him crucified.

Ignatius of Antioch

Ignatius, also called Theophorus, to the Church at Ephesus in Asia . . . predestined from eternity for a glory that is lasting and unchanging, united and chosen through true suffering by the will of the Father in Jesus Christ our God (*Letter to the Ephesians* 1 [A.D. 110]).

To the Church beloved and enlightened after the love of Jesus Christ, our God, by the will of him that has willed everything which is (*Letter to the Romans* 1 **[A.D. 110]**).

Aristides

[Christians] are they who, above every people of the earth, have found the truth, for they acknowledge God, the Creator and maker of all things, in the only-begotten Son and in the Holy Spirit (*Apology 16* **[A.D. 140]**).

Justin Martyr

And since they are compelled, they agree that some Scriptures which we mention to them, and which expressly prove that Christ was to suffer, to be worshipped, and [to be called] God (*Dialogue with Trypho* **[A.D. 155]**).

Tatian the Syrian

We are not playing the fool, you Greeks, nor do we talk nonsense, when we report that God was born in the form of a man (*Address to the Greeks* 21 **[A.D. 170]**).

Melito of Sardis

It is no way necessary in dealing with persons of intelligence to adduce the actions of Christ after his baptism as proof that his soul and his body, his human nature, were like ours, real and not phantasmal. The activities of Christ after his baptism, and especially his miracles, gave indication and assurance to the world of the deity hidden in his flesh. Being God and likewise perfect man, he gave positive indications of his two natures: of his deity by the miracles during the three years following after his baptism, of his humanity in the thirty years which came before his baptism during which, by reason of his condition according to the flesh, he concealed the signs of his deity, although he was the true God existing before the ages (Fragment in Anastasius of Sinai's *The Guide* 13 **[A.D. 177]**).

Irenaeus

For the Church, although dispersed throughout the whole world even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and from their disciples the faith in one God, Father Almighty, the creator of heaven and earth and sea and all that is in them; and in one Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became flesh for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who announced through the prophets the dispensations and the comings, and the birth from a Virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the bodily ascension into heaven of the beloved Christ Jesus our

Lord, and his coming from heaven in the glory of the Father to reestablish all things; and the raising up again of all flesh of all humanity, in order that to Jesus Christ our Lord and God and Savior and King, in accord with the approval of the invisible Father, every knee shall bend of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth (*Against Heresies* 1:10:1 **[A.D. 189]**).

Clement of Alexandria

The Word, then, the Christ, is the cause both of our ancient beginning — for he was in God — and of our well-being. And now this same Word has appeared as man. He alone is both God and man, and the source of all our good things (*Exhortation to the Greeks* 1:7:1 **[A.D. 190]**).

Caius

I mean Justin and Miltiades, and Tatian and Clement, and many others, in all which divinity is ascribed to Christ. For who is ignorant of the books of Irenaeus and Melito, and the rest, which declare Christ to be God and man? (Fragment 2 **[circa A.D. 200]**).

Tertullian

The origins of both his substances display him as man and as God: From the one, born, and from the other, not born (*The Flesh of Christ* 5:6-7 **[A.D. 210]**).

Origen

Although he was God, he took flesh; and having been made man, he remained what he was: God (*On First Principles* 1:0:4 **[A.D. 225]**).

Hippolytus

Only [God's] Word is from himself and is therefore also God, becoming the substance of God (*Refutation of All Heresies* 10:33 **[A.D. 228]**).

For Christ is the God over all, who has arranged to wash away sin from mankind, rendering the old man new (ibid. 10:34).

Cyprian of Carthage

One who denies that Christ is God cannot become his temple [of the Holy Spirit . . . (Letters 73:12 **[A.D. 253]**).

Arnobus

"Well, then," some raging, angry, and excited man will say, "is that Christ your God?" "God indeed" we shall answer, "and God of the hidden powers" (*Against the Pagans* 1:42 **[A.D. 305]**).

Lactantius

He was made both Son of God in the spirit and Son of man in the flesh, that is, both God and man (*Divine Institutes* 4:13:5 **[A.D. 307]**).

Council of Nicea 1

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in being with the Father. Through Him all things were made (*Creed of Nicea* **[A.D. 325]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on The Trinity

Groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and Oneness Pentecostals are opposed to the doctrine of the Trinity. Jehovah's Witnesses even go so far as to claim that the doctrine of the Trinity was unknown to the Early Fathers. They specifically claim that Tertullian, Origen, and Theophilus of Antioch gave evidence against it. As you can see below, this is a false claim. It is true that Scripture does not spell the doctrine out in the manner that a theology text book might. However, all the necessary elements can be found there. That the doctrine cannot be fully understood does not mean that we cannot know that it is true. Divine Revelation, as well as reason, tells us that it must be so.

Ignatius of Antioch

Take care, therefore, to be confirmed in the decrees of the Lord and of the Apostles, in order that in everything you do, you may prosper in body and in soul, in faith and in love, in Son and in Father and in Spirit (*Letter to the Magnesians* 13:1 **[A.D. 110]**).

Athenagoras

For, as we acknowledge a God, and a Son his Logos, and a Holy Spirit, united in essence, - the Father, the Son, the Spirit because the Son is intelligence, reason, wisdom of the Father, and the Spirit an effluence, as light from fire; so also, do we apprehend the existence of other powers, which exercise dominion about matter, and by means of it (*A Plea for the Christians*, 2:18 **[A.D. 177]**).

Irenaeus

For the Son, who is the Word of God, arranged these things beforehand from the beginning, the Father being in no want of angels, in order that He might call the creation into being, and form man, for whom also the creation was made; nor, again, standing in need of any instrumentality for the framing of created things, or for the ordering of those things which had reference to man; while, [at the same time,] He has a vast and unspeakable number of servants. For His offspring and His similitude do minister to Him in every respect; that is, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Word and Wisdom; whom all the angels serve, and to whom they are subject (*Against Heresies* 4:7:4 **[A.D. 189]**).

Theophilus of Antioch

The three days which were before the luminaries, are types of the Trinity, of God, and His Word, and His Wisdom (*To Autolycus* 2:18 **[A.D. 181]**).

Clement of Alexandria

And the address in the Timœus calls the creator, Father, speaking thus: 'Ye gods of gods, of whom I am Father; and the Creator of your works.' So that when he says, 'Around the king of all, all things are, and because of Him are all things; and he [or that] is the cause of all good things; and around the second are the things second in order; and around the third, the third,' I understand nothing else than the Holy Trinity to be meant; for the third is the Holy Spirit, and the Son is the second, by whom all things were made according to the will of the Father (*Stromata* 5:14 **[A.D. 202]**).

Hippolytus

A man, therefore, even though he will it not, is compelled to acknowledge God the Father Almighty, and Christ Jesus the Son of God, who, being God, became man, to whom also the Father made all things subject, Himself excepted, and the Holy Spirit; and that these, therefore, are three. But if he desires to learn how it is shown still that there is one God, let him know that His power is one. As far as regards the power, therefore, God is one. But as far as regards the economy there is a threefold manifestation (*Against the Heresy of One Noetus* 8 **[A.D. 200-210]**).

Tertullian

…All are of One, by unity (that is) of substance; while the mystery of the dispensation is still guarded, which distributes the Unity into a Trinity, placing in their order the three Persons – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost: three, however, not in condition, but in degree; not in substance, but in form; not in power, but in aspect; yet of one substance, and of one condition, and of one power, inasmuch as He is one God, from whom these degrees and forms and aspects are reckoned, under the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost (*Against Praxeus* 2 **[A.D. 213]**).

Origen

…the divine benefits [are] bestowed upon us by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which Trinity is the fountain of all holiness…. (*On First Principles* 1:4:2 **[A.D. 225]**).

Gregory Thaumaturgus

There is a perfect Trinity, in glory and eternity and sovereignty, neither divided nor estranged. Wherefore there is nothing either created or in servitude in the Trinity; nor anything superinduced, as if at some former period it was non-existent, and at some later period it was introduced. And thus neither was the Son ever wanting to the Father, nor the Spirit to the Son; but without variation and without change, the same Trinity abides forever (*Declaration of Faith* **[circa A.D. 250]**).

Methodius

Whence also in this place they are not only said to hymn with their praises the divine substance of the divine unity, but also the glory to be adored by all of that one of the sacred Trinity, which now, by the appearance of God in the flesh, hath even lighted upon earth (*Oration Concerning Simeon and Anna* 2 **[A.D. 300]**).

Gregory Nazianzen

But [the faithful] worship the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one Godhead; God the Father, God the Son and (do not be angry) God the Holy Spirit, one nature in three personalities, intellectual, perfect, self-existent, numerically separate, but not separate in godhead (*Orations* 33 **[A.D. 374]**).

Epiphanius

[The Antiochenes] confess the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit to be consubstantial, three hypostases, one essence, one divinity. That is the true faith which has been handed down by the fathers… (*Against the Heresies of the Panarians* 73 **[A.D. 374-377]**).

Ambrose of Milan

The substance of the Trinity is, so to say, a common Essence in that which is distinct, an incomprehensible, ineffable Substance. We hold the distinction, not the confusion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; a distinction without separation; a distinction without plurality; and thus we believe in Father, Son and Holy Spirit as each existing from and to eternity in this divine and wonderful Mystery: not in two Fathers, nor in two Sons, nor in two Spirits (*To Gratian, On the Christian Faith* 4:8 **[A.D. 381]**).

Augustine

Let us believe that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit is one God, the Creator and Ruler of the whole creature; and that the Father is not the Son, nor the Holy Spirit either the Father or the Son, but a trinity of persons mutually interrelated, and a unity of an equal essence (*On the Trinity* 9:1 **[A.D. 428]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on The Church

The early Church taught infallibly, gave us the New Testament, and was made up of three ranks of clergy – bishop, priest, and deacon. Nothing would have been more foreign to them than the idea that the Bible was the sole rule of faith. For one thing, the printing press would not be invented for more than a thousand years. Even if they would have had access to a Bible, the vast majority of people were illiterate. Additionally, the New Testament was not even codified until the fourth century. Realistically speaking, the type of Christianity proposed by our Protestant friends was not even possible for the first fifteen centuries after Christ's resurrection.

Clement of Rome

Those, therefore, who present their offerings at the appointed times, are accepted and blessed; for inasmuch as they follow the laws of the Lord, they sin not. For his own peculiar services are assigned to the high priest, and their own proper place is prescribed to the priests, and their own special ministrations devolve on the Levites. The layman is bound by the laws that pertain to laymen (*Letter to the Corinthians* 40 **[A.D. 95]**).

Ignatius of Antioch

In like manner let everyone respect the deacons as they would respect Jesus Christ, and just as they respect the bishop as a type of the Father, and the presbyters as the council of God and college of the apostles. Without these, it cannot be called a Church. I am confident that you accept this, for I have received the exemplar of your love and have it with me in the person of your bishop. His very demeanor is a great lesson and his meekness is his strength. I believe that even the godless do respect him (*Letter to the Trallians* 3:1-2 **[A. D. 110]**).

Hermas

With regard to the stones which are in the building. Those square white stones which fitted exactly into each other, are apostles, bishops, teachers, and deacons, who have lived in godly purity, and have acted as bishops and teachers and deacons chastely and reverently to the elect of God (*The Shepherd* 3:56:1 **[A.D. 140-155]**).

Irenaeus

Since therefore we have such proofs, it is not necessary to seek the truth among others which it is easy to obtain from the Church; since the apostles, like a rich man [depositing his money] in a bank, lodged in her hands most copiously all things pertaining to the truth: so that every man, whosoever will, can draw from her the water of life. For she is the entrance to life; all others are thieves and robbers. On this account we are bound to avoid them, but to make choice of the things pertaining to the Church with the utmost diligence, and to lay hold of the tradition of the truth. For how stands the case? Suppose there should arise a dispute relative to some important question among us. Should we not have recourse to the most ancient churches with which the apostles held constant intercourse, and learn from them what is certain and clear in regard to the present question? For how should it be if the apostles themselves had not left us writings? Would it not be necessary [in that case] to follow the course of the tradition which they handed down to those to whom they did commit the churches? (*Against Heresies* 3:4 **[A.D. 189]**).

Now all these [heretics] are of much later date than the bishops to whom the apostles committed the Churches; which fact I have in the third book taken all pains to demonstrate. It follows, then, as a matter of course, that these heretics aforementioned, since they are blind to the truth, and deviate from the [right] way, will walk in various roads; and therefore, the footsteps of their doctrine are scattered here and there without agreement or connection. But the path of those belonging to the Church circumscribes the whole world, as possessing the sure tradition from the apostles, and gives unto us to see that the faith of all is one and the same (*Against Heresies* 3:4 **[A.D. 189]**).

Clement of Alexandria

The gradations of bishops, presbyters, and deacons happen to be imitations, in my opinion, of the angelic glory and of that arrangement which, the Scriptures say, awaits those who have followed in the footsteps of the apostles and who have lived in complete righteousness according to the gospel (*Stromata* 6:13:107:2 **[A.D. 202]**).

Hippolytus

When a deacon is to be ordained, he is chosen after the fashion of those things said above, the bishop alone in like manner imposing his hands upon him as we have prescribed. In the ordaining of a deacon, this is the reason why the bishop alone is to impose his hands upon him: He is not ordained to the priesthood, but to serve the bishop and to fulfill the bishop's command. He has no part in the council of the clergy, but is to attend to his own duties and is to acquaint the bishop with such matters as are needful. . .. On a presbyter [priest], however, let the presbyters impose their hands because of the common and like Spirit of the clergy. Even so, the presbyter has only the power to receive [the Spirit], and not the power to give [the Spirit]. That is why a presbyter does not ordain the clergy; for at the ordaining of a presbyter, he but seals while the bishop ordains. (*Apostolic Tradition* 9 **[ca. A.D. 215]**).

Origen

Not fornication only, but even marriages make us unfit for ecclesiastical honors; for neither a bishop, nor a presbyter, nor a deacon, nor a widow is able to be twice married (*Homilies on Luke*, 17 **[ca. A.D. 235]**).

Cyprian

Peter speaks there, on whom the Church was to be built, teaching and showing in the name of the Church, that although a rebellious and arrogant multitude of those who will not hear or obey may depart, yet the Church does not depart from Christ; and they are the Church who are a people united to the priest, and the flock which adheres to its pastor. Whence you ought to know that the bishop is in the Church, and the Church in the bishop; and if anyone be not with the bishop, that he is not in the Church (Letters 66 **[A.D. 253]**).

Hilary of Poitiers

This is a truth which the passionate zeal of rival heresies brings into the clearest prominence. The Church, ordained by the Lord and established by His Apostles, is one for all; but the frantic folly of discordant sects has severed them from her (*On the Trinity* 7:4 **[A.D. 356-360]**).

Jerome

Since Hilary when he left the Church was only a deacon, and since the Church is to him, though to him alone, a mere worldly multitude, he can neither duly celebrate the Eucharist, for he has no bishops or priests (*Dialogue Against the Luciferians* 21 **[A.D. 382]**).

John Chrysostom

[In the greeting of the epistle to the Philippians, Paul addresses himself:] “To the co-bishops and deacons.” What does this mean? Were there plural bishops of one city? Certainly not! It is the presbyters that [Paul] calls by this title; for these titles were then interchangeable, and the bishop is even called a deacon. That is why, when writing to Timothy, he says, “Fulfill your diaconate” although Timothy was then a bishop. That he was in fact a bishop is clear when Paul says to him, “Lay hands on no man lightly,” and again, “which was given you with the laying on of hands of the presbytery”; and presbyters would not have ordained a bishop (*Homilies on the Epistle to the Philippians* 1:1 **[inter A.D. 398-404]**).

Apostolic Constitutions

A bishop is to be ordained by three bishops or two;, and if anyone be ordained by one bishop, he and the one ordaining are to be deposed (8:27:2 **[A.D. 400]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on The Catholic Church

We have one Savior and He established one Church (Matthew 16:18). He also promised to guard it against error (John 16:13). And He did. It was never His intent to create thousands of churches with contradictory teachings. Rather, He prayed that we would be one as He and the Father are one so that the world would know that He sent us (John 17:21). It would be hard to deny that the Protestant Reformation created and continues to create many divisions in the Body of Christ. In the words of Scott Hahn; "The world now has reason to doubt." The Early Church was the Catholic Church. It taught and practiced in the same manner as the Catholic Church of today. And oddly enough, it was even called the "Catholic Church."

Ignatius of Antioch

See that ye all follow the bishop, even as Jesus Christ does the Father, and the presbytery as ye would the apostles; and reverence the deacons, as being the institution of God. Let no man do anything connected with the Church without the bishop. Let that be deemed a proper Eucharist, which is [administered] either by the bishop, or by one to whom he has entrusted it. Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude [of the people] also be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church (*Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* 8 **[A.D. 110]**).

Polycarp

And of the elect, he was one indeed, the wonderful martyr Polycarp, who in our days was an apostolic and prophetic teacher, bishop of the Catholic Church in Smyrna. (*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 16:2 **[A.D. 155]**).

Justin Martyr

For the men of former generations, who instituted private and public rites in honor of such as were more powerful, caused forgetfulness of the Catholic faith to take possession of their posterity (*On the Sole Government of God* 1 **[inter A.D. 151-155]**).

Irenaeus

The truth is to be found nowhere else but in the Catholic Church, the sole depository of apostolical doctrine. Heresies are of recent formation and cannot trace their origin up to the apostles (*Against Heresies* 3:4 **[A.D. 189]**).

The Muratorian Canon

He wrote, besides these, one to Philemon, and one to Titus, and two to Timothy, in simple personal affection and love indeed; but yet these are hallowed in the esteem of the Catholic Church (3 **[inter A.D. 180-200]**).

Tertullian

For it is evident that those men lived not so long ago – in the reign of Antoninus for the most part – and that they at first were believers in the doctrine of the Catholic Church, in the church of Rome under the episcopate of the blessed Eleutherus, (*The Prescription Against Heretics* 22, 30 **[A.D.200]**).

Clement of Alexandria

It is my opinion that the true Church, that which is really ancient, is one, and that in it those who according to God's purpose are just, are enrolled…Therefore in substance and idea, in origin, in pre-eminence, we say that the ancient and Catholic Church is alone, collecting as it does into the unity of the one faith (*Stromata* 7:17 **[A.D. 202]**).

Origen

Let such things, however, be lightly esteemed by him who is desirous of being trained in divine learning, while retaining in its integrity the rule of the Catholic faith (*On First Principles* 3 **[A.D. 225]**).

Hippolytus

Behold, into how great impiety that lawless one has proceeded, by inculcating adultery and murder at the same time! And withal, after such audacious acts, they, lost to all shame, attempt to call themselves a Catholic Church! (*Refutation of All Heresies* 9:7 **[A.D. 228]**).

Cyprian of Carthage

They are striving here also to distract the members of Christ into schismatical parties, and to cut and tear the one body of the Catholic Church (Epistle 40:2 **[circa A.D. 250]**).

Dionysius the Great

For, indeed, in the most considerable councils of the bishops, as I hear, it has been decreed that they who come from heresy should first be trained in Catholic doctrine, and then should be cleansed by baptism from the filth of the old and impure leaven (Epistle 6:1 **[A.D. 251-253]**).

Peter of Alexandria

These things having thus ended, it was everywhere published far and wide that Arius had not been cut off from the Catholic unity without a divine interposition (*Genuine Acts of Peter* **[inter A.D. 300-311]**).

Lactantius

Therefore, it is the Catholic Church alone which retains true worship. This is the fountain of truth, this is the abode of the faith, this is the temple of God; into which if any one shall not enter, or from which if any shall go out, he is estranged from the hope of life and eternal salvation (*Divine Institutes* 4:30 **[A.D. 307]**).

Alexander of Alexandria

And besides, also, one only Catholic and Apostolic Church, which can never be destroyed, though all the world should seek to make war with it; but it is victorious over every most impious revolt of the heretics who rise up against it (*Letter 1 on the Arian Heresy* 12 **[inter A.D. 313-325]**).

Eusebius

But the splendor of the Catholic and only true Church, which is always the same, grew in magnitude and power, and reflected its piety and simplicity and freedom, and the modesty and purity of its inspired life and philosophy to every nation both of Greeks and of Barbarians (*Church History* 4:7:13 **[A.D. 325]**).

Cyril of Jerusalem

"In one Holy Catholic Church," on which, though one might say many things, we will speak but briefly. It is called Catholic then because it extends over all the world, from one end of the earth to the other; and because it teaches universally and completely one and all the doctrines which ought to come to men's knowledge, concerning things both visible and invisible, heavenly and earthly; and because it brings into subjection to godliness the whole race of mankind, governors and governed, learned and unlearned (*Catechetical Lecture* 18:22-23 **[A.D. 350]**).

Augustine

This same is the holy Church, the one Church, the true Church, the Catholic Church, fighting against all heresies: … "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (*A Sermon to Catechumens on the Creed* 14 **[inter A.D. 388-430]**).

Leo the Great

Do not doubt that the LORD, the Founder of the catholic Faith, will befriend you in all things (Letter 20 **[A.D. 448]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on The Primacy of Peter / Rome

The first Christians understood that Peter and his successors held a place of primacy in the Church and exercised authority over it. They believed that a rejection of Peter's authority was a rejection of Christ's authority. As the Scriptures tell us, Peter and Peter alone received the keys of the kingdom with the power to bind and loose (Matthew 16:18-19). It is true that Peter and his successors are sinful human beings. But it is also true that all the biblical authors were sinful human beings. And yet God was able to keep them from teaching error. That same God keeps Peter and his successors from officially teaching error.

Clement of Rome

Accept our counsel and you will have nothing to regret. . . . If anyone disobeys the things which have been said by him [Jesus] through us, let them know that they will involve themselves in no small danger. We, however, shall be innocent of this sin and will pray with entreaty and supplication that the Creator of all may keep unharmed the number of his elect (*Letter to the Corinthians* 58:2, 59:1 **[A.D. 95]**).

Ignatius of Antioch

You [the See of Rome] have envied no one, but others have you taught. I desire only that what you have enjoined in your instructions may remain in force (*Epistle to the Romans* 3:1 **[A.D. 110]**).

Irenaeus

… the greatest and most ancient church known to all, founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles. Peter and Paul, that church which has the tradition and the faith which comes down to us after having been announced to men by the apostles. With that church, because of its superior origin, all the churches must agree, that is, all the faithful in the whole world, and it is in her that the faithful everywhere have maintained the apostolic tradition (*Against Heresies* 3:3:2 **[inter A.D. 189]**).

Clement of Alexandria

[T]he blessed Peter, the chosen, the preeminent, the first among the disciples, for whom alone with himself the Savior paid the tribute [Matt. 17:27], quickly grasped and understood their meaning. And what does he say? "Behold, we have left all and have followed you" [Matt. 19:2 7, Mark 10:28] (*Who is the Rich Man that is Saved?* 21:3-5 **[A.D. 200]**).

Tertullian

[T]he Lord said to Peter, "On this rock I will build my Church, I have given you the keys of the kingdom of heaven [and] whatever you shall have bound or loosed on earth will be bound or loosed in heaven" [Matt. 16:18-19]. ... Upon you, he says, I will build my Church; and I will give to you the keys, not to the Church; and whatever you shall have bound or you shall have loosed, not what they shall have bound or they shall have loosed (*Modesty* 21:9-10 **[A.D. 220]**).

Letter of Clement to James

Simon [Peter], who, for the sake of the true faith, and the most sure foundation of his doctrine, was set apart to be the foundation of the Church, and for this end was by Jesus himself, with his truthful mouth, named Peter, the first-fruits of our Lord, the first of the apostles; to whom first the Father revealed the Son; whom the Christ, with good reason, blessed; the called, and elect (*Letter of Clement to James* 2 **[A.D, 221]**).

Origen

And Peter, on whom the Church of Christ is built, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail left only one epistle of acknowledged genuineness (*Commentaries on John* 5:3 **[A.D. 226-232]**).

Cyprian

With a false bishop appointed for themselves by heretics, they dare even to set sail and carry letters from schismatics and blasphemers to the Chair of Peter and to the principal church [at Rome], in which sacerdotal unity has its source" (*Epistle to Cornelius* [Bishop of Rome] 59:14 **[A.D. 252]**).

Constantine Augustus

And that the opposing parties who were contending persistently and incessantly with each other, should be summoned from Africa; that in their presence, and in the presence of the bishop of Rome, the matter which appeared to be causing the disturbance might be examined and decided with all care (*To Chrestus* **[A.D. 314]** as recorded by Eusebius).

Cyril of Jerusalem

In the power of the same Holy Spirit, Peter, both the chief of the apostles and the keeper of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, in the name of Christ healed Aeneas the paralytic at Lydda, which is now called Diospolis [Acts 9 ;3 2-3 4] (*Catechetical Lectures* 17;27 **[A.D. 350]**).

Optatus

In the city of Rome the Episcopal chair was given first to Peter, the chair in which Peter sat, the same who was head — that is why he is also called Cephas — of all the apostles, the one chair in which unity is maintained by all. Neither do the apostles proceed individually on their own, and anyone who would [presume to] set up another chair in opposition to that single chair would, by that very fact, be a schismatic and a sinner (*The Schism of the Donatists* 2:2 **[circa A.D. 367]**).

Ephraim

Simon, my follower, I have made you the foundation of the holy Church. I betimes called you Peter, because you will support all its tall buildings. You are the inspector of those who will build on earth a Church for Me. If they should wish to build what is false, you, the foundation, will condemn them. You are the head of the fountain from which my teaching flows, you are the chief of my disciples (Homilies 4:1 **[inter A.D. 338-373]**).

Ambrose of Milan

[Christ] made answer: “You are Peter, and upon this rock will I build my Church . . .” Could he not, then, strengthen the faith of the man to whom, acting on his own authority, he gave the kingdom, whom he called the rock, thereby declaring him to be the foundation of the Church [Matt. 16:18]? (*The Faith* 4:5 **[A.D. 379]**).

Tyrannius Rufinus

and further how he speaks of the city of Rome, which now through the grace of God is reckoned by Christians as their capital (*Apology* 2:23 **[A.D. 400]**).

Augustine

Among these [apostles] Peter alone almost everywhere deserved to represent the whole Church. Because of that representation of the Church, which only he bore, he deserved to hear “I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (*Sermons* 295:2 **[A.D. 411]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Peter's Presence in Rome

Some contend that Peter could not have been the bishop of Rome because he was never in Rome. This of course runs counter to the testimony of the Early Fathers and Scripture. In 1 Peter 5:12-13 Peter says: “I write you this briefly through Silvanus, whom I consider a faithful brother, exhorting you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Remain firm in it. The chosen one at Babylon sends you greeting, as does Mark, my son.” Babylon is a code word for Rome and is used elsewhere in Scripture to mean the same thing. Examples can be found in Revelation 18:2, 18:10 and 18:21. Further evidence can be found in Rome itself as Peter’s tomb is located under ST Peter’s Basilica.

Dionysius of Corinth

You have also, by your very admonition, brought together the planting that was made by Peter and Paul at Rome and at Corinth; for both of them alike planted in our Corinth and taught us; and both alike, teaching similarly in Italy, suffered martyrdom at the same time (*Letter to Soter of Rome* **[inter A.D. 166 -174]** as recorded by Eusebius).

Irenaeus

Matthew also issued among the Hebrews a written Gospel in their own language, while Peter and Paul were evangelizing in Rome and laying the foundation of the Church. (*Against Heresies* 3:1:1 **[A.D. 189]**).

Caius

It is recorded that Paul was beheaded in Rome itself, and Peter, likewise, was crucified, during the reign [of the Emperor Nero]. The account is confirmed by the names of Peter and Paul over the cemeteries there, which remain to the present time. And it is confirmed also by a stalwart man of the Church, Gaius by name, who lived in the time of Zephyrinus, bishop of Rome. This Gaius, in a written disputation with Proclus, the leader of the sect of Cataphrygians, says this of the places in which the remains of the aforementioned apostles were deposited: "I can point out the trophies of the apostles. For if you are willing to go to the Vatican or to the Ostian Way, you will find the trophies of those who founded this Church" (*Disputation with Proclus* **[A.D. 198]** in Eusebius, *Church History* 2:25:5).

Clement of Alexandria

When Peter preached the Word publicly at Rome, and declared the Gospel by the Spirit, many who were present requested that Mark, who had been for a long time his follower and who remembered his sayings, should write down what had been proclaimed. Having composed the Gospel, he gave it to those who had requested it (Fragment in Eusebius, *Church History* 6:14:1 **[circa A.D. 200]**).

Tertullian

Rome, where authority is at hand for us too. What a happy church that is, on which the apostles poured out their whole doctrine with their blood; where Peter had a passion like that of the Lord, where Paul was crowned with the death of John [the Baptist, by being beheaded] (*The Prescription Against the Heretics* 36 **[A.D. 200]**).

Cyprian of Carthage

After such things as these, moreover, they still dare — a false bishop having been appointed for them by, heretics— to set sail and to bear letters from schismatic and profane persons to the throne of Peter, and to the chief church whence priestly unity takes its source; and not to consider that these were the Romans whose faith was praised in the preaching of the apostle, to whom faithlessness could have no access (Letter 54:14 **[A.D. 252]**).

Eusebius

The Apostle Peter, after he has established the Church in Antioch, is sent to Rome, where he remains bishop of that city, preaching the Gospel for twenty-five years (*The Chronicle*, Ad An. Dom. 42 **[A.D. 303]**).

Peter of Alexandria

Peter, the first chosen of the Apostles, having been apprehended often and thrown into prison and treated with ignominy, at last was crucified in Rome (*Canonical Letter*, canon 9 **[A.D. 306]**).

Lactantius

When Nero was already reigning Peter came to Rome, where, in virtue of the performance of certain miracles which he worked by that power of God … he converted many to righteousness and established a firm and steadfast temple to God. When this fact was reported to Nero, he noticed that not only at Rome, but everywhere great multitudes were daily abandoning the worship of idols, and, condemning their old ways, were going over to the new religion. Being that he was a detestable and pernicious tyrant, he sprang to the task of tearing down the heavenly temple and of destroying righteousness. It was he that first persecuted the servants of God. Peter, he fixed to a cross; and Paul, he slew (*The Deaths of the Persecutors* 2:5 **[inter A.D. 316-320]**).

Council of Sardica

But if judgment have gone against a bishop in any cause, and he think that he has a good case, in order that the question may be reopened, let us, if it be your pleasure, honor the memory of St. Peter the Apostle, and let those who tried the case write to Julius, the bishop of Rome, and if he shall judge that the case should be retried, let that be done, and let him appoint judges; but if he shall find that the case is of such a sort that the former decision need not be disturbed, what he has decreed shall be confirmed (canon 3 **[A.D. 344]**).

Cyril of Jerusalem

[Simon Magus] so deceived the City of Rome that Claudius erected a statue of him and wrote beneath it in the language of the Romans Simoni Deo Sancto, which is translated To the Holy God Simon. While the error was extending itself Peter and Paul arrived, a noble pair and the rulers of the Church; and they set the error aright… for Peter was there, he that carries about the keys of heaven (*Catechetical Lectures* 6:14 **[A.D. 350]**).

Optatus

You cannot deny that you are aware that in the city of Rome the episcopal chair was given first to Peter; the chair in which Peter sat, the same who was head—that is why he is also called Cephas [‘Rock’]—of all the apostles; the one chair in which unity is maintained by all (*The Schism of the Donatists* 2:2 **[A.D. 367]**).

Epiphanius of Salamis

At Rome the first apostles and bishops were Peter and Paul, then Linus, then Cletus, then Clement, the contemporary of Peter and Paul (*Medicine Chest Against All Heresies* 27:6 **[A.D. 375]**).

Damasus

The first see, therefore, is that of Peter the Apostle, that of the Roman Church, which has neither stain nor blemish nor anything like it. The second see, however, is that at Alexandria, consecrated in behalf of blessed Peter by Mark, his disciple and an evangelist, who was sent to Egypt by the Apostle Peter, where he preached the word of truth and finished his glorious martyrdom. The third honorable see, indeed, is that at Antioch, which belonged to the most blessed Apostle Peter, where first he dwelt before he came to Rome, and where the name Christians was first applied, as to a new people (*The Decree of Damasus* 3 **[A.D. 382]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Apostolic Succession

Christ conferred authority on the apostles who in turn conferred it upon their successors. In this way, Jesus' true teachings were safeguarded and handed down through the ages. The Apostle Paul tells us how this was done in a letter to Timothy. He writes: "Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the elders laid their hands upon you" (1Timothy 4:14). There are also examples of men other than the twelve being called apostles. For instance, in Acts 14:14 we see that Barnabas along with Paul is referred to as an apostle. Though neither were one of the original twelve, they would carry on their work. All of this makes sense as the Church of Jesus Christ would have to function as designed until the Second Coming.

Clement of Rome

Our Apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife for the office of bishop. For this reason, therefore, having received perfect foreknowledge, they appointed those who have already been mentioned, and afterwards added the further provision that, if they should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry (*Letter to the Corinthians* 44:1 **[A.D. 95]**).

Ignatius of Antioch

Let no one do anything of concern to the Church without the bishop. Let that be considered a valid Eucharist which is celebrated by the bishop, or by one whom he appoints. Wherever the bishop appears, let the people be there; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church (*Letter to the Smyrnaens* 8:1 **[A.D. 110]**).

Irenaeus

We are in a position to reckon up those who were by the apostles instituted bishops in the Churches, and [to demonstrate] the succession of these men to our own times; . . . For if the apostles had known hidden mysteries, which they were in the habit of imparting to the perfect apart and privily from the rest, they would have delivered them especially to those to whom they were also committing the Churches themselves. For they were desirous that these men should be very perfect and blameless in all things, whom also they were leaving behind as their successors, delivering up their own place of government to these men (*Against Heresies* 3:3:1 **[A.D. 189]**).

Tertullian

If there be any [heresies] bold enough to plant themselves in the midst of the apostolic age, so that they might seem to have been handed down by the Apostles because they were from the time of the Apostles, we can say to them: let them show the origin of their Churches, let them unroll the order of their bishops, running down in succession from the beginning, so that their first bishop shall have for author and predecessor some one of the Apostles or of the apostolic men who continued steadfast with the Apostles (*The Prescription Against Heretics* 32:1 **[A.D. 200]**).

Clement of Alexandria

After the death of the tyrant, the [Apostle John] came back again to Ephesus from the Island of Patmos; and, upon being invited, he went even to the neighboring cities of the pagans, here to appoint bishops, there to set in order whole Churches, and there to ordain to the clerical estate such as were designated by the Spirit (*Who is the Rich Man that is Saved?* 42:2 **[A.D. 200]**).

Origen

through His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, what appears to us, who observe things by a right way of understanding, to be the standard and discipline delivered to the apostles by Jesus Christ, and which they handed down in succession to their posterity, the teachers of the holy Church (*On First Principals* 4:8 **[A.D. 225]**).

Cyprian of Carthage

Christ, who says to the apostles, and thereby to all chief rulers, who by vicarious ordination succeed to the apostles: "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that heareth me, heareth Him that sent me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me, and Him that sent me" (*Luke 10:16*, Letter 68:4 **[circa A.D. 250]**).

Firmilion of Caesarea

But what is his error, and how great his blindness, who says that the remission of sins can be given in the synagogues of the heretics, and who does not remain on the foundation of the one Church which was founded upon the rock by Christ can be learned from this, which Christ said to Peter alone: "Whatever things you shall bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth, they shall be loosed in heaven;" and by this, again in the gospel, when Christ breathed upon the Apostles alone, saying to them; "Receive the Holy Spirit: if you forgive any man his sins, they shall be forgiven; and if you retain any man's sins, they shall be retained." Therefore, the power of forgiving sins was given to the Apostles and to the Churches which these men, sent by Christ, established; and to the bishops who succeeded them (*Letter to Cyprian* 75:16 **[A.D. 255-256]**).

Peter of Alexandria

A cycle of two hundred and eighty-five years from the incarnation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ had rolled round, when the venerable Theonas, the bishop of this city, by an ethereal flight, mounted upwards to the celestial kingdoms. To him Peter, succeeding at the helm of the Church, was by all the clergy and the whole Christian community appointed bishop, the sixteenth in order from Mark the Evangelist, who was also archbishop of the city (*Genuine Acts of Peter* **[A.D. 300-311]**).

Eusebius

Zambdas received the episcopate of the church of Jerusalem after the bishop Hymenaeus, whom we mentioned a little above. He died in a short time, and Hermon, the last before the persecution in our day, succeeded to the apostolic chair, which has been preserved there until the present time (*Church History* 7:32:29 **[A.D. 325]**).

Gregory of Nyssa

The tradition has come down to us from our fathers, handled on, like some inheritance by succession from the apostles and the saints who came after them (*Against Eunomius* 4:5 **[A.D. 382]**).

Jerome

Far be it from me to speak adversely of any of these clergy who, in succession from the apostles, confect by their sacred word the Body of Christ (Letter 14:8 **[A.D. 374-376]**).

Augustine

[T]here are many other things which most properly can keep me in [the Catholic Church's] bosom. The unanimity of peoples and nations keeps me here. Her authority, inaugurated in miracles, nourished by hope, augmented by love, and confirmed by her age, keeps me here. The succession of priests, from the very see of the apostle Peter, to whom the Lord, after his resurrection, gave the charge of feeding his sheep [John 21:15–17], up to the present episcopate, keeps me here. And last, the very name Catholic, which, not without reason, belongs to this Church alone (*Against the Letter of Manichaeus called Fundamental* 4:5 **[A.D. 397]**).

Apostolic Constitutions

[Invocation in the Ordination of Bishops] Grant to him, almighty master, through your Christ, possession of the Holy Spirit, so that he may have, according to your mandate, the power to remit sins, to confer orders according to your precept, and to dissolve every bond, according to the power which you gave to your apostles (8:5:7 **[A.D. 400]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Clerical Celibacy

Critics will often claim that clerical celibacy is an unnatural invention of the Catholic Church. However, the practice of celibacy has its roots in Scripture. Thus, it has been practiced in the Church from the very beginning. The apostle Paul tells us: “I should like you to be free of anxieties. An unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord. But a married man is anxious about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and he is divided” (1 Corinthians 7:32-33). Jesus commends those who are celibate for the sake of the kingdom. In Matthew 19:12 He says the following: “Some are incapable of marriage because they were born so; some, because they were made so by others; some because they have renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Whoever can accept this ought to accept it.” While everyone may not be called to be celibate, it is obvious that some are.

Clement of Rome

Let our whole body, then, be preserved in, Christ Jesus; and let everyone be subject to his neighbor, according to the special gift bestowed upon him. Let the strong not despise the weak, and let the weak show respect unto the strong. Let the rich man provide for the wants of the poor; and let the poor man bless God, because He hath given him one by whom his need may be supplied. Let the wise man display his wisdom, not by [mere] words, but through good deeds. Let the humble not bear testimony to himself, but leave witness to be borne to him by another. Let him that is pure in the flesh not grow proud of it, and boast, knowing that it was another who bestowed on him the gift of continence. Let us consider, then, brethren, of what matter we were made, — who and what manner of beings we came into the world, as it were out of a sepulcher, and from utter darkness. He who made us and fashioned us, having prepared His bountiful gifts for us before we were born, introduced us into His world. Since, therefore, we receive all these things from Him, we ought for everything to give Him thanks; to whom be glory for ever and ever (*Letter to the Corinthians*, 38:2 **[A.D. 95]**).

Ignatius of Antioch

If anyone can continue in a state of purity, to the honor of Him who is Lord of the flesh, let him so remain without boasting (*Letter to Polycarp* 5 **[AD 110]**).

Justin Martyr

And many, both men and women, who have been Christ's disciples from childhood, have preserved their purity at the age of sixty and seventy years; and I am proud that I could produce such from every race of men and women (*Defense of Christianity* 15 **[A.D. 150]**).

Tertullian

How many men, therefore, and how many women, in Ecclesiastical Orders, owe their position to continence, who have preferred to be wedded to. God; who have restored the honor of their flesh, and who have already dedicated themselves as sons of that (future) age, by slaying in themselves the concupiscence of lust, and that whole (propensity) which could not be admitted within Paradise! Whence it is presumable that such as shall wish to be received within Paradise, ought at last to begin to cease from that thing from which Paradise is intact (*On Exhortation to Chastity* 8 **[A.D. 204-212]**).

Clement of Alexandria

Even Paul did not hesitate in one letter to address his consort. The only reason why he did not take her about with him was that it would have been an inconvenience for his ministry. Accordingly, he says in a letter: "Have we not a right to take about with us a wife that is a sister like the other apostles?" But the latter, in accordance with their particular ministry, devoted themselves to preaching without any distraction, and took their wives with them not as women with whom they had marriage relations, but as sisters, that they might be their fellow-ministers in dealing

with housewives. I t was through them that the Lord's teaching penetrated also the women's quarters without any scandal being aroused (*Stromata* 3:6:53 **[A.D. 202]**).

Eusebius

I am glad to say we are able to provide teachers and preachers of the word of holiness, free from all ties of life and anxious thoughts. And in our day these men are necessarily devoted to celibacy that they may have leisure for higher things; they have undertaken to bring up not one or two children but a prodigious number, and to educate them in godliness, and to care for their life generally. On the top of all this, if we carefully examine the lives of the ancient men of whom I am speaking, we shall find that they had children in early life, but later on abstained and ceased from having them… To this I must refer the student, only warning him that according to the laws of the new covenant the producing of children is certainly not forbidden, but the provisions are similar to those followed by the ancient men of God. "For a bishop," says the Scripture "must be the husband of one wife." Yet it is fitting that those in the priesthood and occupied in the service of God, should abstain after ordination from the intercourse of marriage (*Church History* 1:9 **[A.D. 325]**).

Spanish Council of Elvira

We decree that all bishops, priests, and deacons, and all clerics engaged in the ministry, are forbidden entirely to have conjugal relations with their wives and to beget children; whoever shall do so, will be deposed from clerical dignity (Canon 33 **[A.D. 305]**).

Cyril of Jerusalem

For it became Him who is most pure, and a teacher of purity, to have come forth from a pure bride-chamber. For if he who well fulfils the office of a priest of Jesus abstains froth a wife, how should Jesus Himself be born of man and woman? (*Catechetical Lectures* 12:25 **[A.D. 350]**).

Epiphanius

Holy Church respects the dignity of the priesthood to such a point that she does not admit to the diaconate, the priesthood, or the episcopate, no nor even to the subdiaconate, anyone still living in marriage and begetting children. She accepts only him who if married gives up his wife or has lost her by death, especially in those places where the ecclesiastical canons are strictly attended to (*Panarion* **[A.D. 376]**).

Jerome

In accordance with this rule Peter and the other Apostles (I must give Jovinianus something now and then out of my abundance) had indeed wives, but those which they had taken before they knew the Gospel. But once they were received into the Apostolate, they forsook the offices of marriage. For when Peter, representing the Apostles, says to the Lord: Matthew 19:27 Lo we have left all and followed you, the Lord answered him, Luke 18:29-30 Verily I say unto you, there is no man that has left house or wife, or brethren, or parents, or children for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this time, and in the world to come eternal life (*Against Jovinianus* 1:26 **[A.D. 393]**).

Ambrose of Milan

But ye know that the ministerial office must be kept pure and unspotted, and must not be defiled by conjugal intercourse; ye know this, I say, who have received the gifts of the sacred ministry, with pure bodies, and unspoiled modesty, and without ever having enjoyed conjugal intercourse. I am mentioning this, because in some out-of-the-way places, when they enter on the ministry, or even when they become priests, they have begotten children. They defend this on the ground of old custom, when, as it happened, the sacrifice was offered up at long intervals. However, even the people had to be purified two or three days beforehand, so as to come clean to the sacrifice. As we read in the Old Testament, Exodus 19:10 they even used to wash their clothes. If such regard was paid in what was only the figure, how much ought it to be shown in the reality! Learn then, Priest and Levite, what it means to wash your clothes. You must have a pure body wherewith to offer up the sacraments (*On the Duties of the Clergy* 50:258 **[A.D. 391]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Justification

We are justified by our faith in Christ which is manifested in a life of good works. As James tells us: “faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:17). While the meaning of the text is plain some still try to get around it. They contend that salvation is a gift, and it is. But then they take another step and say that once salvation is achieved there is nothing one can do or not do to lose it. One must merely believe to be saved. They see works as a human effort to please God. But the works spoken of by James and the Early Fathers are accomplished by the grace of God and not on the strength of the individual. Therefore, they do not constitute “Works Salvation.” In reality a good work is the evidence that the individual has accepted the grace of God in his life. That is why James says no works equals dead faith. And dead faith cannot save.

Clement of Rome

Let us therefore join with those to whom grace is given by God. Let us clothe ourselves in concord, being humble and self- controlled, keeping ourselves far from all backbiting and slander, being justified by works and not by words. . .. Why was our Father Abraham blessed? Was it not because of his deeds of justice and truth, wrought in faith? . . . So, we, having been called through his will in Christ Jesus, were not justified through ourselves or through our own wisdom or understanding or piety or works which we wrought in holiness of heart, but through faith, whereby the almighty God justified all men. (*Letter to the Corinthians* 30:3, 31:2, 32:3-4 **[A.D. 95]**).

Theophilus of Antioch

Give studious attention to the prophetic writings, and they will lead you on a clearer path to escape the eternal punishments and to obtain the eternal good things of God. He who gave the mouth for speech and formed the ears for hearing and made eyes for seeing will examine everything and will judge justly, granting recompense to each according to merit. To those who seek immortality by the patient exercise of good works, he will give everlasting life, joy, peace, rest, and all good things, which neither has eye seen nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man. For the unbelievers and for the contemptuous, and for those who do not submit to the truth but assent to iniquity, when they have been involved in adulteries and fornications and homosexuality and avarice and in lawless idolatries, there will be wrath and indignation, tribulation and anguish, and in the end such men as these will be detained in everlasting fire (*To Autolycas* 1:14 **[ca. A.D. 181]**).

Clement of Alexandria

When we hear, 'Your faith has saved you,' we do not understand the Lord to say simply that they will be saved who have believed in whatever manner, even if works have not followed. To begin with, it was to the Jews alone that he spoke this phrase, who had lived in accord with the law and blamelessly and who had lacked only faith in the Lord (*Stromata* 6:14 **[post A.D. 202]**).

Hippolytus

It is said, the Savior has declared, "Not every-one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." And it is necessary that they who perform this (will), not hear it merely, should enter into the kingdom of heaven (*Refutation of All Heresies* 5:2 **[A.D. 225]**).

Origen

Whoever dies in his sins, even if he profess to believe in Christ, does not truly believe in him; and even if that which exists without works be called faith, such faith is dead in itself, as we read in the epistle bearing the name of James (*Commentaries on John* 19:6 **[A.D. 226-232]**).

Cyprian

You, then, who are rich and wealthy, buy for yourself from Christ gold purified in fire, for with your filth, as if burned away in the fire; you can be like pure gold, if you are cleansed by almsgiving and by works of justice. Buy yourself a white garment so that, although you had been naked like Adam and were formerly frightful and deformed, you may be clothed in the white garment of Christ. You who are a matron rich and wealthy, anoint not your eyes with the antimony of the devil, but with the salve of Christ, so that you may at last come to see God, when you have merited before God both by your works and by your manner of living (*Works and Almsgiving* 14 **[A.D. 252]**).

Aphracrtes

Great is the gift which he that is good has given to us. While not forcing us, and in spite of our sins he wants us to be justified. While he is in no way aided by our good works, he heals us that we may be pleasing in his sight. When we do not wish to ask of him, he is angry with us. He calls out to all of us constantly; "Ask and receive, and when you seek, you shall find" (*Treatises* 23:48 **[A.D. 336-345]**).

Gregory of Nyssa

Paul, joining righteousness to faith and weaving them together, constructs of them the breastplates for the infantryman, armoring the soldier properly and safely on both sides. A soldier cannot be considered safely armored when either shield is disjoined from the other. Faith without works of justice is not sufficient for salvation; neither is righteous living secure in itself of salvation, if it is disjoined from faith (*Homilies on Ecclesiastes* 8 [**ca. A.D. 335-394]**).

John Chrysostom

He that believes in the Son has everlasting life." Is it enough, then, to believe in the Son,' someone will say, 'in order to have everlasting life?' By no means! Listen to Christ declare this himself when he says, 'Not everyone who says to me, "Lord! Lord!" shall enter into the kingdom of heaven'; and the blasphemy against the Spirit is alone sufficient to cast him into hell. But why should I speak of a part of our teaching? For if a man believe rightly in the Father and in the Son and in the Holy Spirit, but does not live rightly, his faith will avail him nothing toward salvation (*Homilies on the Gospel of John* 31:1 **[circa A.D. 391]**).

Jerome

But since in the Law no one is justified before God, it is evident that the just man lives by faith.' It should be noted that he does not say that a man, a person, lives by faith, lest it be thought that he is condemning good works. Rather, he says the 'just' man lives by faith. He implies thereby that whoever would be faithful and would conduct his life according to the faith can in no other way arrive at the faith or live in it except first he be a just man of pure life, coming up to the faith by certain degrees (*Commentaries on Galatians* 2:3:11 **[A.D. 386]**).

Augustine

But we know that God does not hear sinners: but if any man is a worshiper of God and does his will, that man God will hear. He still speaks as one only anointed. For God does listen to sinners too. If God did not listen to sinners, it would have been all in vain for the publican to cast down his eyes to the ground and strike his breast saying: "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner." And that confession merited justification, just as the blind man merited enlightenment (*Homilies on the Gospel of John* 44:13 **[A.D. 416]**).

Prosper of Aquitaine

Just as good works are to be referred to Him that inspires them, God, so too evil works are to be referred to those who are sinning. For sinners have not been abandoned by God so that they might themselves abandon God; rather, they have abandoned and have been abandoned and have been changed from good to evil by their own will; and consequently, although they may have been reborn, although they may have been justified, they are not, however, predestined by Him who foreknew what kind of persons they would be (*Calumniators in Gaul* 3 **[A.D. 431]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Merit

When the Catholic Church speaks of merit, she does not mean that we can earn our salvation in the strict literal sense. For only Christ can merit or earn salvation for us. When applied to humans, the word merit is synonymous to the word reward. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us: “With regard to God, there is no strict right to any merit on the part of man. Between God and us there is an immeasurable inequality, for we have received everything from Him, our Creator” (CCC 2007). The Catechism goes on to say: “The merit of man before God in the Christian life arises from the fact that God has freely chosen to associate man with the work of His grace” (CCC 2008). So, when we speak of man meriting salvation, we are speaking of man being rewarded for allowing God to work through him. In short, for saying yes to Christ. This was also the view of the early Church.

Ignatius of Antioch

Be pleasing to him whose soldiers you are, and whose pay you receive. May none of you be found to be a deserter. Let your baptism be your armament, your faith your helmet, your love your spear, your endurance your full suit of armor. Let your works be as your deposited withholdings, so that you may receive the back-pay which has accrued to you (*Letter to Polycarp* 6:2 **[A.D. 110]**).

Justin Martyr

We have learned from the prophets and we hold it as true that punishments and chastisements and good rewards are distributed according to the merit of each man’s actions. Were this not the case, and were all things to happen according to the decree of fate, there would be nothing at all in our power (*First Apology* 43 **[A.D. 151]**).

Tatian the Syrian

[T]he wicked man is justly punished, having become depraved of himself; and the just man is worthy of praise for his honest deeds, since it was in his free choice that he did not transgress the will of God (*Address to the Greeks* 7 **[A.D. 170]**).

Athenagoras

And we shall make no mistake in saying, that the [goal] of an intelligent life and rational judgment, is to be occupied uninterruptedly with those objects to which the natural reason is chiefly and primarily adapted, and to delight unceasingly in the contemplation of Him Who Is, and of his decrees, notwithstanding that the majority of men, because they are affected too passionately and too violently by things below, pass through life without attaining this object. For . . . the examination relates to individuals, and the reward or punishment of lives ill or well spent is proportioned to the merit of each (*The Resurrection of the Dead* 25 **[A.D. 178]**).

Theophilus of Antioch

He who gave the mouth for speech and formed the ears for hearing and made eyes for seeing will examine everything and will judge justly, granting recompense to each according to merit. To those who seek immortality by the patient exercise of good works [Rom. 2:7], he will give everlasting life, joy, peace, rest, and all good things, which neither eye has seen nor ear has heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man [1 Cor. 2:9]. For the unbelievers and the contemptuous and for those who do not submit to the truth but assent to iniquity . . . there will be wrath and indignation [Rom. 2:8]” (*To Autolycus* 1:14 **[A.D. 181]**).

Irenaeus

“[Paul], an able wrestler, urges us on in the struggle for immortality, so that we may receive a crown and so that we may regard as a precious crown that which we acquire by our own struggle and which does not grow upon us spontaneously. . .. Those things which come to us spontaneously are not loved as much as those which are obtained by anxious care” (Against Heresies 4:37:7 **[A.D. 189]**).

Tertullian

Again, we [Christians] affirm that a judgment has been ordained by God according to the merits of every man" (*To the Nation's* 19 **[A.D. 195]**).

"A good deed has God for its debtor [cf. Prov. 19:17], just as also an evil one; for a judge is the rewarder in every case [cf. Rom. 13:3–4]" (*Repentance* 2:11 **[A.D. 203]**).

Hippolytus

Standing before [Christ's] judgment, all of them, men, angels, and demons, crying out in one voice, shall say: 'Just is your judgment,' and the justice of that cry will be apparent in the recompense made to each. To those who have done well, everlasting enjoyment shall be given; while to lovers of evil shall be given eternal punishment (*Against the Greeks* 3 **[A.D. 212]**).

Cyprian of Carthage

The Lord denounces [Christian evildoers], and says, 'Many shall say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, and in your name have cast out devils, and in your name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, you who work iniquity' [Matt. 7:21–23]. There is need of righteousness, that one may deserve well of God the Judge; we must obey his precepts and warnings, that our merits may receive their reward (*The Unity of the Catholic Church* 15, 1st ed. **[A.D. 251]**).

Lactantius

Let everyone train himself to righteousness, mold himself to self-restraint, prepare himself for the contest, equip himself for virtue . . . [and] in his uprightness acknowledge the true and only God, may cast away pleasures, by the attractions of which the lofty soul is depressed to the earth, may hold fast innocence, may be of service to as many as possible, may gain for himself incorruptible treasures by good works, that he may be able, with God for his judge, to gain for the merits of his virtue either the crown of faith, or the reward of immortality" (*Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 73 **[A.D. 317]**).

Cyril of Jerusalem

The root of every good work is the hope of the resurrection, for the expectation of a reward nerves the soul to good work. Every laborer is prepared to endure the toils if he looks forward to the reward of these toils (*Catechetical Lectures* 18:1 **[A.D. 350]**).

Jerome

It is our task, according to our different virtues, to prepare for ourselves different rewards. . .. If we were all going to be equal in heaven it would be useless for us to humble ourselves here in order to have a greater place there. . .. Why should virgins persevere? Why should widows toil? Why should married women be content? Let us all sin, and after we repent, we shall be the same as the apostles are!" (*Against Jovinian* 2:32 **[A.D. 393]**).

Augustine

What merit, then, does a man have before grace, by which he might receive grace, when our every good merit is produced in us only by grace and when God, crowning our merits, crowns nothing else but his own gifts to us? (Letters 194:5:19 **[A.D. 412]**).

Prosper of Aquitaine

Indeed, a man who has been justified, that is, who from impious has been made pious, since he had no antecedent good merit, receives a gift, by which gift he may also acquire merit. Thus, what was begun in him by Christ's grace can also be augmented by the industry of his free choice, but never in the absence of God's help, without which no one is able either to progress or to continue in doing good" (*Responses on Behalf of Augustine* 6 **[A.D. 431]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Free Will and Salvation

Reformer John Calvin wrote: “For the will is so overwhelmed by wickedness and so pervaded by vice and corruption that it cannot in any way escape to honorable exertion or devote itself to righteousness” (*The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*). He wrote elsewhere: “So depraved is [man’s] nature that he can be moved or impelled only to evil” (ibid). Man, according to Calvin and other reformers, cannot cooperate in his salvation. But whenever God gives man a choice, He is affirming that man can make good choices. In Deuteronomy 30:19 we read: “I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore, choose life, that you and your descendants may live.” Even those who do not know God can do some good: “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same” (Luke 6:32). Nature itself orders man to a degree of right thinking: “Ever since the creation of the world His invisible nature, namely, His eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So, they [wicked men] are without excuse” (Romans 1:20). This does not mean that we can be saved without grace. Only that man is not totally depraved and lacking in free will.

Justin Martyr

We have learned from the prophets, and we hold it to be true, that punishments, chastisements, and rewards are rendered according to the merit of each man's actions. Otherwise, if all things happen by fate, then nothing is in our own power. For if it be predestined that one man be good and another man evil, then the first is not deserving of praise or the other to be blamed. Unless humans have the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions-whatever they may be.... For neither would a man be worthy of reward or praise if he did not of himself choose the good, but was merely created for that end. Likewise, if a man were evil, he would not deserve punishment, since he was not evil of himself, being unable to do anything else than what he was made for (*First Apology* 43 **[A.D. 151]**).

Clement of Alexandria

Nor shall he who is saved be saved against his will, for he is not inanimate; but he will above all voluntarily and of free choice speed to salvation (*Stromata* 7:7 **[A.D. 202]**).

Tertullian

Judas likewise was for a long time reckoned among the elect (apostles), and was even appointed to the office of their treasurer; he was not yet the traitor, although he was become fraudulent; but afterwards the devil entered into him (*Treatise on the Soul* 11 **[A.D. 209]**).

Dionysius

Wherefore he also became an enemy to His Catholic Church; and besides that, he alienated and estranged himself from the mercy of God, and fled to the utmost possible distance from His salvation (*Extant Fragments* Letter 11:3 **[A.D. 251-253]**).

Archelaus

All the creatures that God made, He made very good. And He gave to every individual the sense of free will, by which standard He also instituted the law of judgment.... And certainly whoever will, may keep the commandments. Whoever despises them and turns aside to what is contrary to them, shall yet without doubt have to face this law of judgment.... There can be no doubt that every individual, in using his own proper power of will, may shape his course in whatever direction he pleases (*Disputation with Manes* 32-33 **[A.D. 277]**).

Methodius

Those [pagans] who decide that man does not have free will, but say that he is governed by the unavoidable necessities of fate, are guilty of impiety toward God Himself, making Him out to be the cause and author of human evils (*The Banquet of the Ten Virgins* 8:16 **[circa A.D. 311]**).

Athanasius

Moreover, if we believe man to be, as the divine Scriptures say, a work of God's hands, how could any defiled work proceed from a pure Power? and if, according to the divine Acts of the Apostles, 'we are God's offspring,' we have nothing unclean in ourselves. For then only do we incur defilement, when we commit sin, that foulest of things (Letter 48 **[A.D. 373]**).

Cyril of Jerusalem

For we shall not tolerate those who give a wrong meaning to that saying, Hereby know we the children of God, and the children of the devil, as if there were by nature some men to be saved, and some to be lost. Whereas we come into such holy sonship not of necessity but by choice: nor was the traitor Judas by nature a son of the devil and of perdition for certainly he would never have cast out devils at all in the name of Christ: for Satan casteth not out Satan. Nor on the other hand would Paul have turned from persecuting to preaching. But the adoption is in our own power, as John saith, But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the children of God (*Catechetical Lecture* 7:13 **[A.D. 348-350]**).

Gregory of Nyssa

That some are saved and some perish depends rather upon the deliberate choice of those who hear the word (*Refutation of Apollinaris* 29 **[post A.D. 385]**).

John Chrysostom

Hence, he says, that it is not the calling alone, but the purpose of those called too, that works the salvation. For the calling was not forced upon them, nor compulsory. All then were called, but all did not obey the call (*Homily 15 on Romans* 28 **[A.D. 391]**).

Jerome

Remember how thou hast received, and didst hear, and keep it, and repent, and so on, were of course believers, and baptized, who once stood, but fell through sin (*Against Jovinianus* 2:3 **[A.D. 393]**).

Augustine

What is so established in free will as what the law says, that we must not worship an idol, must not commit adultery, must do no murder? Nay, these crimes, and such like, are of such a kind that, if any one should commit them, he is removed from the communion of the body of Christ (*Two Letters of the Pelagians* 4:26 **[A.D. 426-428]**).

John Cassian

It cannot then be doubted that there are by nature some seeds of goodness in every soul implanted by the kindness of the Creator: but unless these are quickened by the assistance of God, they will not be able to attain to an increase of perfection, for, as the blessed Apostle says: "Neither is he that planteth anything nor he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase" (*Conference* 13:7 **[circa A.D. 430]**).

Fulgence of Ruspe

Those, therefore, who go away from God and commit fornication perish forthwith by sinning of their own evil will, which is not God’s doing (*To Monimus* 1:19:2 **[post A.D. 512]**).

Gregory the Great

For one could not be drawn to God after death who had separated himself from God by evil living (Letters 7:15 **[inter A.D. 590-604]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Once Saved Not Always Saved

Martin Luther was a man who suffered from a condition known as Scrupulosity. Someone thus afflicted is haunted by guilt concerning moral or religious issues. He lived in constant fear that he would go to hell. He would go to confession as often as he could. At one point his confessor told him that God did not have a problem with him. He, Martin Luther, had a problem with God. One day after reading Scripture he concluded that what one did, did not matter. If one would genuinely turn to Jesus he would be saved for all time. And nothing he did after that would cause him to lose his salvation. While this eased the suffering caused by his scrupulosity, it was a doctrine that contradicted Scripture and the writings of the Early Church.

The Didache

Watch for your life's sake. Let not your lamps be quenched, nor your loins unloosed; but be ready, for you know not the hour in which our Lord comes. Matthew 24:42 But often shall you come together, seeking the things which are befitting to your souls: for the whole time of your faith will not profit you, if you be not made perfect in the last time. For in the last days false prophets and corrupters shall be multiplied, and the sheep shall be turned into wolves, and love shall be turned into hate; Matthew 24:11-12 for when lawlessness increases, they shall hate and persecute and betray one another, Matthew 24:10 (16). **[AD 70].**

Herrmas

"And as many of them," he added, "as have repented, shall have their dwelling in the tower. And those of them who have been slower in repenting shall dwell within the walls. And as many as do not repent at all, but abide in their deeds, shall utterly perish."... Yet they also, being naturally good, on hearing my commandments, purified themselves, and soon repented. Their dwelling, accordingly, was in the tower. But if any one relapse into strife, he will be east out of the tower, and will lose his life (*The Shepherd* 3:8:7 **[A.D. 155]**).

Justin Martyr

Eternal fire has been prepared for him [Satan] as he apostatized from God of his own free-will, and likewise for all who unrepentant continue in the apostasy, he now blasphemes, by means of such men, the Lord who brings judgment [upon him] as being already condemned, and imputes the guilt of his apostasy to his Maker, not to his own voluntary disposition (**[A.D. 156]** Quoted by Irenaeus in *Against Heresies* 5:26:2).

Irenaeus of Lyon

Christ shall not die again on behalf of those who now commit sin, for death shall no more have dominion over Him; but the Son shall come in the glory of the Father, requiring from His stewards and dispensers the money which He had entrusted to them, with usury; and from those to whom He had given most shall He demand most. We ought not, therefore, as that presbyter remarks, to be puffed up, nor be severe upon those of old time, but ought ourselves to fear, lest perchance, after [we have come to] the knowledge of Christ, if we do things displeasing to God, we obtain no further forgiveness of sins, but be shut out from His kingdom (*Against Heresies* 4:27:2 **[inter A.D. 180-190]**).

Tatian the Syrian

Now, in the beginning the spirit was a constant companion of the soul, but the spirit forsook it because it was not willing to follow. Yet, retaining as it were a spark of its power, though unable by reason of the separation to discern the perfect, while seeking for God it fashioned to itself in its wandering many gods, following the sophistries of the demons. But the Spirit of God is not with all, but, taking up its abode with those who live justly, and intimately combining with the soul, by prophecies it announced hidden things to other souls. And the souls that are obedient to wisdom have attracted to themselves the cognate spirit; but the disobedient, rejecting the minister of the

suffering God, have shown themselves to be fighters against God, rather than His worshippers (*Address to the Greeks* 13 **[A.D. 175]**).

Tertullian

But some think as if God were under a necessity of bestowing even on the unworthy, what He has engaged (to give); and they turn His liberality into slavery. But if it is of necessity that God grants us the symbol of death, then He does so unwillingly. But who permits a gift to be permanently retained which he has granted unwillingly? For do not many afterward fall out of (grace)? Is not this gift taken away from many? (*On Repentance* 6 **[A.D. 204]**).

Cyprian of Carthage

It is written, "He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved," (Matthew 10:22) whatever has been before the end is a step by which we ascend to the summit of salvation, not a terminus wherein the full result of the ascent is already gained (*On the Unity of the Church* 21 **[A.D. 251]**).

Aphrahat

Therefore, let us prepare our temples for the Spirit of Christ, and let us not grieve it that it may not depart from us. Remember the warning that the Apostle gives us: — Grieve not the Holy Spirit whereby you have been sealed unto the day of redemption. For from baptism do we receive the Spirit of Christ... And whatever man there is that receives the Spirit from the water (of baptism) and grieves it, it departs from him until he dies, and returns according to its nature to Christ, and accuses that man of having grieved it (*Demonstrations* 6:14 **[A.D. 345]**).

John Chrysostom

This temple is holier than that; for it glistened not with gold and silver, but with the grace of the Spirit, and in place of the ark and the cherubim, it had Christ, and His Father, and the Paraclete seated within. But now all is changed, and the temple is desolate, and bare of its former beauty and comeliness, unadorned with its divine and unspeakable adornments, destitute of all security and protection; it has neither door nor bolt, and is laid open to all manner of soul-destroying and shameful thoughts; and if the thought of arrogance or fornication, or avarice, or any more accursed than these, wish to enter in there is no one to hinder them; whereas formerly, even as the Heaven is inaccessible to all these, so also was the purity of your soul (*Exhortations to Theodore after His Fall* 1:1 **[A.D. 378]**).

Pacian of Barcelona

What remedy shall there be for the fornicator? Shall either he be able to appease the Lord who hath abandoned Him? Or he to preserve his own blood, who hath shed another's? Or he to restore the temple of God, who hath violated it by fornication? These, my brethren, are capital, these are mortal, crimes (*On Repentance* 9 **[A.D. 385]**).

Jerome

Hear what the Apostle John says: 1 John 5:16 "He who knows that his brother sins a sin not unto death, let him ask, and he shall give him life, even to him that sins not unto death. But he that has sinned unto death, who shall pray for him?" You observe that if we entreat for smaller offenses, we obtain pardon: if for greater ones, it is difficult to obtain our request: and that there is a great difference between sins (*Against Jovinianus* 2:30 **[A.D. 393]**).

Augustine of Hippo

Both those who have not heard the gospel, and those who, having heard it and been changed by it for the better, have not received perseverance, and those who, having heard the gospel, have refused to come to Christ, that is, to believe in Him, since He Himself says, "No man comes unto me, except it were given him of my Father," John 6:65 and those who by their tender age were unable to believe, but might be absolved from original sin by the sole laver of regeneration, and yet have not received this laver, and have perished in death: are not made to differ from that lump which it is plain is condemned, as all go from one into condemnation (*On Rebuke and Grace* 12 **[A.D. 427]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Baptism

The early church, and thus the Catholic Church view baptism differently than most modern-day Protestants. As a result, the way it is administered differs significantly. Baptism is something more than a symbolic ritual. Something more than a sign of one's personal commitment to Christ. It is a sacrament established by Jesus Christ: "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). Its purpose is to bestow grace on the recipient: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). From the earliest days it was administered even to whole families, from infants to adults. Age is no barrier to the benefits of God's grace. It is true that the Bible records full immersion baptisms. But nowhere in Scripture is it mandated. As time went on, circumstances changed. And so did the way baptism was administered. For instance, in colder climates sprinkling or pouring became the norm. If the proper form and matter were maintained the baptisms were considered valid. The proper form being: "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." And the proper matter being water.

The Didache

After the foregoing instructions, baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in living [running] water. If you have no living water, then baptize in other water, and if you are not able in cold, then in warm. If you have neither, pour water three times on the head, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Before baptism, let the one baptizing and the one to be baptized fast, as also any others who are able. Command the one who is to be baptized to fast beforehand for one or two days (*Didache* 7:1 **[ca. A.D. 70]**).

Justin Martyr

Then they are brought by us where there is water and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For, in the name of God, the Father... and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit [Matt. 28:19], they then receive the washing with water. For Christ also said, "Unless you are born again, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (*First Apology 61* **[A.D. 151]**).

Irenaeus

He [Jesus] came to save all through himself – all, I say, who through him are reborn in God; infants, and children, and youths, and old men. Therefore, he passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, sanctifying infants; a child for children, sanctifying those who are of that age . . . [so that] he might be the perfect teacher in all things, perfect not only in respect to the setting forth of truth, perfect also in respect to relative age (*Against Heresies* 2:22:4 **[A.D. 189]**).

Tertullian

[N]o one can attain salvation without baptism, especially in view of the declaration of the Lord, who says, "Unless a man shall be born of water, he shall not have life" (*On Baptism* 12:1 **[A.D. 203]**).

Hippolytus

Where there is no scarcity of water the stream shall flow through the baptismal font or pour into it from above; but if water is scarce, whether on a constant condition or on occasion, then use whatever water is available. Let them remove their clothing. Baptize first the children, and if they can speak for themselves let them do so. Otherwise, let their parents or other relatives speak for them (*The Apostolic Tradition* 21:16 **[A.D.215]**).

Origen

The Church received from the apostles the tradition of giving baptism even to infants. The apostles, to whom were committed the secrets of divine sacraments, knew there is in everyone innate strains of [original] sin, which must be washed away through water and the Spirit (*Commentaries on Romans* 5:9 **[A.D. 248]**).

Cornelius I

As [the heretic Novatian] seemed about to die, he received baptism in the bed where he lay, by pouring. . .. (*Letter to Fabius of Antioch* 6:43 **[A.D. 251]**).

Cyprian of Carthage

As to what pertains to the case of infants: You [Fidus] said that they ought not to be baptized within the second or third day after their birth, that the old law of circumcision must be taken into consideration, and that you did not think that one should be baptized and sanctified within the eighth day after his birth. In our council it seemed to us far otherwise. No one agreed to the course which you thought should be taken. Rather, we all judge that the mercy and grace of God ought to be denied to no man born" (Letters 64:2 **[A.D. 253]**).

In the saving sacraments, when necessity compels and when God bestows his pardon, divine benefits are bestowed fully upon believers, nor ought anyone be disturbed because the sick are poured upon or sprinkled when they receive the Lord's grace" (*Letter to a Certain Magnus* 69 (76):12 **[A.D. 254]**).

Gregory Nazianzen

Have you an infant child? Do not let sin get any opportunity, but let him be sanctified from his childhood; from his very tenderest age let him be consecrated by the Spirit (*Oration 40 On Baptism* 17 **[A.D. 381]**).

John Chrysostom

Thus those who are yet Catechumens, because they make this their object, (how they may defer baptism to the last,) give themselves no concern about leading an upright life: and those who have been baptized (φωτισθεντες), whether it be because they received it as children, or whether it be that having received it in sickness, and afterwards recovered glory of God), so it is, that neither do these make an earnest business of it (*Homily 23 on Acts* 10 **[A.D. 400]**).

Ambrose of Milan

The Church was redeemed at the price of Christ's blood. Jew or Greek, it makes no difference; but if he has believed, he must circumcise himself from his sins [in baptism (Col. 2:11-12)] so that he can be saved . . . for no one ascends into the kingdom of heaven except through the sacrament of baptism.... “Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (*On Abraham* 2:11:79-84 **[A.D. 387]**).

Apostolic Constitutions

Do you also baptize your infants, and bring them up in the nurture and admonition of God. For says He: "Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not" (6:15 **[A.D. 400]**).

Augustine

It is this one Spirit who makes it possible for an infant to be regenerated . . . when that infant is brought to baptism; and it is through this one Spirit that the infant so presented is reborn. For it is not written, “Unless a man be born again by the will of his parents” or “by the faith of those presenting him or ministering to him,” but, “Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Spirit.” The water, therefore, manifesting exteriorly the sacrament of grace, and the Spirit effecting interiorly the benefit of grace, both regenerate in one Christ that man who was generated in Adam (Letters 98:2 **[A.D. 408]**).

Baptism does not consist in the merits of those by whom it is administered, nor in the merits of those to whom it is administered, but by its own sanctity and truth, on account of Him by whom it has been instituted (*Against Cresonius* 4:16 **[A.D. 409]**).

Jerome

One thing I will say and so end my discourse, that you ought either to give us a new creed, so that, after baptizing children into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you may baptize them into the kingdom of heaven; or, if you have one baptism both for infants and for persons of mature age, it follows that infants also should be baptized for the remission of sins after the likeness of the transgression of Adam (*Against the Pelagians* 3:19 **[A.D. 415]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Being Born Again

In John 3:3, Jesus tells Nicodimus no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. To some this means that once a person makes a personal commitment to Christ he is born again. As the Apostle Paul would say: “If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Corinthians 5:17). And, of course, there is a mountain of evidence that proves the power of God can change lives. However, when Jesus and the Early Church Fathers spoke about being born again, they were talking about something different. When Nicodimus questioned Jesus following the above proclamation, Jesus got more specific. He said: “I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.” In other words, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being baptized. It is important to point out that Jesus is not speaking of merely being baptized. Baptism infuses us with grace. Grace enables us to recognize our need for Christ. It also enables us to be who God wants us to be. And if we cooperate with God’s grace, it brings us to salvation.

Justin Martyr

Then they are brought by us where there is water and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For, in the name of God, the Father... and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit [Matt. 28:19], they then receive the washing with water. For Christ also said, "Unless you are born again, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" **(*First Apology* 61 [A.D. 151]**).

Irenaeus

And [Naaman] dipped himself . . . seven times in the Jordan' [2 Kgs. 5:14]. It was not for nothing that Naaman of old, when suffering from leprosy, was purified upon his being baptized, but [this served] as an indication to us. For as we are lepers in sin, we are made clean, by means of the sacred water and the invocation of the Lord, from our old transgressions, being spiritually regenerated as newborn babes, even as the Lord has declared: 'Except a man be born again through water and the Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven' [John 3:5] (*Fragments of the Lost Writings* 34 **[inter A.D. 175-185]**).

Theophilus

Moreover, those things which were created from the waters were blessed by God, so that this might also be a sign that men would at a future time receive repentance and remission of sins through water and the bath of regeneration-all who proceed to the truth and are born again and receive a blessing from God (*To Autolycus* 2:16 **[A.D. 181]**).

Clement of Rome

But you will perhaps say, 'What does the baptism of water contribute toward the worship of God?' In the first place, because that which has pleased God is fulfilled. In the second place, because when you are regenerated and born again of water and of God, the frailty of your former birth, which you have through men, is cut off, and so . . . you shall be able to attain salvation; but otherwise it is impossible. For thus has the true prophet [Jesus] testified to us with an oath: "Verily, I say to you, that unless a man is born again of water . . . he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (*Recognitions of Clement* 6:9 **[A.D. 221]**).

Cyprian

[I]t behooves those to be baptized . . . so that they are prepared, in the lawful and true and only baptism of the holy Church, by divine regeneration, for the kingdom of God . . . because it is written "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (*Epistles* 72 [73]: 21 **[A.D. 252]**).

Cyril of Jerusalem

Since man is of a twofold nature, composed of body and soul, the purification also is twofold: the corporeal for the corporeal and the incorporeal for the incorporeal. The water cleanses the body, and the Spirit seals the soul. . . . When you go down into the water, then, regard not simply the water, but look for salvation through the power of the Spirit. For without both you cannot attain to perfection. It is not who says this, but the Lord Jesus Christ, who has the power in this matter. And he says, 'Unless a man be born again,' and he adds the words 'of water and of the Spirit,' 'he cannot enter the kingdom of God.' He that is baptized with water, but is not found worthy of the Spirit, does not receive the grace in perfection. Nor, if a man be virtuous in his deeds, but does not receive the seal by means of the water, shall he enter the kingdom of heaven. A bold saying, but not mine; for it is Jesus who has declared it (*Catechetical Lectures* 3:4 **[A.D. 350]**).

Hilary of Poitiers

Or, again, since he who plants and he who waters are one, are they not one because, being themselves born again in one baptism they form a ministry of one regenerating baptism? (*On the Trinity* 8:9 **[A.D. 356-360]**).

Basil

This then is what it is to be born again of water and of the Spirit, the being made dead being affected in the water, while our life is wrought in us through the Spirit. In three immersions, then, and with three invocations, the great mystery of baptism is performed, to the end that the type of death may be fully figured, and that by the tradition of the divine knowledge the baptized may have their souls enlightened (*On the Holy Spirit* 15:35 **[A.D. 375]**).

Gregory of Nyssa

purposing to change us from corruption to incorruption by the birth from above, the birth by water and the Spirit, Himself led the way in this birth, drawing down upon the water, by His own baptism, the Holy Spirit; so that in all things He became the first-born of those who are spiritually born again, and gave the name of brethren to those who partook in a birth like to His own by water and the Spirit. But since it was also meet that He should implant in our nature the power of rising again from the dead, He becomes the in that He first by His own act loosed the pains of death (9), so that His new birth from the dead was made a way for us also, since the pains of death, wherein we were held, were loosed by the resurrection of the Lord. Thus, just as by having shared in the washing of regeneration (*Against Eunomius* 2:8 **[A.D. 382]**).

Ambrose of Milan

The Church was redeemed at the price of Christ's blood. Jew or Greek, it makes no difference; but if he has believed, he must circumcise himself from his sins [in baptism (Col. 2:11-12)] so that he can be saved . . . for no one ascends into the kingdom of heaven except through the sacrament of baptism.... "Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (*On Abraham* 2:11:79-84 **[A.D. 387]**).

Augustine

It is this one Spirit who makes it possible for an infant to be regenerated . . . when that infant is brought to baptism; and it is through this one Spirit that the infant so presented is reborn. For it is not written, "Unless a man be born again by the will of his parents" or "by the faith of those presenting him or ministering to him," but, "Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Spirit." The water, therefore, manifesting exteriorly the sacrament of grace, and the Spirit effecting interiorly the benefit of grace, both regenerate in one Christ that man who was generated in Adam (Letters 98:2 **[A.D. 408]**).

Jerome

He endeavors to show that "they who with full assurance of faith have been born again in baptism, cannot be overthrown by the devil" (*Against Jovianus* 1:3 **[A.D. 393]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on The Sacrament of Confirmation

The sacrament of Confirmation continues what was begun in the sacrament of Baptism. The grace of Baptism brings us into the family of God and helps us to understand our need for Him. Through the sacrament of Confirmation, we invite the Holy Spirit to strengthen and mature us in the faith. Confirmation further equips us with special gifts that enable us to effectively live and promote the faith. Gifts such as wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and the fear of God. Administering the sacrament of confirmation is not some late invention of the Church. We see the apostles Peter and John administering it in Acts 8:14-17 and we know by the writings of the Early Church Fathers that the practiced was continued.

Theophilus of Antioch

Are you unwilling to be anointed with the oil of God? It is on this account that we are called Christians: because we are anointed with the oil of God (*To Autolycus* 1:12 **[A.D. 181]**).

Tertullian

After coming from the place of washing we are thoroughly anointed with a blessed unction, from the ancient discipline by which [those] in the priesthood . . . were accustomed to be anointed with a horn of oil, ever since Aaron was anointed by Moses. . .. So also with us, the unction runs on the body and profits us spiritually, in the same way that baptism itself is a corporal act by which we are plunged in water, while its effect is spiritual, in that we are freed from sins. After this, the hand is imposed for a blessing, invoking and inviting the Holy Spirit (*Baptism* 7:1–2, 8:1 **[A.D. 203]**).

Hippolytus

The bishop, imposing his hand on them, shall make an invocation, saying, 'O Lord God, who made them worthy of the remission of sins through the Holy Spirit's washing unto rebirth, send into them your grace so that they may serve you according to your will, for there is glory to you, to the Father and the Son with the Holy Spirit, in the holy Church, both now and through the ages of ages. Amen.' Then, pouring the consecrated oil into his hand and imposing it on the head of the baptized, he shall say, "I anoint you with holy oil in the Lord, the Father Almighty, and Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit." Signing them on the forehead, he shall kiss them and say, "The Lord be with you.' He that has been signed shall say, 'And with your spirit." Thus, shall he do to each (*The Apostolic Tradition* 21–22 **[A.D. 215]**).

Cyprian of Carthage

It is necessary for him that has been baptized also to be anointed, so that by his having received chrism, that is, the anointing, he can be the anointed of God and have in him the grace of Christ (Letters 7:2 **[A.D. 253]**).

Council of Carthage VII

[I]n the Gospel our Lord Jesus Christ spoke with his divine voice, saying, 'Except a man be born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God' [John 3:5]. This is the Spirit which from the beginning was borne over the waters; for neither can the Spirit operate without the water, nor the water without the Spirit. Certain people therefore interpret [this passage] for themselves wrongly, when they say that by imposition of the hand they receive the Holy Ghost, and are thus received, when it is manifest that they ought to be born again [initiated] in the Catholic Church by both sacraments (Seventh Carthage **[A.D. 256]**).

Anonymous

[I]t has been asked among the brethren what course ought specially to be adopted towards the persons of those who . . . baptized in heresy . . . and subsequently departing from their heresy, and fleeing as supplicants to the Church of God, should repent with their whole hearts, and only now perceiving the condemnation of their error,

implore from the Church the help of salvation. . .. [A]ccording to the most ancient custom and ecclesiastical tradition, it would suffice, after that baptism which they have received outside the Church . . . that only hands should be laid upon them by the bishop for their reception of the Holy Spirit, and this imposition of hands would afford them the renewed and perfected seal of faith (*Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 **[A.D. 256]**).

Cyril of Jerusalem

After you had come up from the pool of the sacred streams, there was given chrism, the antitype of that with which Christ was anointed, and this is the Holy Spirit. But beware of supposing that this is ordinary ointment. For just as the bread of the Eucharist after the invocation of the Holy Spirit is simple bread no longer, but the body of Christ, so also this ointment is no longer plain ointment, nor, so to speak, common, after the invocation. Further, it is the gracious gift of Christ, and it is made fit for the imparting of his Godhead by the coming of the Holy Spirit. This ointment is symbolically applied to your forehead and to your other senses; while your body is anointed with the visible ointment, your soul is sanctified by the holy and life-giving Spirit. Just as Christ, after his baptism, and the coming upon him of the Holy Spirit, went forth and defeated the adversary, so also with you after holy baptism and the mystical chrism, having put on the panoply of the Holy Spirit, you are to withstand the power of the adversary and defeat him (*Catechetical Lectures*, 21:1:3–4 **[A.D. 350]**).

Serapion

[Prayer for blessing the holy chrism:] ‘God of powers, aid of every soul that turns to you and comes under your powerful hand in your only-begotten. We beseech you, that through your divine and invisible power of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, you may effect in this chrism a divine and heavenly operation, so that those baptized and anointed in the tracing with it of the sign of the saving cross of the only-begotten . . . as if reborn and renewed through the bath of regeneration, may be made participants in the gift of the Holy Spirit and, confirmed by this seal, may remain firm and immovable, unharmed and inviolate. . ..” (*The Sacramentary of Serapion* 25:1 **[A.D. 350]**).

Pacian of Barcelona

If, then, the power of both baptism and confirmation, greater by far than charisms, is passed on to the bishops, so too is the right of binding and loosing (*Three Letters to the Novatianist Sympronian* 1:6 **[A.D. 383]**).

Council of Laodicea

They who are baptized must after Baptism be anointed with the heavenly chrism and be partakers of the Kingdom of Christ (Canon 48 **[A.D. 390]**).

Ambrose of Milan

[Baptism] is followed by a spiritual signing, as you have heard in the reading today; for after the font it but remains to perfect the work, when, at the invocation of the priest the Holy Spirit is poured out, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of council and fortitude, the spirit of knowledge and piety, the spirit of holy fear (*The Sacraments* 3:2:8 **[A.D. 390-391]**).

The Apostolic Constitutions

[H]ow dare any man speak against his bishop, by whom the Lord gave the Holy Spirit among you upon the laying on of his hands, by whom you have learned the sacred doctrines, and have known God, and have believed in Christ, by whom you were known of God, by whom you were sealed with the oil of gladness and the ointment of understanding, by whom you were declared to be the children of light, by whom the Lord in your illumination testified by the imposition of the bishop’s hands (*Apostolic Constitutions* 2:4:32 **[A.D. 400]**).

Gregory the Great

Either from writings or witnesses, as to whether persons have been baptized or confirmed, or whether churches have been consecrated, that such persons should be baptized and confirmed, and that such churches should be canonically dedicated, lest such doubt should become ruin to the faithful (Letters 14:17 **[A.D. 600-604]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Holy Orders

Just like the Catholic Church of today, the early church had a three-tiered system of clergy; bishop, presbyter (priest), and deacon. We see this arrangement portrayed in the Scriptures. The writings of the Early Church Fathers give us a bit more detail. Deacons were subject to the priests and the bishop. Priests were subject to the bishop. Furthermore, only bishops were allowed to ordain priests and deacons. And only priests and bishops were allowed to preside at Mass.

Clement of Rome

Laodicea, Peter ordered the people to meet on the following day; and having ordained one of those who followed him as bishop over them, and others as presbyters, and having baptized multitudes, and restored to health all who were troubled with sicknesses or demons (*Recognitions of Clement* 10:68 **[A.D. 221]**).

Ignatius of Antioch

Now, therefore, it has been my privilege to see you in the person of your God-inspired bishop, Damas; and in the persons of your worthy presbyters, Bassus and Apollonius; and my fellow-servant, the deacon, Zotion. What a delight is his company! For he is subject to the bishop as to the grace of God, and to the presbytery as to the law of Jesus Christ (*Letter to the Magnesians* 2 **[A.D. 110]**).

I cried out while I was in your midst, I spoke with a loud voice, the voice of God: 'Give heed to the bishop and the presbytery and the deacons.' Some suspect me of saying this because I had previous knowledge of the division certain persons had caused; but he for whom I am in chains is my witness that I had no knowledge of this from any man. It was the Spirit who kept preaching these words, "Do nothing without the bishop, keep your body as the temple of God, love unity, flee from divisions, be imitators of Jesus Christ, as he was imitator of the Father" (*Letter to the Philadelphians* 7:1–2 **[A.D. 110]**).

Clement of Alexandria

A multitude of other pieces of advice to particular persons is written in the holy books: some for presbyters, some for bishops and deacons; and others for widows, of whom we shall have opportunity to speak elsewhere (*The Instructor of Children* 3:12:97:2 **[A.D. 191]**).

Hippolytus

When a deacon is to be ordained, he is chosen after the fashion of those things said above, the bishop alone in like manner imposing his hands upon him as we have prescribed. In the ordaining of a deacon, this is the reason why the bishop alone is to impose his hands upon him: he is not ordained to the priesthood, but to serve the bishop and to fulfill the bishop's command. He has no part in the council of the clergy but is to attend to his own duties and is to acquaint the bishop with such matters as are needful. . .. On a presbyter, however, let the presbyters impose their hands because of the common and like Spirit of the clergy. Even so, the presbyter has only the power to receive [the Spirit], and not the power to give [the Spirit]. That is why a presbyter does not ordain the clergy; for at the ordaining of a presbyter, he but seals while the bishop ordains (*The Apostolic Tradition* 9 **[A.D. 215]**).

Origen

Not fornication only, but even marriages make us unfit for ecclesiastical honors; for neither a bishop, nor a presbyter, nor a deacon, nor a widow is able to be twice married (*Homilies on Luke* 17 **[A.D. 234]**).

Cyprian of Carthage

Christ, who says to the apostles, and thereby to all chief rulers, who by vicarious ordination succeed to the apostles: "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that heareth me, heareth Him that sent me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me, and Him that sent me" (Luke 10:16, Letter 68:4 **[circa A.D. 250]**).

Council of Elvira

Bishops, presbyters, and deacons may not leave their own places for the sake of commerce, nor are they to be traveling about the provinces, frequenting the markets for their own profit. Certainly, for the procuring of their own necessities they can send a boy or a freedman or a hireling or a friend or whomever, but, if they wish to engage in business, let them do so within the province (Canon 18 **[A.D. 300]**).

Council of Nicaea I

It has come to the knowledge of the holy and great synod that, in some districts and cities, the deacons administer the Eucharist to the presbyters [i.e., priests], whereas neither canon nor custom permits that they who have no right to offer [the Eucharistic sacrifice] should give the Body of Christ to them that do offer [it]. And this also has been made known, that certain deacons now touch the Eucharist even before the bishops. Let all such practices be utterly done away, and let the deacons remain within their own bounds, knowing that they are the ministers of the bishop and the inferiors of the presbyters. Let them receive the Eucharist according to their order, after the presbyters, and let either the bishop or the presbyter administer to them (Canon 18 **[A.D. 325]**).

Eusebius

Greece on account of a pressing necessity in connection with ecclesiastical affairs, and went through Palestine, and was ordained as presbyter in Caesarea by the bishops of that country (*Church History* 6:23 **[A.D. 325]**).

Cyril of Jerusalem

Consider, I pray, of each nation, Bishops, Presbyters, Deacons, Solitaries, Virgins, and laity besides; and then behold their great Protector, and the Dispenser of their gifts; how throughout the world He gives to one chastity, to another perpetual virginity, to another almsgiving, to another voluntary poverty, to another power of repelling hostile spirits (*Catechetical Lecture* 16:22 **[A.D. 350]**).

Athanasius

For if all were of the same mind as your present advisers, how would you have become a Christian, since there would be no bishops? Or if our successors are to inherit this state of mind, how will the Churches be able to hold together? (Letter 49:4 **[A.D. 354]**).

Hilary of Poitiers

The Blessed Apostle Paul in laying down the form for appointing a bishop and creating by his instructions an entirely new type of member of the Church, has taught us in the following words the sum total of all the virtues perfected in him: Holding fast the word according to the doctrine of faith that he may be able to exhort to sound doctrine and to convict gainsavers. For there are many unruly men, vain talkers and deceivers. For in this way he points out that the essentials of orderliness and morals are only profitable for good service in the priesthood if at the same time the qualities needful for knowing how to teach and preserve the faith are not lacking, for a man is not straightway made a good and useful priest by a merely innocent life or by a mere knowledge of preaching (*On the Trinity* 8:1 **[A.D. 356-360]**).

Theodoret

For a dying bishop is not permitted to ordain another to take his place, and all the bishops of a province are ordered to be convened; again, no ordination of a bishop is permitted to take place without three bishops (*Ecclesiastical History* 5:23 **[A.D. 449-450]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on The Priesthood

The ministerial priesthood (Luke 22:14-20, Acts 14:23, James 5:14-15) is distinct from the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:5-9). Both participate in the priesthood of Christ, but in different ways. This has been a Christian reality from the beginning. The leaders of the local churches were referred to as either presbyters or priests. Presbyter comes from the Greek word presbyteros (πρεσβύτερος). Presbyteros means elder. Since the earliest Christians were Jewish, elder was a term that they would be familiar with. They were also called priests because their main function was to offer the Eucharistic sacrifice. This was and is done in response to Jesus command at the last Supper: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). This of course is not a new sacrifice but a participation in the once for all sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

Ignatius of Antioch

Good, too, are the priests; but the High Priest is better, to whom was entrusted the holy of holies; and to Him alone were entrusted the secret things of God. He is the door of the Father, through which Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and the prophets and the Apostles and the Church. All these are joined in the unity of God (*Letter to the Philadelphians* 9:1 **[A.D. 110]**).

Irenaeus of Lyon

And all the apostles of the Lord are priests, who do inherit here neither lands nor houses, but serve God and the altar continually (*Against Heresies* 4:8:3 **[A.D. 189]**).

Liturgy of the Blessed Apostles

The Priest says this secret prayer in the sanctuary: O Lord God Omnipotent, Thine is the Holy Catholic Church, inasmuch as Thou, through the great passion of Thy Christ, didst buy the sheep of Thy pasture; and from the grace of the Holy Spirit, who is indeed of one nature with Thy glorious divinity, are granted the degrees of the true priestly ordination (6 **[A.D. 200]**).

Teachings of the Apostles Syriac

And by ordination to the priesthood, which the apostles themselves had received from our Lord, did their Gospel wing its way rapidly into the four quarters of the world (27 **[A.D. 230]**).

Origen

So, too, the apostles, and those who have become like apostles, being priests according to the Great High Priest and having received knowledge of the service of God, know under the Spirit's teaching for which sins, and when, and how they ought to offer sacrifices, and recognize for which they ought not to do so (*On Prayer* 18 **[A.D. 233]**).

Cyprian of Carthage

On which account it is fitting, that with full diligence and sincere investigation those should be chosen for God's priesthood whom it is manifest God will hear (Letter 67:2 **[A.D. 254]**).

Peter of Alexandria

Since I have found out that Meletius acts in no way for the common good, – for neither is he contented with the letter of the most holy bishops and martyrs, – but, invading my parish, hath assumed so much to himself as to endeavor to separate from my authority the priests, and those who had been entrusted with visiting the needy; and, giving proof of his desire for pre-eminence, has ordained in the prison several unto himself; now, take ye heed to this, and hold no communion with him (Fragments 1 **[A.D. 300-311]**).

Eusebius

Moreover, he made the priests of God his counselors, and deemed it incumbent on him to honor the God who had appeared to him with all devotion (*Life of Constantine* 1:32 **[A.D. 339]**).

Cyril of Jerusalem

After this the Priest cries aloud, "Lift up your hearts." For truly ought we in that most awful hour to have our heart on high with God, and not below, thinking of earth and earthly things. In effect therefore, the Priest bids all in that hour to dismiss all cares of this life (*Catechetical Lecture* 23:4 **[A.D. 350]**).

Gregory of Nyssa

The man who ungrudgingly spent upon the poor his patrimony even before he was a priest, and most of all in the time of the famine, during which he was a ruler of the Church, though still a priest in the rank of presbyters (*Against Eunomius* 1:10 **[A.D. 382]**).

John Chrysostom

The Offering is the same, whether a common man, or Paul or Peter offer it. It is the same which Christ gave to His disciples, and which the Priests now minister. This is nowise inferior to that, because it is not men that sanctify even this, but the Same who sanctified the one sanctifies the other also. For as the words which God spake are the same which the Priest now utters, so is the Offering the same, and the Baptism, that which He gave (*Homily 2 on 2 Timothy* **[A.D. 393-397]**).

Jerome

You see then that the blessedness of a bishop, priest, or deacon, does not lie in the fact that they are bishops, priests, or deacons, but in their having the virtues which their names and offices imply (*Against Jovinianus* 1:35 **[A.D. 393]**).

Apostolic Constitutions

And I James, the son of Alphaeus, make a constitution in regard to confessors: A confessor is not ordained; for he is so by choice and patience, and is worthy of great honor, as having confessed the name of God, and of His Christ, before nations and kings. But if there be occasion, he is to be ordained either a bishop, priest, or deacon (8:23 **[A.D. 400]**).

John Cassian

But sometimes it creates a wish to take holy orders, and a desire for the priesthood or diaconate. And it represents that if a man has even against his will received this office, he will fulfil it with such sanctity and strictness that he will be able to set an example of saintliness even to other priests; and that he will win over many people, not only by his manner of life, but also by his teaching and preaching (*Institutes* 11:14 **[A.D. 425-430]**).

Sozomen

And the event has exceeded my prayer, in that so many priests of Christ have been conducted into the same place; now, it is my desire that you should be of one mind and be partakers of a consentient judgment, for I deem dissension in the Church of God as more dangerous than any other evil (*Church History* **[A.D. 440-443]**).

Theodoret

Was it that I ordained to the priesthood men of character and of honorable life? (Letter 81 **[circa A.D. 443]**).

Leo the Great

Priests and deacons may not be ordained on weekdays any more than bishops (Letter 6:6 **[A.D. 446]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on The Mass

The Early Church Fathers believed and taught that the Mass was a true sacrifice. It was not a new sacrifice but a participation in the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross. They understood that there are two parts to a sacrifice, the slaying of the victim and the offering up of the fruits. When we celebrate the Mass, we participate in the second part. Such a sacrifice was foretold in the Old Testament. In Malachi 1:11 we read: “From the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place, incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering, for my name is great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts.” The sacrifice spoken of is not the Judaic sacrifice. The passage refers to a pure sacrifice (Jesus) that will take place everywhere among the nations (Gentiles). The sacrifice of the Mass is the sacrifice which takes place everywhere among the nations.

The Didache

Assemble on the Lord’s Day, and break bread and offer the Eucharist: but first make confession of your faults, so that your sacrifice may be a pure one. Anyone who has a difference with his fellow is not to take part with you until he has been reconciled, so as to avoid any profanation of your sacrifice [Matt. 5:23—24]. For this is the offering of which the Lord has said, "Everywhere and always bring me a sacrifice that is undefiled, for I am a great king, says the Lord, and my name is the wonder of nations" [Mal. 1:11, 14] (*Didache* 14 **[A.D. 70]**).

Clement of Rome

Our sin will not be small if we eject from the episcopate those who blamelessly and holily have offered its sacrifices. Blessed are those presbyters who have already finished their course, and who have obtained a fruitful and perfect release (*Letter to the Corinthians* 44:4-5 **[A.D. 95]**).

Ignatius of Antioch

Make certain, therefore, that you all observe one common Eucharist; for there is but one body of our Lord Jesus Christ, and but one cup of union with his blood, and one single altar of sacrifice —even as there is also but one bishop, with his clergy and my own fellow servitors, the deacons. This will ensure that all your doings are in full accord with the will of God (*Letter to the Philadelphians* 4 **[A.D. 110]**).

Justin Martyr

God speaks by the mouth of Malachi, one of the twelve [minor prophets], as I said before, about the sacrifices at that time presented by you: "I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord, and I will not accept your sacrifices at your hands; for from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, my name has been glorified among the Gentiles, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering, for my name is great among the Gentiles" [Mal. 1:10-11]. He then speaks of those Gentiles, namely us [Christians] who in every place offer sacrifices to him, that is, the bread of the Eucharist and also the cup of the Eucharist (*Dialogue with Trypho* 41 **[A.D. 155]**).

Irenaeus

He took from among creation that which is bread, and gave thanks, saying, "This is my body." The cup likewise, which is from among the creation to which we belong, he confessed to be his blood. He taught the new sacrifice of the new covenant, of which Malachi, one of the twelve [minor] prophets, had signified beforehand: "You do not do my will, says the Lord Almighty, and I will not accept a sacrifice at your hands. For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is glorified among the Gentiles, and in every place, incense is offered to my name, and a pure sacrifice; for great is my name among the Gentiles, says the Lord" [Mal. 1:10-11]. By these words he makes it plain that the former people will cease to make offerings to God but that in every place sacrifice will be offered to him, and indeed, a pure one, for his name is glorified among the Gentiles (*Against Heresies* 4:17:5 **[A.D. I89]**).

Hippolytus

“And she [Wisdom] has furnished her table” [Prov. 9:2] . . . refers to his [Christ's] honored and undefiled body and blood, which day by day are administered and offered sacrificially at the spiritual divine table, as a memorial of that first and ever-memorable table of the spiritual divine supper (*Extant Works and Fragments* **[circa A.D. 225]**).

Cyprian

If Christ Jesus, our Lord and God, is himself the high priest of God the Father; and if he offered himself as a sacrifice to the Father; and if he commanded that this be done in commemoration of himself, then certainly the priest, who imitates that which Christ did, truly functions in place of Christ (Letters 63:14 **[A.D. 253]**).

Serapion

"Holy, holy, holy Lord Sabaoth, heaven and earth is full of your glory." Heaven is full, and full is the earth, with your magnificent glory, Lord of virtues. Full also is this sacrifice, with your strength and your communion; for to you we offer this living sacrifice, this unbloody oblation (*Prayer of the Eucharistic Sacrifice* 13:12-16 **[A.D. 350]**).

Cyril of Jerusalem

Then, having sanctified ourselves by these spiritual hymns, we beseech the merciful God to send forth his Holy Spirit upon the gifts lying before him, that he may make the bread the body of Christ and the wine the blood of Christ, for whatsoever the Holy Spirit has touched is surely sanctified and changed. Then, upon the completion of the spiritual sacrifice, the bloodless worship, over that propitiatory victim we call upon God for the common peace of the churches, for the welfare of the world, for kings, for soldiers and allies, for the sick, for the afflicted; and in summary, we all pray and offer this sacrifice for all who are in need (*Catechetical Lectures* 23:7-8 **[A.D. 350]**).

Ambrose of Milan

We saw the prince of priests coming to us, we saw and heard him offering his blood for us. We follow, inasmuch as we are able, being priests, and we offer the sacrifice on behalf of the people. Even if we are of but little merit, still, in the sacrifice, we are honorable. Even if Christ is not now seen as the one who offers the sacrifice, nevertheless it is he himself that is offered in sacrifice here on earth when the body of Christ is offered. Indeed, to offer himself he is made visible in us, he whose word makes holy the sacrifice that is offered (*Commentaries on twelve Psalms of David* 38:25 **[A.D. 389]**).

John Chrysostom

On the Preparation, on the Sabbath, on the Lord’s Day, and on the day of Martyrs, it is the same Sacrifice that is performed. "For as often," he saith, "as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death." (1 Cor. xi. 26.) No time is limited for the performance of this Sacrifice, why then is it then called the Paschal feast? Because Christ suffered for us then. Let not the time, therefore, make any difference in your approach. There is at all times the same power, the same dignity, the same grace, one and the same body; nor is one celebration of it more or less holy than another (*Homily 5 on First Timothy* **[A.D. 390]**).

Apostolic Constitutions

You, therefore, O bishops, are to your people priests and Levites, ministering to the holy tabernacle, the holy Catholic Church; who stand at the altar of the Lord your God, and offer to Him reasonable and unbloody sacrifices through Jesus the great High Priest (2:25 **[A.D. 400]**).

Augustine

Christ is both the priest, offering Himself, and Himself the victim. He willed that the sacramental sign of this should be the daily sacrifice of the Church, who, since the Church is His body and He the head, learns to offer herself through Him (*The City of God* 10:20 **[A.D. 413-426]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on The Eucharist

The Early Fathers recognized the clear meaning of Scripture regarding the “Real Presence” of Christ in the Eucharist. While some found it hard to accept, (John 6:60-66) Jesus was adamant in proclaiming that his flesh and blood were real food and drink. And He did not correct those who abandoned him over this. And that is because they understood Him perfectly. There was no symbolism involved. The early Christians were even persecuted for this belief as they were accused of being cannibals. So clear is the meaning of John 6, that even Martin Luther was compelled to tell his followers in Strasburg, in 1524: “I am caught, I cannot escape, the text is too strong.” While the Eucharist is the actual body and blood of Christ, it retains the appearance of bread and wine. Also note that when the fathers refer to the elements used, they speak of wine, not grape juice.

Ignatius of Antioch

Take note of those who hold heterodox opinions on the grace of Jesus Christ which has come to us and see how contrary their opinions are to the mind of God. . .. They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, flesh which suffered for our sins and which that Father, in his goodness, raised up again. They who deny the gift of God are perishing in their disputes (*Letter to the Smyrnaeans* 6:2-7:1 **[A.D. 110]**).

Justin Martyr

We call this food Eucharist, and no one else is permitted to partake of it, except one who believes our teaching to be true and who has been washed in the washing which is for the remission of sins and for regeneration [baptism] and is thereby living as Christ enjoined. For not as common bread nor common drink do we receive these, but since Jesus Christ our Savior was made incarnate by the word of God and had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so too, as we have been taught, the food which has been made into the Eucharist by the Eucharistic prayer set down by him, and by the change of which our blood and flesh is nurtured, is both the flesh and the blood of that incarnated Jesus (*First Apology* 66 **[A.D. 151]**).

Irenaeus

He has declared the cup, a part of creation, to be his own blood) from which he causes our blood to flow; and the bread, a part of creation, he has established as his own body, from which he gives increase unto our bodies. When, therefore, the mixed cup [wine and water] and the baked bread receive the Word of God and become the Eucharist, the body of Christ, and from these the substance of our flesh is increased and supported) how can they say that the flesh is not capable of receiving the gift of God, which is eternal life — flesh which is nourished by the body and blood of the Lord and is in fact a member of him? (*Against Heresies* 5:2 **[A.D. 189]**).

Clement of Alexandria

"Eat my flesh)" [Jesus] says, "and drink my blood." The Lord supplies us with these intimate nutrients, he delivers over his flesh and pours out his blood, and nothing is lacking for the growth of his children (*The Instructor of Children* 1:6:43:3 **[A.D. 191]**).

Hippolytus

"And she [Wisdom] has furnished her table" [Proverbs 9:1] . . . refers to his [Christ's] honored and undefiled body and blood, which day by day are administered and offered sacrificially at the spiritual divine table, as a memorial of that first and ever-memorable table of the spiritual divine supper [i.e., the Last Supper] (*Fragment from Commentary on Proverbs* **[A.D. 217]**).

Athanasius

You shall see the Levites bringing loaves and a cup of wine and placing them on the table. So long as the prayers of supplication and entreaties have not been made, there is only bread and wine. But after the great and wonderful

prayers have been completed, then the bread is become the Body, and the wine the Blood, of our Lord Jesus Christ… (*Sermon to the Newly Baptized, from Eutyches* **[A.D. 295-373]**).

Aphraahat

After having spoken thus [at the Last Supper], the Lord rose up from the place where he had made the Passover and had given his body as food and his blood as drink, and he went with his disciples to the place where he was to be arrested. But he ate of his own body and drank of his own blood, while he was pondering on the dead. With His own hands the Lord presented his own body to be eaten, and before he was crucified, he gave his blood as drink (*Treatises* 12:6 **[A.D. 340]**).

Cyril of Jerusalem

The bread and the wine of the Eucharist before the holy invocation of the adorable Trinity were simple bread and wine, but the invocation having been made, the bread becomes the body of Christ and the wine the blood of Christ (*Catechetical Lectures* 19:7 **[A.D. 350]**).

Ephraim the Syrian

After the disciples had eaten the new and holy bread, and when they understood by faith that they had eaten of Christ's body, Christ went on to explain and to give them the whole sacrament. He took and mixed a cup of wine. Then He blessed it, and signed it, and made it holy, declaring that it was His own blood, which was about to be poured out (*Homilies* 4:6 **[ante A.D. 373]**).

Gregory of Nyssa

The bread again is at first common bread, but when the sacramental action consecrates it, it is called, and becomes, the Body of Christ (*On the Baptism of Christ* **[A.D. 383]**).

Ambrose of Milan

Perhaps you may be saying, "I see something else; how can you assure me that I am receiving the body of Christ?" It but remains for us to prove it. And how many are the examples we might use! . . . Christ is in that sacrament, because it is the body of Christ (*The Mysteries* 9:50, 58 **[A.D. 390]**).

John Chrysostom

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not communion of the blood of Christ? Very trustworthily and awesomely does He say it. For what He is saying is this: "What is in the cup is that which flowed from His side, and we partake of it" (*On First Corinthians* 24:1:3 **[A.D. 392]**).

Theodore

When [Christ] gave the bread, he did not say, "This is the symbol of my body" but, "This is my body." In the same way when he gave the cup of his blood he did not say. "This is the symbol of my blood," but, "This is my blood," for he wanted us to look upon the [Eucharistic elements] after their reception of grace and the coming of the Holy Spirit not according to their nature, but receive them as they are, the body and blood of our Lord. We ought . . . not regard [the elements] merely as bread and cup) but as the body and blood of the Lord, into which they were transformed by the descent of the Holy Spirit (*Catechetical Homilies* 5:1 **[A.D. 405]**).

Augustine

That bread which you see on the altar having been sanctified by the word of God is the body of Christ, that chalice, or rather, what is in that chalice, having been sanctified by the word of God, is the blood of Christ (*Sermons* 227 **[A.D. 411]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Receiving the Eucharist Worthily

It is not uncommon to see the vast majority of people at Sunday Mass receive communion. It is also not uncommon to see practically no one go to confession on Saturday. If the great saints and popes needed confession, I am guessing the rest of us need it to. The apostle Paul warned us about not being properly disposed when receiving communion. He said: “Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord...**For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself**.” The Church has always cautioned us against receiving communion unworthily. The Council of Trent proclaimed: “Now ecclesiastical usage declares that necessary proof to be, that no one, conscious to himself of mortal sin, how contrite whatsoever he may seem to himself, ought to approach to the sacred Eucharist without previous sacramental confession” (Session 13, Ch. 7). Rather than seeing confession as a burden, we ought to cherish it for the gift it truly is.

The Didache

In church, make confession of your faults, and do not come to prayer with a bad conscience … Whosoever is holy, let him approach. Whoso is not, let him repent (4, 10 **[A.D. 70]**).

Justin Martyr

We call this food Eucharist, and no one else is permitted to partake of it, except one who believes our teaching to be true and who has been washed in the washing which is for the remission of sins and for regeneration [Baptism], and has thereby living as Christ has enjoined. For not as common bread or common drink do we receive these; but since Jesus Christ our Savior was made incarnate by the Word of God and had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so too, as we have been taught, the food which has been made into the Eucharist by the Eucharistic prayer set down by Him, and by the change of which our blood and flesh is nourished, is both the flesh and blood of that incarnated Jesus (*First Apology* 66 **[A.D. 151]**).

Origen

We give thanks to the Creator of all, and, along with thanksgiving and prayer, for the blessings we have received, we also eat the bread presented to us; and this bread becomes by prayer a sacred body, which sanctifies those who sincerely partake of it (*Contra Celsus* 8:33 **[A.D. 248]**).

Cyprian of Carthage

There was a woman too who with impure hands tried to open the locket in which she was keeping Our Lord's holy body, but fire flared up from it and she was too terrified to touch it. And a man who, in spite of his sin, also presumed secretly to join the rest in receiving sacrifice offered by the bishop, was unable to eat or even handle Our Lord's sacred body; when he opened his hands, he found he was holding nothing but ashes. By this one example it was made manifest that Our Lord removes Himself from one who denies Him, and that what is received brings no blessing to the unworthy, since the Holy One has fled and the saving grace is turned to ashes (*The Lapsed* 26, **[A.D. 251]**).

Cyril of Jerusalem

Keep these traditions inviolate, and preserve yourselves from offenses. Do not cut yourselves off from Communion, do not deprive yourselves, through the pollution of sins, of these Holy and Spiritual Mysteries (*Catechetical Lectures, 23 On the Mysteries* 5, 23 **[A.D. 350]**).

Basil the Great

He, therefore, who approaches the Body and Blood of Christ in commemoration of Him who died for us and rose again must be free not only from defilement of flesh and spirit, in order that he may not eat drink unto judgement, but he must actively manifest the remembrance of Him who died for us and rose again, by being dead to sin, to the world, and to himself, and alive unto God in Christ Jesus, our Lord (*Concerning Baptism* Book I, Ch. 3. **[A.D. 360]**).

What is the mark of a Christian? That he be purified of all defilement of the flesh and of the spirit in the Blood of Christ, perfecting sanctification in the fear of God and the love of Christ, and that he have no blemish nor spot nor any such thing; that he be holy and blameless and so eat the Body of Christ and drink His Blood; for 'he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself.' What is the mark of those who eat the Bread and drink the Cup of Christ? That they keep in perpetual remembrance Him who died for us and rose again (*The Morals* 22 **[circa A.D. 370]**).

John Chrysostom

Take care, then, lest you too become guilty of the body and blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:27). They slaughtered His most holy body, but you, after such great benefits, receive Him into a filthy soul. For it was not enough for Him to be made man, to be struck and to be slaughtered, but He even mingles Himself with us; and this not by faith only, but even in every deed He makes us His body. How very pure, then, ought He not be who enjoys the benefit of this sacrifice (*Homilies on Matthew* 82:5 **[A.D. 390]**).

Augustine of Hippo

You should understand what you have received, what you will receive, indeed what you should receive daily. That bread that you see on the altar and that has been sanctified by the word of God is the body of Christ. That chalice-rather, that which the chalice contains, has been sanctified by the word of God and is the blood of Christ. Through these things the Lord Christ wished to entrust to us his body and his blood, which he shed for us unto the remission of sins. **If you receive them well** you are that which you receive. (*Sermon 227* On Easter Sunday **[A.D. 414]**).

Theodore of Mopsuestia

[if we have sinned], the body and blood of our Lord … will strengthen us … if with diligence we do good works and turn from evil deeds and truly repent of the sins that befall us, undoubtedly, we shall obtain the grace of the remission of our sins in our receiving of the holy sacrament (*Catechetical Homilies* 16 **[circa A.D. 428]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Confession / Reconciliation

On the evening of the first Easter, Jesus gave his apostles the authority to forgive or retain sins in his name (John 20:20-23). This does not refer to the general body of believers as some claim. In Matthew 6:14-15 Jesus said: “If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions.” Clearly believers do not have the option of retaining any one’s sins. The passage in John 20 refers to the sacrament of Reconciliation or Confession, as it is more commonly known.

The Didache

Confess your sins in church, and do not go up to your prayer with an evil conscience. This is the way of life. . ., On the Lord's Day gather together, break bread, and give thanks, after confessing your transgressions so that your sacrifice may be pure (*Didache* 14 **[A.D.70]**).

The Letter of Barnabas

You shall judge righteously. You shall not make a schism, but you shall pacify those that contend by bringing them together. You shall confess your sins. (*Letter of Barnabas* 19 **[A.D. 74]**).

Ignatius of Antioch

Where there is division and wrath, God does not dwell. To all them that repent, the Lord grants forgiveness, if they turn in penitence to the unity of God, and to communion with the bishop (*Letter to the Philadelphians* 3 **[A.D. 110]**).

Tertullian

The Church has the power of forgiving sins. This I acknowledge and adjudge (*Repentance* 10:21 **[A.D. 203]**).

Hippolytus

[The bishop conducting the ordination shall pray] God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . pour forth now that power which comes from you, from your Royal Spirit, which you gave to your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, and which he bestowed upon his holy apostles. . . and grant this your servant, whom you have chosen for the episcopate, [the power] to feed your holy flock and to serve without blame as your high priest, ministering night and day to propitiate unceasingly before your face and to offer to you the gifts of your holy Church, and by the Spirit of the high priesthood to have the authority to forgive sins, in accord with your command (*Apostolic Tradition* 3 **[A.D. 215]**).

Origen

[A filial method of forgiveness], albeit hard and laborious [is] the remission of sins through penance, when the sinner . . . does not shrink from declaring his sin to a priest of the Lord and from seeking medicine, after the manner of him who say, "I said, to the Lord, I will accuse myself of my iniquity” (*Homilies in Leviticus* 2:4 **[A.D. 248]**).

Cyprian

The Apostle [Paul] likewise bears witness and says: "Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord "[I Cor. 11:27]. But [the impenitent] spurn and despise all these warnings; before their sins are expiated, before they have made a confession of their crime, before their conscience has been purged in the ceremony and at the hand of the priest (*The Lapsed* 15:1-3 **[A.D. 251]**).

Firmilian of Caesarea

Therefore, the power of forgiving sins was given to the Apostles and to the Churches which these men sent by Christ, established; and to the bishops who succeeded them (*Letter to Cyprian* 75:16 **[A.D. 268]**).

Lactantius

But, however, because all the separate assemblies of heretics call themselves Christians in preference to others, and think that theirs is the Catholic Church, it must be known that the true Catholic Church is that in which there is confession and repentance, which treats in a wholesome manner the sins and wounds to which the weakness of the flesh is liable (*Divine Institutes* 4 **[A.D. 307]**).

Hilary of Poitiers

The power of binding and loosing given to the Apostles: In our present condition we are all subdued by the terror of that greatest dread. And now, out in front of that terror, He sets the irrevocable apostolic judgement, however severe, so that those whom they shall bind on earth, that is, whomsoever they leave bound in the knots of their sins; and those whom they loose, which is to say, those who by their confession receive grace unto salvation: these, in accord with the apostolic sentence, are bound or loosed also in heaven (*Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* 18:8 **[A.D. 353-355]**).

Basil the Great

It is necessary to confess our sins to those to whom the dispensation of God's mysteries is entrusted. Those doing penance of old are found to have done it before the saints. It is written in the Gospel that they confessed their sins to John the Baptist [Matthew 3:6], but in Acts [19:18] they confessed to the apostles. (*Rules Briefly Treated* 288 **[A.D. 370]**).

Ambrose of Milan

The Lord Himself said: "Receive ye the Holy Spirit. Whosesoever sins ye forgive they shall be forgiven." See that sins are forgiven through the Holy Spirit. But men make use of their ministry for the forgiveness of sins, they do not exercise the right of any power of their own. For they forgive sins not in their own name but in that of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (*On the Holy Spirit* 3:137 **[A.D. 381]**).

But what was impossible was made possible by God, who gave us so great a grace. It seemed likewise impossible for sins to be forgiven through penance; yet Christ granted even this to His Apostles, and by His Apostles it has been transmitted to the offices of priest (*On Penance* 2:2:12 **[inter 384-394]**).

Gregory of Nyssa

For if the confession of the revered and precious Names of the Holy Trinity is useless, and the customs of the Church unprofitable, and if among these customs is the sign of the cross, prayer, baptism, confession of sins, a ready zeal to keep the commandment, right ordering of character… (*Against Eunomius* 11:5 **[A.D. 382]**).

John Chrysostom

Priests have received a power which God has given neither to angels nor to archangels. It was said to them: "Whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose, shall be loosed." Temporal rulers have indeed the power of binding: but they can only bind the body. Priests, in contrast, can bind with a bond which pertains to the soul itself and transcends the very heavens. Did [God] not give them all the powers of heaven? "Whose sins you shall forgive," he says, "they are forgiven them; whose sins you shall retain, they are retained." The Father has given all judgment to the Son. And now I see the Son placing all this power in the hands of men (*The Priesthood* 3:5 **[A.D. 387]**).

Augustine

Those of you who have defiled yourselves with unlawful sexual relations apart from your wives, if besides your wives you have slept with another woman; do penance, as it is done in the Church, so that the Church may pray for you. Nobody should say to himself, "I do it privately, I deal with God privately. God knows and He will forgive me, because I do penance in my heart." So, was there no point in the Lord saying, what you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Matthew 18:18, 16:19)? So, were the keys given to the Church of God for nothing? Are we to nullify the Gospel, nullify the words of Christ? Am I to promise you what He refuses you? Wouldn't I just be deceiving you? (*Sermon 392* 3 **[A.D. 420]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Anointing of the Sick

The sacrament of the Anointing of the sick, or as it is sometimes referred to, The Last Rites, is based on the teachings of Scripture. In Mark 6:13 we see that the apostles themselves performed this function: “They drove out many demons, and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.” We further see that those who succeeded the apostles were instructed to do the same. James said it this way: “Is anyone among you sick? He should summon the presbyters of the church, and they should pray over him and anoint [him] with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven” (James 5:14-15).

Hippolytus

If someone makes an offering of oil, the bishop shall give thanks in the same manner as for the oblation of the bread and wine. He does not give thanks with the same words, but quite similar, saying, "Sanctify this oil, God, as you give holiness to all who are anointed and receive it, as you anointed kings, priests, and prophets, so that it may give strength to all who taste it, and health to all who use it" (*The Apostolic Tradition* 5:1-2 **[A.D. 215]**).

Origen

[The penitent Christian] does not shrink from declaring his sin to a priest of the Lord and from seeking medicine . . . [of] which the apostle James says: ‘If then there is anyone sick, let him call the presbyters of the Church, and let them impose hands upon him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him. (*Homilies on Leviticus* 2:4 **[A.D. 250]**).

Council of Nicaea

Concerning the departing, the ancient canonical law is still to be maintained, to wit, that, if any man be at the point of death, he must not be deprived of the last and most indispensable Viaticum (Canon 13 **[A.D. 325]**).

Aphraates

[O]f the sacrament of life, by which Christians [baptism], priests [in ordination], kings and prophets are made perfect; it illuminates darkness [in confirmation], anoints the sick, and by its secret sacrament restores penitents (*Treatises* 23:3 **[A.D. 345]**).

Serapion

We beseech you, Savior of all men, you that have all virtue and power, Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and we pray that you send down from heaven the healing power of the only-begotten [Son] upon this oil, so that for those who are anointed . . . it may be effected for the casting out of every disease and every bodily infirmity . . . for good grace and remission of sins . . . (*The Sacramentary of Serapion* 29:1 **[A.D. 350]**).

Ephraem

They pray over thee; one blows on thee; another seals thee (Homily 46 **[ante A.D. 373]**).

John Chrysostom

The priests of Judaism had power to cleanse the body from leprosy—or rather, not to cleanse it at all, but to declare a person as having been cleansed. . .. Our priests have received the power not of treating with the leprosy of the body, but with spiritual uncleanness; not of declaring cleansed, but of actually cleansing. . .. Priests accomplish this not only by teaching and admonishing, but also by the help of prayer. Not only at the time of our regeneration [in baptism], but even afterward, they have the authority to forgive sins: “Is there anyone among you sick? Let him call in the priests of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the

prayer of faith shall save the sick man, and the Lord shall raise him up, and if he has committed sins, he shall be forgiven" (*On the Priesthood* 3:6:190ff **[A.D. 387]**).

Ambrose

Why, then, do you lay on hands, and believe it to be the effect of the blessing, if perchance some sick person recovers? Why do you assume that any can be cleansed by you from the pollution of the devil? Why do you baptize if sins cannot be remitted by man? If baptism is certainly the remission of all sins, what difference does it make whether priests claim that this power is given to them in penance or at the font? In each the mystery is one (*Penance* 1:8:36 **[A.D. 390]**).

Jerome

There came also Constantia a holy woman whose son-in-law and daughter he had anointed with oil and saved from death (*Life of Saint Hilarion* 44 **[A.D. 392]**).

Cyril of Alexandria

[I]f some part of your body is suffering…recall also the saying in the divinely inspired Scripture: "Is anyone among you ill? Let him call the presbyters of the Church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he be in sins they shall be forgiven" (James 5:14-15) (*Worship and Adoration*, 6 **[A.D. 412]**).

Pope Innocent

[I]n the epistle of the blessed Apostle James…'If anyone among you is sick, let him call the priests… There is no doubt that this anointing ought to be interpreted or understood of the sick faithful, who can be anointed with the holy oil of chrism…it is a kind of sacrament (*To Decentius,* 25:8:11 **[A.D. 416]**).

Hilary of Arles

Whenever some illness comes upon man, he should hurry back to the Church. Let him receive the body and blood of Christ, be anointed by the presbyters with consecrated oil and ask them and the deacons to pray over him in Christ's name. If he does this, he will receive not only bodily health but also forgiveness of his sins (Sermon 19:5 **[circa A.D. 440]**).

Caesar of Arles

As often as some infirmity overtakes a man, let him who is ill receive the body and blood of Christ; let him humbly and in faith ask the presbyters for blessed oil, to anoint his body, so that what was written may be fulfilled in him: 'Is anyone among you sick? Let him bring in the presbyters, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he be in sins, they will be forgiven him. . . . See to it, brethren, that whoever is ill hasten to the church, both that he may receive health of body and will merit to obtain the forgiveness of his sins (Sermons 13[325]:3 **[A.D. 542]**).

Cassiodorus

A priest is to be called in, who by the prayer of faith [oratione fidei] and the unction of the holy oil which he imparts will save him who is afflicted [by a serious injury or by sickness] (*Complexiones in Epp. Apostolorum* **[A.D. 570]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Purgatory

The Early Fathers spoke of a place after death where expiation is made for sins. Paul also speaks of such a place in Scripture. In 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 he says: “Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble each man’s work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.”

Acts of Paul and Thecla

And after the exhibition, Tryphaena again receives her. For her daughter Falconilla had died and said to her in a dream: “Mother, thou shalt have this stranger Thecla in my place, in order that she may pray concerning me, and that I may be transferred to the place of the just" (**A.D. 180**).

Clement of Alexandria

The believer through discipline divests himself of his passions and passes to the mansion which is better than the former one, passes to the greatest torment, taking with him the characteristic of repentance for the faults he may have committed after baptism. He is tortured then still more, not yet attaining what he sees others have acquired. The greatest torments are assigned to the believer, for God's righteousness is good, and His goodness righteous, and though these punishments cease in the course of the expiation and purification of each one, "yet" etc. (*Stromata* 6:14 **[A.D. 202]**).

Origen

If a man departs this life with lighter faults, he is condemned to fire which burns away the lighter materials, and prepares the soul for the kingdom of God, where nothing defiled may enter. For if on the foundation of Christ you have built not only gold and silver and precious stones (I Cor., 3); but also wood and hay and stubble, what do you expect when the soul shall be separated from the body? Would you enter into heaven with your wood and hay and stubble and thus defile the kingdom of God; or on account of these hindrances would you remain without and receive no reward for your gold and silver and precious stones? Neither is this just. It remains then that you be committed to the fire which will burn the light materials; for our God to those who can comprehend heavenly things is called a cleansing fire. But this fire consumes not the creature, but what the creature has himself built, wood, and hay and stubble. It is manifest that the fire destroys the wood of our transgressions and then returns to us the reward of our great works. (*Homilies on Jeremias* 13: 445, 448 **[A.D. 244]**).

Abercius

The citizen of a prominent city, I erected this while I lived, that I might have a resting place for my body. Abercius is my name, a disciple of the chaste shepherd who feeds his sheep on the mountains and in the fields, who has great eyes surveying everywhere, who taught me the faithful writings of life. Standing by, I, Abercius, ordered this to be inscribed; truly I was in my seventy-second year. May everyone who is in accord with this and who understands it pray for Abercius (*Epitaph of Abercius* **[A.D. 190]**).

Tertullian

The faithful widow prays for the soul of her husband, and begs for him in the interim repose, and participation in the first resurrection, and offers prayers on the anniversary of his death (*Monogamy* 10 **[A.D. 213]**).

Cyprian of Carthage

It is one thing to stand for pardon, another thing to attain to glory; it is one thing, when cast into prison, not to go out thence until one has paid the uttermost farthing; another thing at once to receive the wages of faith and courage. It is one thing, tortured by long suffering for sins, to be cleansed and long purged by fire; another to have purged all

sins by suffering. It is one thing, in fine, to be in suspense till the sentence of God at the Day of Judgment; another to be at once crowned by the Lord (Letters 51[55]:20 **[A.D. 253]**).

Cyril of Jerusalem

Then we make mention also of those who have already fallen asleep: first, the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs, that through their prayers and supplications God would receive our petition, next, we make mention also of the holy fathers and bishops who have already fallen asleep, and, to put it simply, of all among us who have already fallen asleep. For we believe that it will be of very great benefit to the souls of those for whom the petition is carried up, while this holy and most solemn sacrifice is laid out (*Catechetical Lectures* 23:5:9 **[A.D. 350]**).

Serapion

We beseech you also on behalf of all the departed, of whom also this is the commemoration (after mentioning the names) Sanctify these souls, for You know them all; sanctify all who have fallen asleep in the Lord and count them all among the ranks of your saints and give them a place and abode in your kingdom (*Anaphora* 13:5 **[A.D. 350]**).

Basil the Great

I think that the noble athletes of God, who have wrestled all their lives with the invisible enemies, after they have escaped all of their persecutions and have come to the end of life, are examined by the prince of this world; and if they are found to have any wounds from their wrestling, any stains or effects of sin they are detained (*Homilies on the Psalms* 7:2 **[ante A.D. 370]**).

Epiphanius of Salamis

Furthermore, as to mentioning the names of the dead, how is there anything very useful in that? What is more timely or more excellent than that those who are still here should believe that the departed do live, and that they have not retreated into nothingness, but that they exist and are alive with the Master. And so that this most august proclamation might be told in full, how do they hope, who are praying for the brethren as if they were but sojourning in a foreign land? Useful too is the prayer fashioned on their behalf (*Against all Heresies* 75:8 **[A.D. 374-377]**).

Gregory of Nyssa

If a man … after his departure out of the body, gains knowledge of the difference between virtue and vice, and finds that he is not able to partake of divinity until he has been purged of the filthy contagion in his soul by the purifying fire (*Sermon on the Dead* **[A.D. 383]**).

John Chrysostom

Let us help and commemorate them. If Job's sons were purified by their father's sacrifice [Job I:5), why would we doubt that our offerings for the dead bring them some consolation? Let us not hesitate to help those who have died and to offer our prayers for them (*Homilies on First Corinthians* 41:5 **[A.D. 392]**).

Ambrose of Milan

Give perfect rest to thy servant Theodosius, that rest which thou hast prepared for thy saints… I have loved him, and therefore will I follow him into the land of the living; nor will I leave him until by tears and prayers I shall lead him wither his merits summon him, unto the holy mountain of the Lord (*Funeral Sermon of Theodosius* 36-37 **[A.D. 395]**).

Augustine

Temporal punishments are suffered by some in this life only, by some after death, by some both here and hereafter, but all of them before that last and strictest judgment. But not all who suffer temporal punishments after death will come to eternal punishments, which are to follow after that judgment (*The City of God* 21:13 **[A.D. 419]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Intercession of the Saints

Asking those who have gone before us for their prayers is an ancient practice. Examples can be found in the catacombs as well as the writings of the Early Fathers. This is a part of the doctrine of the communion of saints. The saints in heaven are not worshiped or thought to have any power in and of themselves. They are merely asked to pray for and with us. We believe they can do this in part because of what we read in Scripture. We know that those in heaven care for us (Luke 15:7). We also know that they present our prayers to Jesus (Revelation 5:8). Finally, we see that they add their own prayers to ours (Revelation 8:3-4).

Origen

But not the high priest [Christ] alone prays for those who pray sincerely, but also the angels... as also the souls of the saints who have already fallen asleep (*On Prayer* II **[A.D. 233]**).

Pectorius

Aschandius, my father, dearly beloved of my heart, with my sweet mother and my brethren, remember your Pectorius in the peace of the Fish [Christ] (Epitaph **[A.D. 250]**).

Cyprian

Let us remember one another in concord and unanimity. Let us on both sides always pray for one another. Let us relieve burdens and afflictions by mutual love, that if one of us, by the swiftness of divine condescension, shall go hence the first, our love may continue in the presence of the Lord, and our prayers for our brethren and sisters not cease in the presence of the Father's mercy (Letters 56 [60]:5 **[A.D. 252]**).

Anonymous

Atticus, sleep in peace, secure in your safety, and pray anxiously for our sins (Funerary inscription near St. Sabina's in Rome **[A.D. 300]**).

Pray for your parents, Matronata Matrona. She lived one year, fifty-two days (ibid.).

Cyril of Jerusalem

Then [during the Eucharistic prayer] we make mention also of those who have already fallen asleep: first, the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs, that through their prayers and supplications God would receive our petition... (*Catechetical Lectures* 23:9 **[A.D. 350]**).

Anonymous

Mother of God, [listen to] my petitions; do not disregard us in adversity but rescue us from danger (*Ryland's Papyrus* 3 **[A.D. 350]**).

Hilary of Poitiers

To those who would wish to stand, neither the guardianship of saints nor the defenses of angels are wanting (*Commentary on the Psalms* 124:5:6 **[A.D. 365]**

Ephraem of Syria

Remember me, you heirs of God, you brethren of Christ; supplicate the Savior earnestly for me, that I may be freed through Christ from him that fights against me day by day (*De Timore, Anim. in fin*. **[A.D. 370]**).

Liturgy of St. Basil

By the command of your only-begotten Son we communicate with the memory of your saints . . . by whose prayers and supplications have mercy upon us all and deliver us for the sake of your holy name (*Liturgy of St. Basil* **[A.D. 373]**).

Gregory Nazianzen

May you [Cyprian] look down from above propitiously upon us and guide our word and life; and shepherd this sacred flock . . . gladden the Holy Trinity, before which you stand (*Orations* 17 [24] **[A.D. 376]**).

Gregory of Nyssa

Do you, [Ephraem] that art standing at the divine altar . . . bear us all in remembrance, petitioning for us the remission of sins, and the fruition of an everlasting kingdom (*Sermon on Ephraem the Syrian* **[A.D. 380]**).

Ambrose of Milan

May Peter, who wept so efficaciously for himself, weep for us and turn towards us Christ's benign countenance (*Hexameron* 5:25:90 **[A.D. 388]**).

John Chrysostom

He that wears the purple . . . stands begging of the saints to be his patrons with God, and he that wears a diadem begs the tent-maker [Paul] and the fisherman [Peter] as patrons, even though they be dead" (*Homilies on 2 Corinthians* 26 **[A.D. 392]**).

When you perceive that God is chastening you, fly not to his enemies . . . but to his friends, the martyrs, the saints, and those who were pleasing to him, and who have great power [in God] (*Orations* 8:6 **[A.D. 396]**).

Augustine

A Christian people celebrate together in religious solemnity the memorials of the martyrs, both to encourage their being imitated and so that it can share in their merits and be aided by their prayers (*Against Faustus the Manichean* **[A.D. 400]**).

Jerome

You say in your book that while we live we are able to pray for each other, but afterwards when we have died, the prayer of no person for another can be heard . . . But if the apostles and martyrs while still in the body can pray for others, at a time when they ought still be solicitous about themselves, how much more will they do so after their crowns, victories, and triumphs? (*Against Vigilantius* 6 **[A.D. 406]**).

Leo the Great

On Wednesday and Friday next, therefore, let us fast, and on Saturday keep vigil with the most blessed Apostle Peter, by whose prayers we may in all things obtain the Divine protection through Christ our Lord. Amen (*Sermon* 17 **[inter A.D. 440-460]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Mary, Mother of the Church

At the foot of the cross Jesus entrusted the care of His mother to the apostle John. He also tells John that Mary is his mother (John 19:25-27). The book of Revelation tells us that Mary is also the mother all believers: “Then the dragon became angry with the woman [Mary] and went off to wage war against the rest of **her offspring**, **those who keep God’s commandments and bear witness to Jesus**” (12:17). As Mother of the Church, Mary intercedes for her children. This was first demonstrated at the wedding at Cana where she asks Jesus to help with a wine shortage. Like any good mother, she continues to intercede for her children here on earth. And as attested below, this was believed from the beginning.

Irenaeus

The Word will become flesh, and the Son of God the son of man—the Pure One opening purely that pure womb, which generates men unto God. (*Against Heresies*, 4, 33, 12 **[A.D.180-190]**).

Just as Eve, wife of Adam, yet still a virgin, became by her disobedience the cause of death for herself and the whole human race, so Mary, too, espoused yet a Virgin, became by her obedience the cause of salvation for herself and the whole human race.... And so it was that the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by Mary's obedience. For what the virgin Eve bound fast by her refusal to believe, this the Virgin Mary unbound by her belief. (ibid 3, 32, 1 **[A.D. 180-190]**).

Ryland’s Papyri

Under your mercy we take refuge, O Mother of God. Do not reject our supplications in necessity, but deliver us from danger (*Sub Tuum Praesidium*, Egypt **[A.D. 250]**).

Ephrem of Syria

O Lady, cease not to watch over us; preserve and guard us under the wings of your compassion and mercy, for, after God, we have no hope but in you!" (**[Circa A.D. 361]**).

Athanasius

It becomes you to be mindful of us, as you stand near Him Who granted you all graces, for you are the Mother of God and our Queen. Help us for the sake of the King, the Lord God Master Who was born of you. For this reason, you are called “full of Grace” ... (*Prayer to Mary Mother of Grace* **[A.D. 373]**).

Epiphanius

True it is . . . the whole race of man upon earth was born of Eve; but in reality, it is from Mary that Life was truly born to the world, so that by giving birth to the Living One, Mary might also become the Mother of all the living. (*Against Eighty Heresies*, 78, 9 **[Circa A.D. 374]**).

Gregory of Nazianzen

Recalling these and other circumstances and imploring the Virgin Mary to bring assistance, since she, too, was a virgin and had been in danger, she entrusted herself to the remedy of fasting and sleeping on the ground (*Oration* 24:11**[A.D. 379]**).

Ambrose of Milan

It was through a man and woman that flesh was cast from Paradise; it was through a virgin that flesh was linked to God....Eve is called mother of the human race, but Mary Mother of salvation (Epistle 63, No. 33 **[A.D. 397]**).

Augustine

The Mother of the Head, in bearing Him corporally became spiritually the Mother of all members of this Divine Head (*Of Holy Virginity* 6, **[A.D.401]**).

Blessed Virgin Mary, who can worthily repay you with praise and thanksgiving for having rescued a fallen world by your generous consent? ...accept then such poor thanks as we have to offer, unequal though they be to your merits. Receive our gratitude and obtain by your prayers the pardon of our sins. Take our prayers into the sanctuary of heaven and enable them to bring about our peace with God...Holy Mary, help the miserable, strengthen the discouraged, comfort the sorrowful, pray for your people, plead for the clergy, intercede for all women consecrated to God. May all who venerate you, feel now your help and protection. ...Make it your continual care to pray for the people of God, for you were blessed by God and were made worthy to bear the Redeemer of the world, who lives and reigns forever (*Prayer to Our Lady of Mercy* **[A.D. 430]**).

Basil the Great

God has ordained that she should assist us in everything! **(A.D. 379)**.

Severus of Antioch

More than the other saints, she is able to lift up prayers for us, and we glory to have obtained her as the ornament of our race (Homily 14:18 **[Early 6th century]**).

John Damascene

The Most High has sanctified His tabernacle. The mountain of God is a fertile mountain, the mountain in which it pleased God to dwell." The apostolic band lifting the true ark of the Lord God on their shoulders, as the priests of old the typical ark, and placing thy body in the tomb, made it, as if another Jordan, the way to the true land of the gospel, the heavenly Jerusalem, the mother of all the faithful, God being its Lord and architect. Thy soul did not descend to Limbo; neither did thy flesh see corruption. Thy pure and spotless body was not left in the earth, but the abode of the Queen, of God's true Mother, was fixed in the heavenly kingdom alone (*Sermon 1 on the Assumption* 6th century).

O Mother of God, if I place my confidence in you, I shall be saved. If I am under your protection, I have nothing to fear, for the fact of being your client is the possession of a certainty of salvation, which God grants only to those whom He intends to save (*Homilies,* 6th century).

Theoteknos of Livias

Raised to heaven, she remains for the human race an unconquerable rampart, interceding for us before her Son and God (*Assumption* 291 **[A.D. 560]**).

Isadore of Seville

Mary represents the church, which, being wedded to Christ conceived us as virgin by the Holy Spirit and as a virgin bore us. (*Allegories* 139 **[A.D. 610]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Mary's Perpetual Virginity

The Bible refers to Jesus as "The" son of Mary and not "A" son of Mary (Mark 6:3). It also records Him entrusting the care of His mother to the apostle John at the foot of the cross (John 19:25-27). Certainly, this would have been an odd occurrence if Mary had other children. In Luke 2:7 Jesus is referred to as Mary's firstborn son. The word firstborn, in this case, was a title not a numerical term. In Israel, the title of firstborn carried with it privileges and responsibilities. In Hebrews 1:6 Jesus is called the firstborn of God. I think we can all agree that God did not Father other incarnated sons or daughters. In Exodus 12:29 God killed all the firstborn of Egypt. Single child families were not exempt. In Numbers 3:13 God proclaims all the firstborn of Israel will be consecrated to Him. Once again, single child families were not exempt. So overwhelming was the evidence from Scripture alone that even Martin Luther and John Calvin taught that Mary remained a virgin through the entire course of her life.

Origen

The Book [*The Protoevangelium*] of James [records] that the brethren of Jesus were sons of Joseph by a former wife, whom he married before Mary. Now those who say so wish to preserve the honor of Mary in virginity to the end, so that body of hers which was appointed to minister to the Word . . . might not know intercourse with a man after the Holy Spirit came into her and the power from on high overshadowed her. (*Commentary on Matthew* 2:17 **[A.D. 248]**).

Liturgy of James

Thou who art the only-begotten Son and Word of God, immortal; who didst submit for our salvation to become flesh of the holy Mother of God, and ever-virgin Mary (9 **[A.D. 300]**).

Peter of Alexandria

the only-begotten Son, and the Word co-eternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and of the same substance with them, according to His divine nature, our Lord and God, Jesus Christ, being in the end of the world born according to the flesh of our holy and glorious lady, Mother of God, and Ever-Virgin, and, of a truth, of Mary the Mother of God; and being seen upon earth, and having true and real converse as man with men, who were of the same substance with Him (Fragments 5:7 **[A.D. 300-311]**).

Hilary of Poitiers

If they [the brethren of the Lord] had been Mary's sons and not those taken from Joseph's former marriage, she would never have been given over in the moment of the passion [crucifixion] to the apostle John as his mother, the Lord saying to each, "Woman, behold your son," and to John, "Behold your mother" [John 19:26-27], as he bequeathed filial love to a disciple as a consolation to the one desolate (*Commentary on Matthew* 1:4 **[A.D. 354]**).

Athanasius

Let those, therefore, who deny that the Son is by nature from the Father and proper to his essence deny also that He took true human flesh from the ever-virgin Mary (*Discourses against the Arians* 2:70 **[A.D. 360]**).

Epiphanius

We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of all things, both visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God . . . who for us men and for our salvation came down and took flesh, that is, was born perfectly of the holy ever-virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit (*The Man Well-Anchored* 120 **[A.D. 374]**).

Didymus the Blind

It helps us to understand the terms "firstborn" and "only begotten" when the Evangelist tells that Mary remained a virgin "until she brought forth her firstborn son" [Matt. 1:25]; for neither did Mary, who is to be honored and praised above all others, marry anyone else, nor did she ever become the mother of anyone else, but even after childbirth she remained always and forever an immaculate virgin" (*The Trinity* 3:4 **[A.D. 386]**).

Ambrose of Milan

Imitate her [Mary], holy mothers, who in her only dearly beloved Son set forth so great an example of maternal virtue; for neither have you sweeter children [than Jesus], nor did the virgin seek the consolation of being able to bear another son (Letters 63:111 **[A.D. 388]**).

Pope Siricius I

You had good reason to be horrified at the thought that another birth might issue from the same virginal womb from which Christ was born according to the Flesh. For the Lord Jesus would never have chosen to be born of a virgin if he had ever judged that she would be so incontinent as to contaminate with the seed of human intercourse the birthplace of the Lord's body, chat court of the eternal King (*Letter to Bishop Anysius* **[A.D. 392]**).

Jerome

And I will explain how the holy Mary can be at once a mother and a virgin. A mother before she was wedded, she remained a virgin after bearing her son (Letter 48:21 **[A.D. 394]**).

Augustine

In being born of a virgin who chose to remain a virgin even before she knew who was to be born other, Christ wanted to approve virginity rather than to impose it. And he wanted virginity to be of free choice even in that woman in whom he took upon himself the form of a slave (*Holy Virginity* 4:4 **[A.D. 401]**).

Leporius

We confess, therefore, that our Lord and God, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, born of the Father before the ages, and in times most recent, made man of the Holy Spirit and the ever-virgin Mary (*Document of Amendment* 3 **[A.D. 426]**).

Cyril of Alexandria

The Word himself, coming into the Blessed Virgin herself, assumed for himself his own temple from the substance of the Virgin and came forth from her a man in all that could be externally discerned, while interiorly He was true God. Therefore, he kept his Mother a virgin even after her childbearing (*Against Those Who Do Not Wish to Confess That the Holy Virgin is the Mother of God* 4 **[A.D. 430]**).

Peter Chrysologus

Where are they who think that the Virgin’s conceiving and the Virgin’s giving birth are just like those of other women? … A Virgin conceived, a Virgin bore, and a Virgin she remains (*Sermons* 117 **[post A.D. 432]**).

Pope Leo I

Christ, however, was begotten in a new kind of nativity, conceived by a Virgin, born of a Virgin, without the concupiscence of paternal flesh, without injury to maternal integrity … but by divine power it was brought about that a Virgin conceived, a Virgin bore, and a Virgin she remained (Sermons 22:2 **[ante A.D. 461]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on The Immaculate Conception

In Genesis 3:15 God says to Satan: “I will put enmity between you and the woman [Mary] and between your offspring and hers [Jesus]. He will strike at your head while you strike at His heal.” The seed of Satan is sin. The seed of the woman is Jesus. Enmity is a complete separation. God applies the term to the woman and Satan as well as to Jesus and sin. Jesus was completely separated from sin. Therefore, there must be a complete separation between the woman and Satan. If the woman were to sin even once, there would be no complete separation between her and Satan. Since the Word of God said there would be enmity between the woman and Satan, the Early Fathers believed and taught that Mary was the woman. She was the logical candidate. Those who say the woman spoken of here was Eve or the Church or even Israel, forget that all those entities were either guilty of sin or were comprised of sinners. Thus, there could be no true enmity between them and Satan. Also, since Jesus is the literal offspring, it only makes sense that Mary would be the literal woman (mother).

The Odes of Solomon

So, the Virgin became a mother with great mercies. And she labored and bore the Son, but without pain, because it did not occur without purpose. And she did not seek a midwife, because he caused her to give life. She bore as a strong man, with will. . .. [Implied as pain during childbirth is the consequence of sin Gen. 3:16] (19 **[A.D. 80]**).

Justin Martyr

[Jesus] became man by the Virgin so that the course that was taken by disobedience in the beginning through the agency of the serpent might be also the very course by which it would be put down. Eve, a virgin and undefiled, conceived the word of the serpent and bore disobedience and death. But the Virgin Mary received faith and joy when the angel Gabriel announced to her the glad tidings that the Spirit of the Lord would come upon her and the power of the Most High would overshadow her, for which reason the Holy One being born of her is the Son of God. And she replied, "Be it done unto me according to your word" (Luke 1:38) (*Dialogue with Trypho* 100 **[A.D. 155]**).

Irenaeus of Lyon

Consequently, then, Mary the Virgin is found to be obedient, saying, "Behold, 0 Lord, your handmaid; be it done to me according to your word." Eve . . . who was then still a virgin although she had Adam for a husband — for in paradise they were both naked but were not ashamed; for, having been created only a short time, they had no understanding of the procreation of children . . . having become disobedient [sin], was made the cause of death for herself and for the whole human race; so also Mary, betrothed to a man but nevertheless still a virgin, being obedient [no sin], was made the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race. . . . Thus, the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. What the virgin Eve had bound in unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosed through faith (*Against Heresies* 3:22:24 **[A.D. 189]**).

Origen

This Virgin Mother of the Only-begotten of God is called Mary, worthy of God, immaculate of the immaculate, one of the one (Homily 1 **[A.D. 244]**).

Hippolytus

He [Jesus] was the ark formed of incorruptible wood. For by this is signified that His tabernacle [Mary] was exempt from defilement and corruption (Orat. In Illud, Dominus pascit me, in Gallandi, Bibl. Patrum, II, 496 ante **[A.D. 235]**).

Athanasius

The Word, then, visited that earth in which He was yet always present; and saw all these evils. He takes a body of our Nature, and that of a spotless Virgin, in whose womb He makes it His own, wherein to reveal Himself, conquer death, and restore life (*On the Incarnation of the Word* 8 **[A.D. 319]**).

Ephraim the Syrian

You alone and your Mother are more beautiful than any others, for there is neither blemish in you nor any stains upon your Mother. Who of my children can compare in beauty to these? (*Nisibene Hymns* 27:8 **[A. D. 361]**).

Ambrose of Milan

Come, then, and search out your sheep, not through your servants or hired men, but do it yourself. Lift me up bodily and in the flesh, which is fallen in Adam. Lift me up not from Sarah but from Mary, a Virgin not only undefiled but a Virgin whom grace had made inviolate, free of every stain of sin (*Commentary on Psalm 118:22-30* **[A.D. 387]**).

Gregory Nazianzen

He was conceived by the virgin, who had been first purified by the Spirit in soul and body; for, as it was fitting that childbearing should receive its share of honor, so it was necessary that virginity should receive even greater honor (Sermon 38 **[A.D. 390**]).

John the Theologian

And from that time forth all knew that the spotless and precious body had been transferred to paradise (*The Falling Asleep of Mary* **[A.D. 400]**).

Assumption of Mary

And a voice, as if of the Son of man, was heard, and the seraphim in a circle round the house where the holy, spotless mother of God and virgin was lying, so that all who were in Bethlehem beheld all the wonderful things (**A.D. 400**).

Augustine

We must except the Holy Virgin Mary, concerning whom I wish to raise no question when it touches the subject of sins, out of honor to the Lord; for from Him we know what abundance of grace for overcoming sin in every particular was conferred upon her who had the merit to conceive and bear Him who undoubtedly had no sin (*Nature and Grace* 36:42 **[A.D. 415]**).

Theodotus of Ancrya

A virgin, innocent, spotless, free of all defect, untouched, unsullied, holy in soul and body, like a lily sprouting among thorns (Homily 6:11**[ante A.D. 446]**).

Proclus of Constantinople

As He formed her without any stain of her own, so He proceeded from her contracting no stain (Homily 1**[ante A.D. 446]**).

Jacob of Sarug

[T]he very fact that God has elected her proves that none was ever holier than Mary, if any stain had disfigured her soul, if any other virgin had been purer and holier, God would have selected her and rejected Mary (**ante A.D. 521**).

Romanos the Melodist

Then the tribes of Israel heard that Anna had conceived the immaculate one. So everyone took part in the rejoicing. Joachim gave a banquet, and great was the merriment in the garden. He invited the priests and Levites to prayer; then he called Mary into the center of the crowd, that she might be magnified (*On the Birth of Mary* 1 **[d. ca A.D. 560]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on The Assumption

The doctrine of the Assumption was one that developed over time. It was not something new, but rather the logical result of what was already known. In response to the sin of our first parents, God makes it clear in Genesis 3:15, that Mary would not sin. For it says that there would be enmity between Satan and the Woman (Mary) and between her offspring (Jesus) and his. If Mary had sinned there would not have been true enmity. In Genesis 2:17 God warns Adam that if he sins, he will be doomed to death. We know that God's warning was ignored. Consequently, we see in Genesis 3:19, God making good on His promise. He says to Adam: "By the sweat of your face shall you get bread to eat, until you return to the ground, from which you were taken. For you are dirt, and to dirt you shall return." Therefore, since corruption in the grave is the result of sin and Mary never sinned, it was only logical that she would be assumed body and soul into heaven.

Pseudo – Melito

If therefore it might come to pass by the power of your grace, it has appeared right to us your servants that, as you, having overcome death, do reign in glory, so you should raise up the body of your Mother and take her with you, rejoicing, into heaven. Then said the Savior [Jesus]: "Be it done according to your will" (*The Passing of the Virgin* 16:2-17 **[A.D. 300]**).

Obsequies of the Holy Virgin

Our Lord made a sign to Michael, and Michael began to speak with the voice of a mighty angel. And angels descended on these clouds; and the number of angels on each cloud was a thousand angels, uttering praises before Jesus. And the Lord said to Michael: 'Let them bring the body of Mary into the clouds.' And when the body of Mary had been brought into the clouds, Our Lord said to the Apostles that they should draw near to the clouds. And when they came to the clouds they were singing with the voice of angels. And Our Lord told the clouds to go to the gate of paradise. And when they had entered paradise, the body of Mary went to the tree of life; and they brought her soul and made it enter her body. And straightway the Lord dismissed the angels to their places (**Fourth Century**).

Epiphanius

Like the bodies of the saints, however, she [the Blessed Virgin Mary] has been held in honor for her character and understanding. And if I should say anything more in her praise, she is like Elijah, who was virgin from his mother's womb, always remained so, and was taken up, but has not seen death (*Panarion* 79 **[A.D. 376]**).

Timothy of Jerusalem

Therefore, the Virgin is immortal to this day, seeing that he who had dwelt in her transported her to the regions of her assumption (*Homily on Simeon and Anna* **[A.D. 400]**).

John the Theologian

The Lord said to his mother, "Let your heart rejoice and be glad. For every favor and every gift has been given to you from my Father in heaven and from me and from the Holy Spirit. Every soul that calls upon your name shall not be ashamed, but shall find mercy and comfort and support and confidence, both in the world that now is and in that which is to come, in the presence of my Father in the heavens". . . And from that time forth all knew that the spotless and precious body had been transferred to paradise (*The Dormition of Mary* **[A.D. 400]**).

Assumption of Mary

and for three days the voices of invisible angels were heard glorifying Christ our God, who had been born of her. And when the third day was ended, the voices were no longer heard; and from that time forth all knew that her spotless and precious body had been transferred to paradise (**A.D. 400**).

Gregory of Tours

[T]he Apostles took up her body on a bier and placed it in a tomb; and they guarded it, expecting the Lord to come. And behold, again the Lord stood by them; and the holy body having been received, He commanded that it be taken in a cloud into paradise: where now, rejoined to the soul, [Mary] rejoices with the Lord's chosen ones. . . (*Eight Books of Miracles* 1:4 **[A.D. 575]**).

Theoteknos of Livias

It was fitting ... that the most holy-body of Mary, God-bearing body, receptacle of God, divinized, incorruptible, illuminated by divine grace and full glory ... should be entrusted to the earth for a little while and raised up to heaven in glory, with her soul pleasing to God (*Homily on the Assumption* **[ca. A.D. 600]**).

Modestus of Jerusalem

As the most glorious Mother of Christ, our Savior and God and the giver of life and immortality, has been endowed with life by him, she has received an eternal incorruptibility of the body together with him who has raised her up from the tomb and has taken her up to himself in a way known only to him (*Encomium in dormitionnem Sanctissimae Dominae nostrae Deiparae semperque Virginis Mariae* **[ante A.D. 634]**).

Germanus of Constantinople

You are she who, as it is written, appears in beauty, and your virginal body is all holy, all chaste, entirely the dwelling place of God, so that it is henceforth completely exempt from dissolution into dust. Though still human, it is changed into the heavenly life of incorruptibility, truly living and glorious, undamaged and sharing in perfect life (Sermon I **[A.D. 683]**).

John Damascene

It was fitting that the she, who had kept her virginity intact in childbirth, should keep her own body free from all corruption even after death. It was fitting that she, who had carried the Creator as a child at her breast, should dwell in the divine tabernacles. It was fitting that the spouse, whom the Father had taken to himself, should live in the divine mansions. It was fitting that she, who had seen her Son upon the cross and who had thereby received into her heart the sword of sorrow which she had escaped when giving birth to him, should look upon him as he sits with the Father, It was fitting that God's Mother should possess what belongs to her Son, and that she should be honored by every creature as the Mother and as the handmaid of God (*Dormition of Mary* **[A.D. 697]**).

Gregorian Sacramentary

Venerable to us, O Lord, is the festivity of this day on which the holy Mother of God suffered temporal death, but still could not be kept down by the bonds of death, who has begotten Thy Son our Lord incarnate from herself (*Gregorian Sacramentary*, Veneranda **[ante A.D. 795]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on The Mother of God

The main objection to this title is that it is not Biblical. But that is not the case. In Luke 1:43 we hear Elizabeth address Mary as “The mother of my Lord.” Now some will say, and rightly so, that the word lord can refer to God or to man. For instance, someone of high rank or from a royal family could be referred to as lord. But Jesus was neither of these, at least not in the earthly sense. Jesus is Lord because He is God. There is something else to consider; in Luke 1:43 Jesus is still in the womb. Elizabeth can only be referring to His divinity when she calls Him Lord. So, the mother of my Lord means the mother of my God. Or simply put, The Mother of God. It is also important to note that the title has more to do with Jesus than it does with Mary. It is an affirmation that He was both human and divine.

Irenaeus

The Virgin Mary, being obedient to his word, received from an angel the glad tidings that she would bear God (*Against Heresies*, 5:19:1 **[A.D. 189]**)

Hippolytus

To all generations they have pictured forth the grandest subjects for contemplation and for action. Thus, too, they preached of the advent of God in the flesh to the world, His advent by the spotless and God-bearing Mary in the way of birth and growth, and the manner of His life and conversation with men, and His manifestation by baptism, and the new birth that was to be to all men (*On the End of the World* 1 **[A.D. 217]**).

Gregory the Wonderworker

For Luke, in the inspired Gospel narratives, delivers a testimony not to Joseph only, but also to Mary, the Mother of God, and gives this account with reference to the very family and house of David (*Four Homilies* 1 **[A.D. 262]**).

Peter of Alexandria

They came to the church of the most blessed Mother of God, and ever-virgin Mary, which, as we began to say, he had constructed in the western quarter, in a suburb, for a cemetery of the martyrs (*The Genuine Acts of Peter of Alexandria* **[A.D. 305]**).

Methodius

Hail to you forever, you virgin mother of God, our unceasing joy, for unto you do I again return.... Hail, you fount of the Son's love for man. ...Wherefore, we pray you, the most excellent among women, who boast in the confidence of your maternal honors that you would unceasingly keep us in remembrance. O holy mother of God, remember us, I say, who make our boast in you (*Oration on Simeon and Anna* 14 **[A.D. 305]**).

Alexander of Alexandria

After this we know of the resurrection of the dead, the first-fruits of which was our Lord Jesus Christ, who in very deed, and not in appearance merely, carried a body, of Mary Mother of God, who in the end of the world came to the human race to put away sin, was crucified and died, and yet did He not thus perceive any detriment to His divinity. (*Letter to Alexander Bishop of Constantinople* 12 **[A.D. 324]**).

Cyril of Jerusalem

The Father bears witness from heaven to his Son. The Holy Spirit bears witness, coming down bodily in the form of a dove. The archangel Gabriel bears witness, bringing the good tidings to Mary. The Virgin Mother of God bears witness (*Catechetical Lectures* 10:19 **[A.D. 350]**).

Ephraim the Syrian

Though still a virgin she carried a child in her womb, and the handmaid and work of his wisdom became the Mother of God (*Songs of Praise* 1:20 **[A.D. 351]**).

Athanasius

The Word begotten of the Father from on high, inexpressibly, inexplicably, incomprehensibly, and eternally, is he that is born in time here below of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God (*The Incarnation of the Word of God* 8 **[A.D. 365]**).

Gregory of Nyssa

Just as, in the age of Mary the mother of God, he who had reigned from Adam to her time found, when he came to her and dashed his forces against the fruit of her virginity as against a rock, that he was shattered to pieces upon her, so in every soul which passes through this life in the flesh under the protection of virginity, the strength of death is in a manner broken and annulled (*On Virginity* 13 **[A.D. 370]**).

Epiphanius of Salamis

Being perfect at the side of the Father and incarnate among us, not in appearance but in truth, he [the Son] reshaped man to perfection in himself from Mary the Mother of God through the Holy Spirit (*The Man Well-Anchored* 75 **[A.D. 374]**).

Ambrose of Milan

The first thing which kindles ardor in learning is the greatness of the teacher. What is greater than the Mother of God? What more glorious than she whom Glory Itself chose? (*The Virgins* 2:2[7] **[A.D. 377]**).

Gregory of Nazianzen

If anyone does not agree that holy Mary is Mother of God, he is at odds with the Godhead (*Letter 1 to Cledonius* **[A.D. 382]**).

Jerome

As to how a virgin became the Mother of God, he [Rufinus] has full knowledge; as to how he himself was born, he knows nothing (*Against Rufinus* 2:10 **[A.D. 401]**).

Theodore of Mopsuestia

"When, therefore, they ask, ‘Is Mary mother of man or Mother of God?’ we answer, ‘Both!’ The one by the very nature of what was done and the other by relation" (*The Incarnation* 15 **[A.D. 405]**).

Cyril of Alexandria

I have been amazed that some are utterly in doubt as to whether or not the holy Virgin is able to be called the Mother of God. For if our Lord Jesus Christ is God, how should the holy Virgin who bore him not be the Mother of God? (*Letter to the Monks of Egypt* 1 **[A.D. 427]**).

John Cassian

You cannot then help admitting that the grace comes from God. It is God, then, who has given it. But it has been given by our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, the Lord Jesus Christ is God. But if he is God, as he certainly is, then she who bore God is the Mother of God (*On the Incarnation of Christ Against Nestorius* 2:2 **[A.D. 429]**

Vincent of Lerins

Nestorius, … while pretending that he holds two distinct substances in Christ, brings in of a sudden two persons, and with unheard-of wickedness would have two sons of God, two Christs, — one, God, the other, man; one, begotten of his Father, the other, born of his mother. For which reason he maintains that Saint Mary ought to be called, not the Mother of God, but the Mother of Christ (*The Notebooks* 12[35] **[A.D. 434]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Sacred Images

The Bible forbids the making and worshiping of images: "You shall not have other Gods besides me. You shall not carve idols for yourselves in the shape of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth. You shall not bow down before them or worship them" (Exodus 20:3-5). But most Protestants take this to mean that the mere making of images is forbidden. This is indeed unfortunate as it ignores not only Church history but Scripture itself. The same God who makes the prohibition in Exodus 20 requires that images be made for the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 37:7), the tabernacle (Exodus 36:8) and Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:23, 7:25, and 7:29). Ironically, even the most ardent critics violate this supposed directive. And they do that by having photographs of family and friends and perhaps even paintings of famous people. After all, if we are not to make images then we are not to make images. And photographs and paintings are images.

Tertullian

The brazen serpent and the golden cherubim were not violations of the Second Commandment. Their meaning. Likewise, when forbidding the similitude to be made of all things which are in heaven, and in earth, and in the waters, He declared also the reasons, as being prohibitory of all material exhibition of a latent idolatry. For He adds: "Thou shalt not bow down to them, nor serve them." The form, however, of the brazen serpent which the Lord afterwards commanded Moses to make, afforded no pretext for idolatry, but was meant for the cure of those who were plagued with the fiery serpents? I say nothing of what was figured by this cure. Thus, too, the golden Cherubim and Seraphim were purely an ornament in the figured fashion of the ark; adapted to ornamentation for reasons totally remote from all condition of idolatry, on account of which the making a likeness is prohibited; and they are evidently not at variance with this law of prohibition, because they are not found in that form of similitude, in reference to which the prohibition is given (*Against Marcion* 2:22 **[inter A.D. 207-212]**).

Eusebius

They say that this statue is an image of Jesus. It has remained to our day, so that we ourselves also saw it when we were staying in the city. Nor is it strange that those of the Gentiles who, of old, were benefited by our Savior, should have done such things, since we have learned also that the likenesses of his apostles Paul and Peter, and of Christ himself, are preserved in paintings, the ancients being accustomed, as it is likely, according to a habit of the Gentiles, to pay this kind of honor indiscriminately to those regarded by them as deliverers (*Church History* 7 **[A.D. 325]**).

Basil

I acknowledge also the holy apostles, prophets, and martyrs; and I invoke them to supplication to God, that through them, that is, through their mediation, the merciful God may be propitious to me, and that a ransom may be made and given me for my sins. Wherefore also I honor and kiss the features of their images, inasmuch as they have been handed down from the holy apostles, and are not forbidden, but are in all our churches (Letter 360 **[circa A.D. 370]**).

John Chrysostom

For like a conflagration indeed, or like a thunderbolt hurled from on high, have they lighted upon the roof of the Church, and yet they rouse up no one; but whilst our Father's house is burning, we are sleeping, as it were, a deep and stupid sleep. And yet who is there whom this fire does not touch? Which of the statues that stand in the Church? for the Church is nothing else than a house built of the souls of us men. Now this house is not of equal honor throughout, but of the stones which contribute to it, some are bright and shining, whilst others are smaller and more dull than they, and yet superior again to others. There we may see many who are in the place of gold also, the gold which adorns the ceiling. Others again we may see, who give the beauty and gracefulness produced by statues. Many we may see, standing like pillars. For he is accustomed to call men also on account of their beauty, adding as they do, much grace, and having their heads overlaid with gold (*Homilies 10 on Ephesians* **[circa A.D. 400]**).

Cyril of Alexandria

Even if we make images of pious men it is not so that we might adore them as gods but that when we see them we might be prompted to imitate them; and if we make images of Christ, it is so that our minds might wing aloft in yearning for Him (*Commentary on the Psalms* 113B 115:16 **[ante A.D. 429]**).

Council of Ephesus

Theodosius, the humble Christian, to the holy and Ecumenical Synod: I confess and I agree to (suntiqemai) and I receive and I salute and I venerate in the first place the spotless image of our Lord Jesus Christ, our true God, and the holy image of her who bore him without seed, the holy Mother of God, and her help and protection and intercessions each day and night as a sinner to my aid I call for, since she has confidence with Christ our God, as he was born of her. Likewise, also I receive and venerate the images of the holy and most laudable Apostles, prophets, and martyrs and the fathers and cultivators of the desert. Not indeed as gods (God forbid!) do I ask all these with my whole heart to pray for me to God, that he may grant me through their intercessions to find mercy at his hands at the day of judgment, for in this I am but showing forth more clearly the affection and love of my soul which I have borne them from the first. Likewise, also I venerate and honor and salute the relics of the Saints as of those who fought for Christ and who have received grace from him for the healing of diseases and the curing of sicknesses and the casting out of devils, as the Christian Church has received from the holy Apostles and Fathers even down to us to-day (Session 1, **[A.D. 431]**).

Gregory the Great

Furthermore, we notify to you that it has come to our ears that your Fraternity, seeing certain adorers of images, broke and threw down these same images in Churches. And we commend you indeed for your zeal against anything made with hands being an object of adoration; but we signify to you that you ought not to have broken these images. For pictorial representation is made use of in Churches for this reason; that such as are ignorant of letters may at least read by looking at the walls what they cannot read in books. Your Fraternity therefore should have both preserved the images and prohibited the people from adoration of them, to the end that both those who are ignorant of letters might have wherewith to gather a knowledge of the history, and that the people might by no means sin by adoration of a pictorial representation. (Letters 9:105 **[A.D. 600]**).

Quinisext Council

In some pictures of the venerable icons, a lamb is painted to which the Precursor points his finger, which is received as a type of grace, indicating beforehand through the Law, our true Lamb, Christ our God (Canon 82 **[A.D. 692]**).

2nd Council of Nicaea

We, therefore, following the royal pathway and the divinely inspired authority of our Holy Fathers and the traditions of the Catholic Church (for, as we all know the Holy Spirit indwells her), define with all certitude and accuracy that just as the figure of the precious and life-giving Cross, so also the venerable and holy images, as well in painting and mosaic as of other fit materials, should be set forth in the holy churches of God, and on the sacred vessels and on the vestments and on hangings and in pictures both in houses and by the wayside, to wit, the figure of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, of our spotless Lady, the Mother of God, of the honorable Angels, of all Saints and of all pious people. For by so much more frequently as they are seen in artistic representation, by so much more readily are men lifted up to the memory of their prototypes, and to a longing after them; and to these should be given due salutation and honorable reverence not indeed that true worship of faith which pertains alone to the divine nature; but to these, as to the figure of the precious and life-giving Cross and to the Book of the Gospels and to the other holy objects, incense and lights may be offered according to ancient pious custom. For the honor which is paid to the image passes on to that which the image represents, and he who reveres the image reveres in it the subject represented (Session 7, **[A.D. 787-788]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Relics

It is said that the veneration of relics is evidence of idolatry or superstition. But this ignores the clear evidence in Scripture that demonstrates not only their use, but their power. For instance, in 2 Kings 13:20-21 we see a dead man come to life after touching the bones of the prophet Elisha. In the New Testament we see a woman cured after touching the hem of Jesus clothing (Matthew 9:20-22). And in Acts 19:11-12 we see people healed by aprons or handkerchiefs that had touched the Apostle Paul. Of course, relics have no power of their own. But just as God chooses to work through men he also chooses to work through their relics as a testament to their holiness. The Early Church was aware of this as evidenced by their practice of collecting and treasuring the relics of the martyrs.

The Martyrdom of Saint Ignatius

… he was thus cast to the wild beasts close beside the temple, that so by them the desire of the holy martyr Ignatius should be fulfilled, according to that which is written, The desire of the righteous is acceptable Proverbs 10:24 [to God], to the effect that he might not be troublesome to any of the brethren by the gathering of his remains, even as he had in his Epistle expressed a wish beforehand that so his end might be. For only the harder portions of his holy remains were left, which were conveyed to Antioch and wrapped in linen, as an inestimable treasure left to the holy Church by the grace which was in the martyr (*The Martyrdom of St. Ignatius* 6 **[A.D. 107]**).

The Martyrdom of Polycarp

[T]he Son of God, we adore; but the martyrs, as disciples and followers of the Lord, we worthily love on account of their extraordinary affection towards their own King and Master... [When Polycarp died] we afterwards took up his bones, as being more precious than the most exquisite jewels, and more purified than gold, and deposited them in a fitting place... [As] opportunity is allowed us, with joy and rejoicing, the Lord shall grant us to celebrate the anniversary of his martyrdom, both in memory of those who have already finished their course, and for the exercising and preparation of those yet to walk in their steps (*The Martyrdom of Polycarp* 17-18 **[A.D. 155]**).

Acts of the Martyrdom of St. Epipodius and St. Alexander

Into [a] cavern their venerable bodies were, with religious forethought, cast, because the fury of the Gentiles, denying the last rites of burial, raged even against the bodies of the dead. [Later] the reverence of religious men preserved that place, and a reverence transmitted [it] through their posterity… [One] woman...preserved [a] sandal of the martyr… [and]did not deny that, by the mercy of God, she had cured very many by means of the relic... . (*Acts of the Martyrdom of SS. Epipodius and Alexander* **[A.D. 178]**, in Ruinart, Acta Primorum Martyrum Sincera et Selecta Chapter 13, as translated in *The Faith of Catholics*, Volume 3, Page 250-251).

The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity

Meanwhile in another gate, Saturus was encouraging the soldier Pudens saying: “In summary,” he says, “certainly, just as I expected and predicted, I have not been affected by any beast up till now. And now you should believe with your whole heart: behold I go forth to there, and I will be finished by one bite of a leopard.” And immediately at the end of the spectacle, as a leopard was let loose, he shed so much blood from one bite, that as he returned, the crowd acclaimed the testimony of his second baptism: “Well washed, well washed!” And plainly he had been saved who had been washed in this way. Then he says to the soldier Pudens: “Goodbye,” he says, “and remember the faith and me; and let these things not trouble you, but strengthen you.” And at the same time he asked for a small ring from the other’s finger, and he returned it to him as an inheritance having been dipped in his wound (21:1-5 **[A.D. 202]**).

Deacon Pontius of Antioch

As [St. Cyprian] sat moistened after his long journey with excessive perspiration (the seat was by chance covered with linen, so that even in the very moment of his passion he might enjoy the honor of the episcopate), one of the officers...who had formerly been a Christian, offered him his clothes, as if he might wish to change his moistened

garments for drier ones; and he doubtless coveted nothing further in respect of his proffered kindness than to possess the now blood-stained sweat of the martyr going to God." (*Life and Passion of St. Cyprian* 16 **[A.D. 258]**).

Peter of Alexandria

In the meanwhile, a spirited body of senators of those who are engaged in the public transport service, seeing what had happened, for they were near the sea, prepared a boat, and suddenly seizing upon the sacred relics, they placed them in it (*The Acts of Peter of Alexandria* **[A.D. 300-311]**).

Eusebius

I can show the trophies of the apostles. For if you will go to the Vatican or to the Ostian way, you will find the trophies of those who laid the foundations of this church. (Quoting Gaius in his dialogue with Proclus A.D. 198, recorded in *Church History* 2:25 **[A.D. 325]**).

With respect to those places which are honored in being the depositories of the remains of martyrs, and continue to be memorials of their glorious departure; how can we doubt that they rightly belong to the churches [?] (*Life of Constantine* 2:40 **[A.D. 339]**).

Basil

If I am able to find any relics of martyrs, I pray that I may take part in your earnest endeavor (Letter 49 **[A.D. 329-379]**).

Ambrose of Milan

We have found this one thing, in which we seem to excel those who have gone before us. That knowledge of the martyrs, which they lost, we have regained. The glorious relics are taken out of an ignoble burying-place, the trophies are displayed under heaven. The tomb is wet with blood. The marks of the bloody triumph are present, the relics are found undisturbed in their order, the head separated from the body. … Let these triumphant victims be brought to the place where Christ is the victim. But He upon the altar, Who suffered for all; they beneath the altar, who were redeemed by His Passion. I had destined this place for myself, for it is fitting that the priest should rest there where he has been wont to offer, but I yield the right hand portion to the sacred victims; that place was due to the martyrs. Let us, then, deposit the sacred relics, and lay them up in a worthy resting-place, and let us celebrate the whole day with faithful devotion (Letter 22 11-13 **[A.D. 386]**).

The Apostolic Constitutions

[God] is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to Him. Wherefore, of those that live with God, even their very relics are not without honor. For even Elisha the prophet, after he was fallen asleep, raised up a dead man who was slain by the pirates of Syria. For his body touched the bones of Elisha, and he arose and revived. Now this would not have happened unless the body of Elisha were holy (6:6 **[A.D. 400]**).

Jerome

We, it is true, refuse to worship or adore...the relics of the martyrs...the angels and archangels...and every name that is named, not only in this world but also in that which is to come. ... Still, we honor the relics of the martyrs that we may adore Him whose martyrs they are. We honor the servants that their honor may be reflected upon their Lord who Himself says: "he that receives you receives me." ... If the relics of the martyrs are not worthy of honor, how comes it that we read "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints?" (Letter 109 1-2 **[A.D. 404]**).

Theodoret of Cyr

The noble souls of the triumphant are sauntering around heaven, dancing in the choruses of the bodiless; and not one tomb for each conceals their bodies, but cities and villages divide them up and call them healers and preservers of souls and bodies and venerate them as guardians and protectors of cities (*The Cure of Pagan Maladies* 8 **[A.D. 449]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on The Sign of the Cross

Performing the sign of the cross is a Catholic practice which dates to the early Church. It was originally used in the administering of the sacraments. Later it gained a wider use as evidenced by the writings of the Early Church Fathers. For the most part it is used at the beginning and end of prayers or devotions. It can also be a prayer unto itself. The sign of the cross is an appeal to the Trinity. With it we ask God to bless what we are about to do or experience. There are two ways of signing oneself. You can either trace a cross on your forehead or chest or you can touch your forehead, then your chest, and finally both of your shoulders (going from left to right) all with your right hand.

Tertullian

At every forward step and movement, at every going in and out, when we put on our our clothes and shoes, when we bathe, when we sit at table, when we light the lamps, on couch, on seat, in all the ordinary actions of daily life, we trace upon the forehead the sign (*The Chaplet* 3 **[A.D. 211]**).

Acts of Xanthippe and Polyxena

And Paul perceived her prayer, and made the sign of the cross, and for several days the people entered unhindered, and as many as had sick and vexed by unclean spirits brought them, and all were healed (14 **[A.D. 270]**).

Cyril of Jerusalem

Let us, therefore, not be ashamed of the Cross of Christ; but though another hide it, do thou openly seal it upon thy forehead, that the devils may behold the royal sign and flee trembling far away. Make then this sign at eating and drinking, at sitting, at lying down, at rising up, at speaking, at walking: in a word, at every act. For He who was here crucified is in heaven above (*Catechetical Lecture* 4:14 **[A.D. 350]**).

Athanasius

Them he quickly heard, though he had not given a thought to the demons, and coming to the door he besought them to depart and not to be afraid, 'for thus,' said he, 'the demons make their seeming onslaughts against those who are cowardly. Sign yourselves therefore with the cross, and depart boldly, and let these make sport for themselves.' So, they departed fortified with the sign of the Cross (*Life of St. Anthony* 13 **[A.D. 356-362]**).

But we by the mention of Christ crucified put all demons to flight, whom you fear as if they were gods. Where the sign of the Cross is, magic is weak and witchcraft has no strength (ibid 78).

Ephraim the Syrian

With the sign of the living cross, seal all thy doings, my son. Go not forth from the door of thy house till thou hast signed the cross. Whether in eating or in drinking, whether in sleeping or in waking, whether in thy house or on the road, or again in the season of leisure, neglect not this sign; for there is no guardian like it. It shall be unto thee as a wall, in the forefront of all thy doings. And teach this to thy children, that heedfully they be conformed to it (*On Admonition and Repentance* 17 **[A.D. 363]**).

Gregory of Nyssa

For if the confession of the revered and precious Names of the Holy Trinity is useless, and the customs of the Church unprofitable, and if among these customs is the sign of the cross, prayer, baptism, confession of sins, a ready zeal to keep the commandment, right ordering of character, sobriety of life, regard to justice, the effort not to be excited by passion, or enslaved by pleasure, or to fall short in moral excellence (*Against Eunomius* 11:5 **[A.D. 382]**).

John Chrysostom

When therefore thou signest thyself, think of the purpose of the cross, and quench anger, and all the other passions. When thou signest thyself, fill thy forehead with all courage, make thy soul free (Homily 54 0n Matthew's Gospel 7 **[A.D. 390]**).

Origen

This (the letter Tau) bears a resemblance to the figure of the cross; and this prophecy (Ezekiel 9:4) is said to regard the sign made by Christians on the forehead, which all believers make whatsoever work they begin upon, and especially at the beginning of prayers, or of holy reading (*Homilies on Ezekial* 9 **[circa A.D. 392]**).

Tyrannius Rufinus

At this point, as the custom is at the close of the Creed, we touch the forehead of this flesh with the sign of the cross (Apology 1:5 **[A.D. 400]**).

Jerome

And although she signed her mouth and her breast with the sign of the cross, and endeavored thus to alleviate a mother's grief; her feelings overpowered her and her maternal instincts were too much for her confiding mind(Letter 108:21 **[A.D. 404]**).

Raising her finger also to her mouth she made the sign of the cross upon her lips. (Letter 108:29 **[A.D. 404]**).

They will suffice to warn you that you must shut the door of your breast and fortify your brow by often making the sign of the cross (Letter 130:9 **[A.D. 414]**).

Apostolic Constitutions

Let the high priest, therefore, together with the priests, pray by himself; and let him put on his shining garment, and stand at the altar, and make the sign of the cross upon his forehead with his hand, and say: The grace of Almighty God, and the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with you all (8:7 **[A.D. 400]**).

Augustine

What is the sign (or seal) of Christ, but the cross of Christ? Which sign, unless it be applied, whether to the foreheads of believers, or to the water itself whereby they are regenerated, or to the oil wherewith they are anointed with chrism, or to the sacrifice by which they are fed, none of these things is rightly performed. How then can it be, that by that which the wicked do no good thing is signified, when by the cross of Christ, which the wicked made, every good thing is signified to us in the celebration of His sacraments (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 118:5 **[circa A.D. 407]**).

Paulus Orosius

Theodosius narrowing himself without friends, but that he was surrounded by enemies, with his body prostrate on the earth, but his mind fixed on heaven, prayed alone to Christ alone, who is able to do all things. Having spent a sleepless night in uninterrupted prayer . . . he confidently, though alone, seized his weapons, conscious that he was not only to be protected by the sign of the cross, but thereby even to be victorious; fortifying himself with that sign, he gave the signal for battle" (*History Against the Pagans* 1:7 **[A.D. 417]**).

Theodoret

With these and other like words he made the sign of the cross over the water, and ordered Equitius, one of his deacons, who was armed with faith and enthusiasm, to take the water and sprinkle it in faith, and then apply the flame. His orders were obeyed, and the demon, unable to endure the approach of the water, fled (*Ecclesiastical History* 5:21 **[A.D. 449-450]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Catholic Practices

Some critics claim that the various distinctive Catholic practices are unnecessary additions to the faith. They say such practices only serve to distract people from the simple Gospel message. But the Early Church Fathers would disagree. In their writings they give witness to the fact that these traditions were practiced from the beginning. Consequently, they give witness to authentic Church Tradition. The type of tradition that Paul speaks of in 2 Thessalonians 2:15: “Stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter” (2 Thessalonians 2:15). In the final analysis we see that these practices were not things that were added by the Catholic Church, rather they were things discarded by the Protestant reformers.

Irenaeus

Notwithstanding this, those who did not keep [the feast in this way] were peacefully disposed towards those who came to them from other **dioceses** in which it was observed (although such observance was [felt] in more decided contrariety [as presented] to those who did not fall in with it; and none were ever cast out [of the Church] for this matter (Fragments 3 **[inter A.D. 175-185]**).

Cyprian of Carthage

Certainly, the one both understands that he has sinned, and laments and bewails it; the other, puffed up in his heart, and pleasing himself in his very crimes, separates sons from their mother, entices sheep from their shepherd, disturbs **the sacraments of God**; and while the lapsed has sinned but once, he sins daily (*Treatise 4* **[A.D. 252]**).

by the **sacrament of baptism**, the filth of the old man is washed away by them, that they pardon the former mortal sins, that they make sons of God by **heavenly regeneration**, and renew to eternal life by the sanctification of the divine layer (Letter 74:17 **[A.D. 256]**).

Council of Sardica

Ye remember that in former times our fathers decreed that if a layman were staying in a city and **should not come to divine worship for three [successive] Sundays** [that is], for three [full] weeks, he should be **repelled from communion** (Canon 11 **[A.D. 344]**).

Athanasius

Ursacius and Valens to my Lord the most blessed **Pope Julius** (*History of the Arians* 3:26 **[A.D. 357-358]**).

Ambrose of Milan

Especially he recommends the **Lord's Prayer**, and the **repetition of Psalms** by night, and the **recitation of the Creed** before daylight (*Concerning Virgins* 3:4 **[A.D. 377]**).

Sulpitius Severus

He had set down a glass vessel containing **oil blessed by Martin** in a pretty high window (*Dialogue* 3 **[circa A.D. 400]**).

Jerome

Some offences are light, [venial] some heavy [mortal]. It is one thing to owe ten thousand talents, another to owe a farthing. We shall have to give account of the idle word no less than of adultery; but it is not the same thing to be put to the blush, and to be put upon the rack, to grow red in the face and to ensure lasting torment. Do you think I am merely expressing my own views? Hear what the Apostle John says: him ask, and he shall give him life,

even to him that sinneth not unto death. But he that hath sinned unto death, who shall pray for him? "You observe that if we entreat for smaller offences, we obtain pardon: if for greater ones, it is difficult to obtain our request: and that there is a great difference between sins (*Against Jovinianus* 2:30 **[A.D. 393]**).

I admire in your work its practical aim, designed as it is to instruct by the authority of scripture ignorant persons in all the churches concerning the reverence with which they must handle holy things and minister at Christ's altar; and to impress upon them that the **sacred chalices, veils,' and other accessories used in the celebration of the Lord's passion** are not mere lifeless and senseless objects devoid of holiness, but that rather, from their association with **the body and blood of the Lord**, they are to be venerated with the same awe as the body and the blood themselves (Letter 114:2 **[A.D. 405]**).

She had assumed the bridal-veil of Christ in the **basilica** of the apostle Peter and had vowed to live henceforth in the **monastery**, in the spots consecrated by the Lord's Cross (Letter 147:6 **[circa A.D. 419]**).

Council of Carthage

And that **all these sacraments** are altogether true and holy and divine is most certain, and in them the whole hope of the soul is placed, although the presumptuous audacity of heretics, taking to itself the name of the truth, dares to administer them. They are but one after all, as the blessed Apostle tells us, saying: "One God, one faith, one baptism," and it is not lawful to reiterate what once only ought to be administered. [Those therefore who have been so baptized] having anathematized their error may be received by the imposition of the hand into the one Church, the pillar as it is called, and the one mother of all Christians, where all these Sacraments are received unto salvation and everlasting life; even the same sacraments which obtain for those persevering in heresy the heavy penalty of damnation (canon 57 **[A.D. 419]**).

Augustine

Every day must this prayer be said by you, when you are baptized**. For the Lord's Prayer is said daily in the Church before the Altar of God,** and the faithful hear it (Sermon 12:8 **[circa A.D. 391]**).

This I remember hearing from more than one: for a certain holy presbyter was an eye-witness of such **an apparition**, having observed a multitude of such phantoms issuing from the baptistery in bodies full of light, after which he heard their prayers in the midst of the church itself (Letter 158 :8 **[inter A.D. 411-430]**).

John Cassian

Wherefore let us enjoy a little sleep, and so shake off the drowsiness that steals over our eyes, as the dawn approaches, **and then we will go together to church, for the observance of Sunday** bids us do this, and after service will come back, and as you wish, discuss with redoubled delight what the Lord may have given to us for our common improvement (*Conference* 7:34 **[circa A.D. 430]**).

Vincent of Lerins

The foregoing would be enough and very much more than enough, to crush and annihilate every profane novelty. But yet that nothing might be wanting to such completeness of proof, we added, at the close, **the twofold authority of the Apostolic See, first, that of holy Pope Sixtus,** the venerable prelate who now adorns the Roman Church; and secondly that of **his predecessor, Pope Celestine** of blessed memory, which same we think it necessary to insert here also (*Commonitory* 84 **[A.D. 434]**).

Theodoret

Conference between Liberius, **Pope of Rome**, and the Emperor Constantius (*Ecclesiastical History* 2:8 **[A.D. 449-450]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Contraception

The Early Church Fathers were undivided in their condemnation of artificial birth control (contraception). They understood the connection between the marital act and the creation of offspring. They also understood the lessons of Genesis 38:6-10 where Onan was condemned by God for what amounted to contraception. Up until 1930 every Protestant denomination taught that contraception was a forbidden practice. In 1930 the Anglican Church held its Lambeth Conference. At that time, they decided that a couple could use contraceptives for what they called "grave reasons in a marriage." It did not take long for “grave reasons” to become any reason. Since that time most Protestant denominations have followed suit.

Letter of Barnabas

Moreover, he [Moses] has rightly detested the weasel [Lev. 11:29]. For he means, "Thou shalt not be like to those whom we hear of as committing wickedness with the mouth with the body through uncleanness [orally consummated sex]; nor shalt thou be joined to those impure women who commit iniquity with the mouth with the body through uncleanness" (10:8 **[A.D. 74]**).

Clement of Alexandria

Because of its divine institution for the propagation of man, the seed is not to be vainly ejaculated, nor is it to be damaged, nor is it to be wasted (*The Instructor of Children* 2:10:91:2 **[A.D. 191]**).

To have coitus other than to procreate children is to do injury to nature (ibid. 2:10:95:3).

Hippolytus

Whence women, reputed believers, began to resort to drugs for producing sterility [oral contraceptives], and to gird themselves round, so to expel what was being conceived [abortion] on account of their not wishing to have a child either by a slave or by any paltry fellow, for the sake of their family and excessive wealth. Behold, into how great impiety that lawless one has proceeded, by inculcating adultery and murder at the same time! (*Refutation of All Heresies* 9:7 **[A.D. 225]**).

Minucius Felix

There are some women who, by drinking medical preparations, extinguish the source of the future man in their very bowels, and thus commit a parricide before they bring forth (*Octavius* 30 **[A.D. 226]**).

Lactantius

[Some] complain of the scantiness of their means, and allege that they have not enough for bringing up more children, as though, in truth, their means were in [their] power . . . or God did not daily make the rich poor and the poor rich. Wherefore, if any one on any account of poverty shall be unable to bring up children, it is better to abstain from relations with his wife (*Divine Institutes* 6:20 **[A.D. 307]**).

God gave us eyes not to see and desire pleasure, but to see acts to be performed for the needs of life; so too, the genital ['generating'] part of the body, as the name itself teaches, has been received by us for no other purpose than the generation of offspring (ibid. 6:23:18).

Epiphanius

They [certain Egyptian heretics] exercise genital acts, yet prevent the conceiving of children. Not in order to produce offspring, but to satisfy lust, are they eager for corruption (Medicine Chest Against Heresies 26:5:2 **[A.D. 375]**).

John Chrysostom

[I]n truth, all men know that they who are under the power of this disease [the sin of covetousness] are wearied even of their father's old age [wishing him to die so they can inherit]; and that which is sweet) and universally desirable, the having of children, they esteem grievous and unwelcome. Many at least with this view have even paid money to be childless, and have mutilated nature, not only killing the newborn, but even acting to prevent their beginning to live [sterilization] (*Homilies on Matthew* 28:5 **[A.D. 391]**).

Why do you sow where the field is eager to destroy the fruit, where there are medicines of sterility [oral contraceptives], where there is murder before birth? . . . Indeed, it is something worse than murder, and I do not know what to call it; for she does not kill what is formed but prevents its formation. What then? Do you condemn the gift of God and Fight with his [natural] laws? (*Homilies on Romans* 24 **[A.D. 391]**).

Jerome

But I wonder why he [the heretic Jovinianus] set Judah and Tamar before us for an example, unless perchance even harlots give him pleasure; or Onan, who was slain because he grudged his brother seed. Does he imagine that we approve of any sexual intercourse except for the procreation of children? (*Against Jovinian* 1:19 **[A.D. 393]**).

You may see a number of women who are widows before they are wives. Others, indeed, will drink sterility [oral contraceptives] and murder a man not yet born, [and some commit abortion] (Letters 22:13 **[A.D. 396]**).

Augustine

This proves that you [Manicheans] approve of having a wife, not for the procreation of children, but for the gratification of passion. In marriage, as the marriage law declares, the man and woman come together for the procreation of children. Therefore, whoever makes the procreation of children a greater sin than copulation, forbids marriage and makes the woman not a wife but a mistress, who for some gifts presented to her, is joined to the man to gratify his passion (*The Morals of the Manichees* 18:65 **[A.D. 388]**).

You [Manicheans] make your auditors adulterers of their wives when they take care lest the women with whom they copulate conceive. They take wives according to the laws of matrimony by tablets announcing that the marriage is contracted to procreate children; and then, fearing because of your [religious] law [against childbearing] . . . they copulate in a shameful union only to satisfy lust for their wives. They are unwilling to have children, on whose account alone marriages are made. How is it, then, that you are not those prohibiting marriage, as the apostle predicted of you so long ago [I Tim. 4:1-4], when you try to take from marriage what marriage is? When this is taken away, husbands are shameful lovers, wives are harlots, bridal chambers are brothels, fathers-in-law are pimps (*Against Faustus* 15:7 **[A.D. 400]**).

For thus the eternal law, that is, the will of God creator of all creatures, taking counsel for the conservation of natural order, not to serve lust, but to see to the preservation of the race, permits the delight of mortal flesh to be released from the control of reason in copulation only to propagate progeny (ibid. 22:30).

Caesarius

Who is he who cannot warn that no woman may take a potion [an oral contraceptive or an abortifacient] so that she is unable to conceive or condemns in herself the nature which God willed to be fecund? As often as she could have conceived or given birth, of that many homicides she will be held guilty, and, unless she undergoes suitable penance, she will be damned by eternal death in hell. If a woman does not wish to have children, let her enter into a religious agreement with her husband; for chastity is the sole sterility of a Christian woman (Sermons 1:12 **[A.D. 522]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Divorce and Remarriage

The Early Church Fathers taught that a true marriage lasted until the death of one of the spouses. However, they also recognized, as does Scripture (1 Corinthians 7:10-11), that there are times when a separation may be necessary. But even when a separation becomes necessary, the spouses must remain single if both spouses remain alive. This was not some arbitrary law created on a whim. Rather it was a direct result of the teachings of Jesus. In Luke 16:18 He very clearly said: “Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.”

Hermas

What then shall the husband do, if the wife continue in this disposition [adultery]? Let him divorce her, and let the husband remain single. But if he divorces his wife and marries another, he too commits adultery (*Shepherd* 4:1:6 **[A.D. 80]**).

Justin Martyr

In regard to chastity, [Jesus] has this to say: If anyone look with lust at a woman, he has already before God committed adultery in his heart. "And, whoever marries a woman who has been divorced from another husband, commits adultery." According to our Teacher, just as they are sinners who contract a second marriage, even though it be in accord with human law, so also are they sinners who look with lustful desire at a woman. He repudiates not only one who actually commits adultery, but even one who wishes to do so; for not only our actions are manifest to God, but even our thoughts (*First Apology* 15 **[A.D. 151]**).

Clement of Alexandria

That Scripture counsels marriage, however, and never allows any release from the union is expressly contained in the law: "You shall not divorce a wife, except for reason of immorality." And it regards as adultery the marriage of a spouse, while the one from whom a separation was made is still alive. "Whoever takes a divorced woman as wife commits adultery," it says: "for if anyone divorces his wife, he debauches her"; that is, he compels her to commit adultery. And not only does he that divorces her become the cause of this, but also he that takes the woman and gives her the opportunity of sinning; for if he did not take her, she would return to her husband (*Miscellanies* 2:23:145:3 **[A.D. 208]**).

Origen

Just as a woman is an adulteress, even though she seems to be married to a man, while a former husband yet lives, so also the man who seems to marry her [and] who has been divorced does not marry her, but, according to the declaration of our Savior, he commits adultery with her (*Commentaries on Matthew* 14:24 **[A.D. 248]**).

Methodius

And thus, from the time of Abraham, the custom of marrying with sisters has ceased; and from the times of the prophets the contracting of marriage with several wives has been done away with; for we read, "Go not after thy lusts, but refrain thyself front thine appetites;" for "wine and women will make men of understanding to fall away;" and in another place, "Let thy fountain be blessed; and rejoice with the wife of thy youth," manifestly forbidding a plurality of wives (*Banquet of Ten Virgins Discourse* 1:3 **[A.D. 300]**).

Council of Neocaesarea

A presbyter shall not be a guest at the nuptials of persons contracting a second marriage; for, since the digamist is worthy of penance, what kind of a presbyter shall he be, who, by being present at the feast, sanctioned the marriage? (Canon 7 **[A.D. 315]**).

Council of Elvira

Likewise, a woman of the faith [i.e., a baptized person] who has left an adulterous husband of the faith and marries another, her marrying in this manner is prohibited. If she has so married, she may not at any more receive communion — unless he that she has left has since departed from this world (canon 9 **[A.D. 324]**).

If she whom a catechumen [an unbaptized person studying the faith] has left shall have married a husband, she is able to be admitted to the fountain of baptism. This shall also be observed in the instance where it is the woman who is the catechumen. But if a woman of the faithful is taken in marriage by a man who left an innocent wife, and if she knew that he had a wife whom he had left without cause, it is determined that Communion is not to be given to her even at death (ibid canon 10).

Ambrose of Milan

No one is permitted to know a woman other than his wife. The marital right is given you for this reason: lest you fall into the snare and sin with a strange woman. "If you are bound to a wife, do not seek a divorce"; for you are not permitted, while your wife lives, to marry another (Abraham 1:7:59 [A.D. 387]).

You dismiss your wife, therefore, as if by right and without being charged with wrong doing and you suppose it is proper for you to do so because no human law forbids it; but divine law forbids it. Anyone who obeys men ought to stand in awe of God. Hear the law of the Lord, which even they who propose our laws must obey: "What God has joined together let no man put asunder" (*Commentary on Luke* 8:5 **[A.D. 389]**).

Jerome

Wherever there is fornication and a suspicion of fornication a wife is freely dismissed. Because it is always possible that someone may calumniate the innocent and, for the sake of a second joining in marriage, act in criminal fashion against the first, it is commanded that when the first wife is dismissed a second may not be taken while the first lives (*Commentaries on Matthew* 3:19:9 **[A.D. 398]**).

Pope Innocent I

[T]he practice is observed by all of regarding as an adulteress a woman who marries a second time while her husband yet lives, and permission to do penance is not granted her until one of them is dead (Letters 2:13:15 **[A.D. 408]**).

Augustine

Neither can it rightly be held that a husband who dismisses his wife because of fornication and marries another does not commit adultery. For there is also adultery on the part of those who, after the repudiation of their former wives because of fornication, marry others. This adultery, nevertheless, is certainly less serious than that of men who dismiss their wives for reasons other than fornication and take other wives. Therefore, when we say; "Whoever marries a woman dismissed by her husband for reason other than fornication commits adultery," undoubtedly, we speak the truth. But we do not thereby acquit of this crime the man who marries a woman who was dismissed because of fornication. We do not doubt in the least that both are adulterers. We do indeed pronounce him an adulterer who dismissed his wife for cause other than fornication and marries another, nor do we thereby defend from the taint of this sin the man who dismissed his wife because of fornication and marries another. We recognize that both are adulterers, though the sin of one is graver than that of the other. No one is so unreasonable to say that a man who marries a woman whose husband has dismissed her because of fornication is not an adulterer, while maintaining that a man who marries a woman dismissed without the ground of fornication is an adulterer. Both of these men are guilty of adultery (*Adulterous Marriages* 1:9:9 **[A.D. 419]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Abortion

Even early non-Christian writers raised objections to abortion. Ovid [B.C. 43-A.D. 17] refers to it as warfare. Juvenal [A.D. 67-127] calls it murder. Certainly, it should come as no surprise that the Church would also object to such a violent act. And object they did. They saw it for what it was; the taking of innocent life, an action which can never be reconciled with the Christian faith. We can certainly empathize with a young woman who finds herself with an unplanned child. However, we also know from others who have been in the same situation, that in the long run choosing life is best for all involved.

The Didache

The second commandment of the Teaching: "Do not murder; do not commit adultery"; do not corrupt boys; do not fornicate; "do not steal"; do not practice magic; do not go in for sorcery; do not murder a child by abortion or kill a newborn infant (2:1-2 **[A.D. 70]**).

Letter of Barnabas

Thou shalt not slay the child by procuring abortion; nor, again, shalt thou destroy it after it is born (19 **[A.D. 74]**).

The Apocalypse of Peter

I saw a gorge in which the discharge and excrement of the tortured ran down and became like a lake. There sat women, and the discharge came up to their throats; and opposite them sat many children, who were born prematurely, weeping. And from them went forth rays of fire and smote the women on the eyes. These were those who produced children outside of marriage and who procured abortions (2:26 **[A.D. 135]**).

Athenagoras

What reason would we have to commit murder when we say that women who induce abortions are murderers, and will have to give account of it to God? For the same person would not regard the fetus in the womb as a living thing and therefore and object of God's care [and then kill it]….But we are altogether consistent in our conduct. We obey reason and do not override it (*A Plea for the Christians* 35 **[A.D. 177]**).

Tertullian

In our case, murder being once for all forbidden, we may not destroy even the fetus in the womb, while as yet the human being derives blood from other parts of the body for its sustenance. To hinder a birth is merely a speedier man - killing; nor does it matter whether you take away a life that is born, or destroy one that is coming to the birth. That is a man which is going to be one; you have the fruit already in the seed (*Apology* 9:6 **[A.D. 197]**).

The Law of Moses, indeed, punishes with due penalties the man who shall cause abortion [Ex 21:22-24]" (*On the Soul* 37 **[A.D 208]**).

Minucius Felix

There are some women who, by drinking medical preparations, extinguish the source of the future man in their very bowels, and thus commit a parricide before they bring forth. And these things assuredly come done from the teaching of your gods (*Octavius* 30 **[A.D. 226]**).

Hippolytus

Women who were reputed to be believers began to take drugs to render themselves sterile, and to bind themselves tightly so as to expel what was being conceived, since they would not, on account of relatives and excess wealth,

want to have a child by a slave or by any insignificant person. See, then, into what great impiety that lawless one has proceeded, by teaching adultery and murder at the same time! (*Refutation of All Heresies* 7:8:4 **[A.D. 228]**).

Council of Ancyra

Women who prostitute themselves, and who kill the child thus begotten, or who try to destroy them when in their wombs, are by ancient law excommunicated to the end of their lives. We, however, have softened their punishment and condemned them to the various appointed degrees of penance for ten years (Canon 21 **[A.D. 314]**).

John Chrysostom

Why sow where the ground makes it its care to destroy the fruit? where there are many efforts at abortion? where there is murder before the birth? for even the harlot thou dost not let continue a mere harlot, but makest her a murderer also. You see how drunkenness leads to whoredom, whoredom to adultery, adultery to murder; or rather something even worse than murder. For I have no name to give it, since it does not take off the thing born, but prevents its being born. Why then dost thou abuse the gift of God, and fight with His laws, and follow after what is a curse as if a blessing, and make the chamber of procreation a chamber for murder, and arm the woman that was given for childbearing unto slaughter? (*Homily 24 on Romans* **[A.D. 391]**).

Basil

She who has intentionally destroyed [the fetus] is subject to the penalty corresponding to a homicide. For us, there is no scrutinizing between the formed and unformed [fetus]; here truly justice is made not only for the unborn but also with reference to the person who is attentive only to himself/herself since so many women generally die for this very reason (*Epistle to Amphilochius,* Bishop of Iconium First Letter 2 **[A.D. 374]**).

Let her that procures abortion undergo ten years' penance, whether the embryo were perfectly formed, or not. (ibid Canon II **[A.D. 374]**).

Jerome

You may see many women widows before wedded, who try to conceal their miserable fall by a lying garb. Unless they are betrayed by swelling wombs or by the crying of their infants, they walk abroad with tripping feet and heads in the air. Some go so far as to take potions, that they may insure barrenness, and thus murder human beings almost before their conception. Some, when they find themselves with child through their sin, use drugs to procure abortion, and when (as often happens) they die with their offspring, they enter the lower world laden with the guilt not only of adultery against Christ but also of suicide and child murder (Letter 22 13:2-5 **[A.D. 384]**).

Ambrose of Milan

The poor get rid of their small children by exposure and denying them when they are discovered. But the rich also, so that their wealth will not be more divided, deny their children [when they are] in the womb and with all the force of parricide, they kill the beings of their wombs [while they are] in the same fruitful womb. In this way life is taken away from them before it has been given (*Hexameron* 5:18:58 **[A.D. 388]**).

Augustine

Therefore brothers, you see how perverse they are and hastening wickedness, who are immature, they seek abortion of the conception before the birth; they are those who tell us, "I do not see that which you say must be believed" (Sermon 126, 12 **[A.D. 411]**).

Sometimes, indeed, this lustful cruelty, or if you please, cruel lust, resorts to such extravagant methods as to use poisonous drugs to secure barrenness; or else, if unsuccessful in this, to destroy the conceived seed by some means previous to birth, preferring that its offspring should rather perish than receive vitality; or if it was advancing to life within the womb, should be slain before it was born (*On Marriage and Concupiscence* 1:17:15 **[A.D. 420]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Women's Ordination

Some who favor women's ordination note that the Early Church spoke of deaconesses. Since deacons were members of the clergy, they assume that deaconesses must have been as well. They further contend that if a deacon can move on to the priesthood, there should be nothing to stop a deaconess from doing the same? But they would be wrong. To be a deacon or deaconess simply means to be a minister or servant. And service can be rendered in a variety of ways. And so, it was with deacons and deaconesses in the Early Church. The record clearly illustrates this. Early Church writings describe the roles of both deacons and deaconesses. And nowhere do we find women performing the duties reserved to the clergy. Rather we find them assisting in other ways. Most notably, they helped women maintain their modesty during baptism or when they were sick.

Clement of Rome

Our apostles also knew, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that there would be strife on account of the office of the episcopate. For this reason, therefore, inasmuch as they had obtained a perfect fore-knowledge of this, they appointed those [ministers] already mentioned, and afterwards gave instructions, that when these should fall asleep, other approved men [not women] should succeed them in their ministry (*Letter to the Corinthians* 44 **[A.D. 95]**).

Tertullian

It is not permitted to a woman to speak in the church; but neither (is it permitted her) to teach, nor to baptize, nor to offer, nor to claim to herself a lot in any manly function, not to say (in any) sacerdotal office (*On the Veiling of Virgins* 9 **[A.D. 207]**).

Hippolytus

When a widow is appointed, she is not ordained but she shall be chosen by name… Let the widow be instituted by word only and let her be reckoned among the widows. But she shall not be ordained, because she does not offer oblation nor has a ministry. But ordination is for clergy on account of their ministry. But the widow is appointed for prayer… (*Apostolic Tradition1*:4:5 **[A.D. 215]**).

The Teaching of the Apostles

We do not permit our 'women to teach in the Church,' but only to pray and hear those that teach; for our Master and Lord, Jesus Himself, when He sent us the twelve to make disciples of the people and of the nations, did nowhere send out women to preach, although He did not want such. For there were with us the mother of our Lord and His sisters; also Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Martha and Mary the sisters of Lazarus; Salome, and certain others. For, had it been necessary for women to teach, He Himself had first commanded these also to instruct the people with us. (3:6 **[A.D. 225]**).

Firmilian of Caesarea

But that woman, who previously by wiles and deceitfulness of the demon was attempting many things for the deceiving of the faithful, among other things by which she had deceived many, also had frequently dared this; to pretend that with an invocation not to be contemned she sanctified bread and celebrated, the Eucharist, and to offer sacrifice to the Lord, not without the sacrament of the accustomed utterance; and also to baptize many, making use of the usual and lawful words of interrogation, that nothing might seem to be different from the ecclesiastical rule (Fragment in Cyprian's Letters 74[75]:10 **[A.D. 256]**).

Council of Nicea

Likewise, in the case of their deaconesses, and generally in the case of those who have been enrolled among their clergy, let the same form be observed. And we mean by deaconesses such as have assumed the habit, but who, since they have no imposition of hands, are to be numbered only among the laity (Canon 19 **[A.D. 325]**).

Council of Laodicea

Presbytides as they are called, or female presidents, are not to be appointed in the Church (Canon 11 **[A.D. 360]**).

Epiphanius

It is true that in the Church there is an order of deaconesses, but not for being priestess, nor for any kind of work of administration, but for the sake of the dignity of the female sex, either at the time of Baptism, or of examining the sick or suffering, so that the naked body of a female may not be seen by men administrating sacred rites, but by the deaconess (*Panarion* 79:3 **[A.D. 377]**

John Chrysostom

[W]hen one is required to preside over the Church, and to be entrusted with the care of so many souls, the whole female sex must retire before the magnitude of the task, and the majority of men also; and we must bring forward those who to a large extent surpass all others, and soar as much above them in excellence of spirit as Saul overtopped the whole Hebrew nation in bodily stature: or rather far more (*On the Priesthood* 2:2 **[A.D. 386]**).

Apostolic Constitutions

I, the same, make a constitution in regard to virgins: A virgin is not ordained, for we have no such command from the Lord; for this is a state of voluntary trial, not for the reproach of marriage, but an account of leisure for piety (8:24 **[A.D. 400]**).

A widow is not ordained; yet if she has lost her husband a great while, and has lived soberly and unblameably, and has taken extraordinary care of her family, as Judith and Anna – those women of great reputation – let her be chosen into the order of widows (ibid 8:25).

A deaconess does not bless, nor perform anything belonging to the office of presbyters or deacons, but only is to keep the doors, and to minister to the presbyters in the baptizing of women, on account of decency (ibid 8:28).

For this is one of the ignorant practices of the Gentile atheism, to ordain women priests to the female deities, not one of the constitutions of Christ. For if baptism were to be administered by women, certainly our Lord would have been baptized by His own mother, and not by John; or when He sent us to baptize, He would have sent along with us women also for this purpose. But now He has nowhere, either by constitution or by writing, delivered to us any such thing (ibid 9:3).

Augustine

"[The Quintillians are heretics who] give women predominance so that these, too, can be honored with the priesthood among them. They say, namely, that Christ revealed himself . . . to Quintilla and Priscilla [two Montanist prophetesses] in the form of a woman" (*Heresies* 1:17 **[A.D. 428]**).

Council of Orange

Female deacons are by no means to be ordained. If there are any who have been already ordained, [illicitly] let them submit their heads to the benediction that is granted to the laity (Canon 26 **[A.D. 441]**).

Council of Chalcedon

A woman shall not receive the laying on of hands as a deaconess under forty years of age, and then only after searching examination. And if, after she has had hands laid on her and has continued for a time to minister, she shall despise the grace of God and give herself in marriage, she shall be anathematized and the man united to her (Canon 15 **[A.D. 451]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Salvation Outside the Church

The Early Church Fathers were not shy when it came to condemning heretics and schismatics. They taught that those who put themselves outside of the Catholic Church had no hope of salvation. Some take that to mean anyone outside of the Church is lost. But that is not so. Their condemnations were aimed specifically at heretics and schismatics. Heretics and schismatics are individuals who at one point had the faith and later rejected it. Those who through no fault of their own do not know what Christ requires of them are not guilty and therefore not automatically condemned. God punishes rebellion, not ignorance. He is not legalistic. As the apostle Paul noted in 1 Corinthians 4:5, men will be judged by the purposes of their hearts.

Clement of Rome

Let us go through all generations and learn that in generation after generation the Master has given a place of repentance for those willing to turn to him. Those who repented for their sins, appeased God in praying, and received salvation, even though they were aliens to God (*Letter to the Corinthians* 7 **[AD 95]**).

Ignatius of Antioch

Be not deceived, my brethren: If anyone follows a maker of schism [i.e., is a schismatic], he does not inherit the kingdom of God; if anyone walks in strange doctrine [i.e., is a heretic], he has no part in the Passion [of Christ]. Take care, then, to use one Eucharist, so that whatever you do, you do according to God: For there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup in the union of his blood; one altar, as there is one bishop, with the presbytery and my fellow servants, the deacons (*Letter to the Philadelphians* 3:3-4:1 **[A.D. 110]**).

Justin Martyr

We have been taught that Christ is the first-begotten of God, and we have declared him to be the Logos of which all mankind partakes [John 1:9]. Those, therefore, who lived according to reason [Greek, logos} were really Christians, even though they were thought to be atheists, such as, among the Greeks, Socrates, Heraclitus, and others like them. . . . Those who lived before Christ but did not live according to reason [logos] were wicked men, and enemies of Christ, and murderers of those who did live according to reason [logos], whereas those who lived then or who live now according to reason [logos] are Christians. Such as these can be confident and unafraid (*First Apology* 46 **[A.D. 151]**).

Irenaeus

In the Church God has placed apostles, prophets, teachers, and every other working of the Spirit, of whom none of those are sharers who do not conform to the Church, but who defraud themselves of life by an evil mind and even worse way of acting. Where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and all grace (*Against Heresies* 3:24:1 **[A.D. 189]**).

[The spiritual man] shall also judge those who give rise to schisms, who are destitute of the love of God, and who look to their own special advantage rather than to the unity of the Church; and who for trifling reasons, or any kind of reason which occurs to them, cut in pieces and divide the great and glorious body of Christ, and so far as in them lies, destroy it — men who prate of peace while they give rise to war, and do in truth strain out a gnat, but swallow a camel. For they can bring about no "reformation" of enough importance to compensate for the evil arising from their schism. . . . True knowledge is that which consists in the doctrine of the apostles, and the ancient constitution of the Church throughout all the world, and the distinctive manifestation of the body of Christ according to the successions of the bishops, by which they have handed down that Church which exists in every place [i.e., the Catholic Church] (ibid., 4:33:7-8).

Origen

There was never a time when God did not want men to be just; he was always concerned about that. Indeed, he always provided beings endowed with reason with occasions for practicing virtue and doing what is right. In every generation the Wisdom of God descended into those souls which he found holy and made them to be prophets and friends of God (*Against Celsus* 4:7 **[A.D. 248]**).

If someone from this people wants to be saved, let him come into this house so that he may be able to attain his salvation. . . . Let no one, then, be persuaded otherwise, nor let anyone deceive himself: Outside of this house, that is, outside of the Church, no one is saved; for, if anyone should go out of it, he is guilty of his own death (*Homilies on Joshua* 3:5 **[A.D. 250]**).

Cyprian of Carthage

Whoever is separated from the Church and is joined to an adulteress [a schismatic church] is separated from the promises of the Church, nor will he that forsakes the Church of Christ attain to the rewards of Christ. He is an alien, a worldling, and an enemy. He cannot have God for his Father who has not the Church for his mother (*The Unity of the Catholic Church* 6, 1st ed. **[A.D. 251]**).

Let them not think that the way of life or salvation exists for them, if they have refused to obey the bishops and priests, since the Lord says in the book of Deuteronomy: "And any man who has the insolence to refuse to listen to the priest or judge, whoever he may be in those days, that man shall die" [Deut. 17:12-13]. And then, indeed, they were killed with the sword . . . but now the proud and insolent are killed with the sword of the Spirit, when they are cast out from the Church. For they cannot live outside, since there is only one house of God, and there can be no salvation for anyone except in the Church (Letters 61[4]:4 **[A.D. 253]**).

The baptism of public witness [desire] and of blood cannot profit a heretic [one who holds the faith and then abandons it] unto salvation, because there is no salvation outside the Church (Letters 72 [73]:21 **[A.D. 253]**).

Lactanius

It is, therefore, the Catholic Church alone that retains true worship. This is the fountain of truth; this, the domicile of faith; this, the temple of God. Whoever does not enter there or whoever does not go out from there, he is a stranger to the hope of life and salvation. . . Because, however, all the various groups of heretics are confident that they are the Christians and think that theirs is the Catholic Church, let it be known that this is the true Church, in which there is confession and penance and which takes a health-promoting care of the sins and wounds to which the weak flesh is subject (*Divine Institutes* 4:30:11-13 **[A.D. 307]**).

Jerome

Heretics bring sentence upon themselves since they by their own choice withdraw from the Church, a withdrawal which, since they are aware of it, constitutes damnation. Between heresy and schism there is this difference: that heresy involves perverse doctrine, while schism separates one from the Church on account of disagreement with the bishop. Nevertheless, there is no schism which does not trump up a heresy to justify its departure from the Church (*Commentary on Titus* 3:10-11 **[A.D. 386]**).

Augustine

We believe also in the holy Church, that is, the Catholic Church. For heretics violate the faith itself by a false opinion about God; schismatics, however, withdraw from fraternal love by hostile separations, although they believe the same things we do. Consequently; neither heretics nor schismatics belong to the Catholic Church, not heretics, because the Church loves God, and not schismatics, because the Church loves neighbor (*Faith and the Creed* 10:21 **[A.D. 393]**).

When we speak of within and without in relation to the Church, it is the position of the heart that we must consider, not that of the body. . . All who are within [the Church] in heart are saved in the unity of the ark (*On Baptism, Against the Donatists* 5:28[39] **[A.D. 400]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Angels and Demons

The existence of angels and demons is considered by many to be pure fantasy. Some of these people even claim to be Christian. They try to update Christianity so as not to feel silly when confronted by friends and acquaintances. They will often attribute symbolic meanings to the terms. For instance, I once heard a priest say that the devil was symbolic for “evil in all of its forms.” But why the disbelief? We believe that God is pure Spirit? Is He not capable of creating beings that are also pure spirit? The Early Church Fathers certainly thought so.

Clement of Rome

Let our glorifying and our confidence be in him. Let us be subject to his will. Let us consider the whole multitude of his angels, how they stand waiting to minister to his will (*Letter to the Corinthians* 34:5 **[A.D. 95]**).

Ignatius of Antioch

Let no one be deceived: Even the heavenly beings and the angels in their glory and rulers visible and invisible – even for these there will be judgment, if they do not believe in the blood of Christ (*Letter to the Smyrnaeans* 6:1 **[A.D. 110]**).

Hermas

God planted the vineyard, that is, he created the people and gave them over to his Son. The Son appointed the angels to guard over them, and he himself cleansed them of their sins, laboring much and undergoing much toil (*The Shepherd* 5:6:2 **[inter A.D. 140-155]**).

Justin Martyr

For we do continually beseech God by Jesus Christ to preserve us from the demons which are hostile to the worship of God, and whom we of old time served, in order that, after our conversion by Him to God, we may be blameless. For we call Him Helper and Redeemer, the power of whose name even the demons do fear; and at this day, when they are exorcised in the name of Jesus Christ, crucified under Pontius Pilate, governor of Judæa, they are overcome. And thus, it is manifest to all, that His Father has given Him so great power, by virtue of which demons are subdued to His name, and to the dispensation of His suffering (*Dialogue with Trypho* 30 **[A.D. 155]**).

Athenagoras of Athens

Who, then, would not be astonished to hear those called atheists, who speak of God the Father and of God the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and who proclaim their power in union and their distinction in order? Nor is our theology confined to these; for we recognize also a multitude of angels and ministers whom God, the Creator and designer of the world, by means of his Word, set in their places and gave into their charge the elements and the heavens and the world and what is in it, and the good order of all (*Supplication for the Christians* 10:4 **[A.D.177]**).

Irenaeus

The devil, however, since he is an apostate angel, is able, as he was in the beginning, to lead astray and to deceive the mind of man for the transgressing of God's commands. Little by little he can darken the hearts of those who would try to serve him, to the point that, forgetting the true God, they adore him as if he were God (*Against Heresies* 5:24:3 **[inter A.D. 180-199]**).

Tertullian

The business [of the fallen angels, who are the demons,] is to corrupt mankind. Thus, from the very first, spiritual wickedness augured man's destruction. Therefore, are they everywhere in a moment. The whole world is but one

place to them. What and where anything happens they can know and tell with equal facility. Their swiftness is thought of as divine, because their substance is not understood (*Apology* 22:4, 8 **[A.D. 197]**).

Origen

In regard to the devil and his angels and opposing powers, the ecclesiastical teaching maintains that these beings do indeed exist, but what they are or how they exist is not explained with sufficient clarity. This opinion, however, is held by most: that the devil was an angel and, having apostatized, he persuaded as many angels as possible to fall away with himself; and these, even to the present time, are called his angels (*The Fundamental Doctrines* 1: Preface:6 **[inter A.D. 220-230]**).

Cyprian of Carthage

The obstinate wickedness of the devil prevails even up to the saving water, but that in baptism it loses all the poison of his wickedness...when, however, they come to the water of salvation and to the sanctification of baptism, we ought to know and to trust that there the devil is beaten down, and the man, dedicated to God, is set free by the divine mercy. For as scorpions and serpents, which prevail on the dry ground, when cast into water, cannot prevail nor retain their venom; so also the wicked spirits, which are called scorpions and serpents, and yet are trodden under foot by us, by the power given by the Lord, cannot remain any longer in the body of a man in whom, baptized and sanctified, the Holy Spirit is beginning to dwell" (Letter 75:15 **[A.D. 255]**).

Eusebius

For when God willed it, seeing that he is the only good and the source and beginning of everything, many participants in his treasures were produced. It was just then that every rational creature was sent forth, some as incorporeal, intelligent and divine powers – angels, indeed, and archangels–immaterial and entirely pure spirits; and besides these, there were the souls of men supplied with a nature that is independent and of free will in respect to the choosing of what is noble or its opposite (*Proof of the Gospel* 4:1 **[inter A.D. 316-322]**).

Athanasius

And while in times past demons, occupying springs or rivers or trees or stones, cheated men by deceptive appearances and imposed upon the credulous by their juggleries, now, after the divine coming of the Word, an end is put to their deceptions. For by the sign of the cross, a man but using it, their wiles are put to flight (*Treatise on the Incarnation of the Word* 47:2 **[A.D. 318]**).

Cyril of Jerusalem

What about this? Someone may say, 'Is it not written that the angels of the little ones always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven?' But the angels see God not as he is, but insofar as they themselves are capable. It is Jesus himself who says, 'Not that anyone has seen the Father, except him that is from God--he has seen the Father.' The angels, then, behold as much as they are able, and the archangels, as much as is their capacity; and the thrones and dominations, more than the others mentioned, yet less that his true dignity. Only the Holy Spirit, with the Son, can behold him properly (*Catechetical Lectures* 6:6 **[A.D. 350]**).

Augustine of Hippo

There the angels too are our fellow citizens; but because we are yet on pilgrimage, we labor; they, however, await our arrival in that city. And from that city to which we journey, letters come to us: those letters are the Scriptures which exhort us to live properly (*Explanations of the Psalms* 90:2:1 **[inter A.D. 392-418]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Astrology / Divination

The Church clearly teaches us in the catechism that practicing astrology as well as other forms of divination is wrong. In paragraph 2116 we read: "All forms of divination are to be rejected: recourse to Satan or demons, conjuring up the dead or other practices falsely supposed to 'unveil' the future. Consulting horoscopes, astrology, palm reading, interpretation of omens and lots, the phenomena of clairvoyance, and recourse to mediums all conceal a desire for power over time, history, and, in the last analysis, other human beings, as well as a wish to conciliate hidden powers. They contradict the honor, respect, and loving fear that we owe to God alone." That the Church has always taught this is also very clear.

Didache

Be neither an enchanter, nor an astrologer, nor a purifier, nor be willing to look at these things, for out of all these idolatry is engendered (3 **[A.D. 70]**).

Tatian the Syrian

[Under the influence of demons] men form the material of their apostasy. For, having shown them a plan of the position of the stars, like dice-players, they introduce Fate, a flagrant injustice. For the judge and the judged are made so by Fate, the murderers and the murdered, the wealthy and the needy— [all are] the offspring of the same Fate (*Address to the Greeks* 8 **[A.D. 170]**).

Such are the demons; these are they who laid down the doctrine of Fate. Their fundamental principle was the placing of animals in the heavens [as constellations] . . . these they dignified with celestial honor, in order that they might themselves be thought to remain in heaven and, by placing the constellations there, might make to appear rational the irrational course of life on earth. Thus, the high-spirited and he who is crushed with toil, the temperate and the intemperate, the indigent and the wealthy, are what they are simply from the controllers of their nativity. For the delineation of the zodiacal circle is the work of the 'gods'. . .. But we are superior to Fate, and instead of wandering demons, we have learned to know one Lord, who wanders not (ibid., 9).

Irenaeus

The devil, however, since he is an apostate angel, is able, as he was in the beginning, to lead astray and to deceive the mind of man for the transgressing of God's commands. And little by little he can darken the hearts of those who would try to serve him, to the point that, forgetting the true God, they adore him as if he were God (*Against Heresies* 5:24:3 **[A.D. 189]**).

Tertullian

We observe among the arts also some professions liable to the charge of idolatry. Of astrologers, there should be no speaking even; but since one in these days has challenged us, defending on his own behalf perseverance in that profession, I will use a few words. I allege not that he honors idols, whose names he has inscribed on the heaven, to whom he has attributed all God's power. . .. One proposition I lay down: that those angels, the deserters of God [demons] . . . were likewise the discoverers of this curious art [astrology], on that account also condemned by God (*Idolatry* 9 **[A.D. 211]**).

Hippolytus

How impotent [the astrologers'] system is for comparing the forms and dispositions of men with names of stars! For we know that those originally conversant with such investigations have called the stars by names given reference to propriety of signification and facility for future recognition. But what similarity is there of these [constellations] with the likeness of animals, or what community of nature are regards conduct and energy, that one should allege that a person born in Leo should be irascible [like a lion] and that one born in Virgo moderate [like a virgin] or one born in Cancer wicked [like a crab]? (*Refutation of All Heresies* 4:37 **[A.D. 228]**).

Lactantius

[D]emons are the enemies and harassers of men, and on this account [the sorcerer Hermes] Trismegistus calls them wicked angels; so far was he from being ignorant that from heavenly beings they were corrupted, and began to be earthly. These were the inventors of astrology, and of soothsaying, and divination, and those productions which are called oracles, and necromancy, and the art of magic, and whatever other evil practices these men exercise, either openly or in secret (*Divine Institutes* 2:16–17 **[A.D. 307]**).

[Demons] brought to light astrology, and augury, and divination; and though these things are in themselves false, yet they themselves, the authors of evils, so govern and regulate them that they are believed to be true. . .. Thus, by their frauds they have drawn darkness over the human race, that truth might be oppressed, and the name of the supreme and matchless God might be forgotten (*Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 28 **[A.D. 317]**).

Basil

(Concerning the zodiac) Then both those who give themselves up to this imaginary science and those who listen to them open-mouthed, as if they could learn from them the future, are supremely ridiculous (*Hexaemeron,* Homily 6:5 **[circa A.D. 350]**).

Synod of Laodicea

They who are of the priesthood or of the clergy shall not be magicians, enchanters, [planetary] 'mathematicians,' or astrologers (Canon 36 **[A.D. 362]**).

Athanasius

They [astrologers] have fabricated books which they call books of [astrological] tables, in which they show stars, to which they have given the names of saints. And therein of a truth they have inflicted on themselves a double reproach, those who have written such books, because they have perfected themselves in a lying and contemptible science [astrology], and as to the ignorant and simple, they have led them astray by evil thoughts concerning the right faith established in truth and upright in the presence of God (*Easter Letter* 39:1 **[A.D. 367]**).

John Chrysostom

Let us show forth by our actions all excellencies of conduct, and kindle abundantly the fire of virtue. For 'you are lights,' he [Paul] says, 'shining in the midst of the world' [Phil. 2:15] . . .. And in fact, a deep night oppresses the whole world. This is what we have to dispel and dissolve. It is night not among heretics and among Greeks only, but also in the multitude on our side, in respect of doctrines and of life. For many [Catholics] entirely disbelieve the resurrection; many fortify themselves with the horoscope; many adhere to superstitious observances, and to omens, and auguries, and presages (*Homilies on First Corinthians* 4:11 **[A.D. 392]**).

Augustine

Now I had also repudiated the lying divination and impious absurdities of the astrologers . . . [and] I turned my thoughts to those that are born twins, who generally come out of the womb so near one to another that the small distance of time between them (however much force [astrologers] may contend that it has in the nature of things) cannot be noted by human observation or be expressed in those [planetary] figures which the astrologer is to examine that he may pronounce the truth. Nor can they be true; for looking into the same figures he must have foretold the same of Esau and Jacob, whereas the same did not happen to them. He must therefore speak falsely, or if truly, then, looking into the same figures he must not speak the same things. Not then by art but by chance would he speak truly (*Confessions* 7:6:8–10 **[A.D. 400]**).

To whom then must we make an answer first—to the heretics or to the astrologers? For both come from the serpent, and desire to corrupt the Church's virginity of heart, which she holds in undefiled faith (*Homilies on John* 8:10 **[A.D. 416]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Hell

The Early Fathers believed in a literal hell. A place where unrepentant sinners would spend their eternity separated from God. A place where all hope would be abandoned and where misery and suffering would be a constant companion. The idea that the Bibles torturous descriptions of hell were somehow symbolic of non-existence, as Jehovah's Witnesses claim, was something that would have been totally foreign to them. To the Fathers, if Jesus said that something was eternal and torturous, (Matthew 25:46, Luke 16:24) then that is what it was. Rather than water down Jesus words they instead chose to use them to warn the faithful as Jesus Himself did.

Ignatius of Antioch

Corrupters of families will not inherit the kingdom of God. And if they who do these things according to the flesh suffer death, how much more if a man corrupt by evil reaching the faith of God for the sake of which Jesus Christ was crucified? A man become so foul will depart into unquenchable fire, and so will anyone who listens to him (*Letter to the Ephesians* 16:1-2 **[A.D. 110]**).

Clement of Rome

If we do the will of Christ, we shall obtain rest; but if not, if we neglect his commandments, nothing will rescue us from eternal punishment (*Second Clement* 5:5 **[A.D. 150]**).

Justin Martyr

No more is it possible for the evildoer, the avaricious, and the treacherous to hide from God than it is for the virtuous. Every man will receive the eternal punishment or reward which his actions deserve. Indeed, if all men recognized this, no one would choose evil even for a short time, knowing that he would incur the eternal sentence of fire. On the contrary, he would take every means to control himself and to adorn himself in virtue, so that he might obtain the good gifts of God and escape the punishments (*First Apology* 12 **[A.D. 151]**).

[Jesus] shall come from the heavens in glory with his angelic host, when he shall raise the bodies of all the men who ever lived. Then he will clothe the worthy in immortality; but the wicked, clothed in eternal sensibility, he will commit to the eternal fire, along with the evil demons (ibid. 52).

The Martyrdom of Polycarp

Fixing their minds on the grace of Christ, [the martyrs] despised worldly tortures and purchased eternal life with but a single hour. To them, the fire of their cruel torturers was cold. They kept before their eyes their escape from the eternal and unquenchable fire (2:3 **[A.D. 155]**).

Athenagoras

We [Christians] are persuaded that when we are removed from this present life we shall live another life, better than the present one. . .. Then we shall abide near God and with God, changeless and free from suffering in the soul . . . or if we fall with the rest [of mankind], a worse one and in fire; for God has not made us as sheep or beasts of burden, a mere incidental work, that we should perish and be annihilated (*Plea for the Christians* 31 **[A.D. 177]**).

Theophilus of Antioch

Give studious attention to the prophetic writings [the Bible] and they will lead you on a clearer path to escape the eternal punishments and to obtain the eternal good things of God.... [God] will examine everything and will judge justly, granting recompense to each according to merit. To those who seek immortally by the patient exercise of good works, he will give everlasting life, joy, peace, rest, and all good things. . . , For the unbelievers and for the contemptuous and for those who do not submit to the truth but assent to iniquity, when they have been involved in adulteries, and fornications, and homosexualities, and avarice, and in lawless idolatries, there will be wrath and

indignation, tribulation and anguish; and in the end, such men as these will be detained in everlasting fire (*To Autolycus* 1:14 **[A.D. 181]**).

Irenaeus

The penalty increases for those who do not believe the Word of God and despise his coming. . . . It is not merely temporal, but eternal. To whomsoever the Lord shall say, "Depart from me, accursed ones, into the everlasting fire," they will be damned forever (*Against Heresies* 4:28:2 **[A.D. 189]**).

Hippolytus

Standing before [Christ's] judgment, all of them, men, angels, and demons, crying out in one voice, shall say: "Just is your judgment!" And the righteousness of that cry will be apparent in the recompense made to each. To those who have done well, everlasting enjoyment shall be given; while to the lovers of evil shall be given eternal punishment. The unquenchable and unending fire awaits these latter, and a certain fiery worm which does not die and which does not waste the body but continually bursts forth from the body with unceasing pain. No sleep will give them rest; no night will soothe them; no death will deliver them from punishment; no appeal of interceding friends will profit them (*Against the Greeks* 3 **[A.D. 212]**).

Minucius Felix

I am not ignorant of the fact that many, in the consciousness of what they deserve, would rather hope than actually believe that there is nothing for them after death. They would prefer to be annihilated rather than be restored for punishment. . . . Nor is there measure nor end to these torments. That clever fire burns the limbs and restores them, wears them away and yet sustains them, just as fiery thunderbolts strike bodies but do not consume them (*Octavius* 34:12-5:3 **[A.D. 226]**).

Cyprian of Carthage

An ever-burning Gehenna and the punishment of being devoured by living flames will consume the condemned; nor will there be any way in which the tormented can ever have respite or be at an end. Souls along with their bodies will be preserved for suffering in unlimited agonies. . .. The grief at punishment will then be without the fruit of repentance; weeping will be useless, and prayer ineffectual. (*To Demetrian* 24 **[A.D. 252]).**

Lactantius

We therefore speak better and more truly, who say that the two ways belong to heaven and hell, because immortality is promised to the righteous, and everlasting punishment is threatened to the unrighteous (*Divine Institutes* 6 **[A.D. 307]**).

Cyril of Jerusalem

We shall be raised therefore, all with our bodies eternal, but not all with bodies alike; For if a man is righteous, he will receive a heavenly body, that he may be able worthily to hold converse with angels; but if a man is a sinner, he shall receive an eternal body, fitted to endure the penalties of sins, that he may burn eternally in fire, nor ever be consumed. And righteously will God assign this portion to either company; for we do nothing without the body. We blaspheme with the mouth, and with the mouth we pray. With the body we commit fornication, and with the body we keep chastity. With the hand we rob, and by the hand we bestow alms; and the rest in like manner. Since then the body has been our minister in all things, it shall also share with us in the future the fruits of the past (*Catechetical Lectures* 18:19 **[A.D. 350]**).

John Chrysostom

This is no small subject of enquiry which we propose, but rather about things which are of the first necessity and which all men enquire about; namely, whether hell fire have any end. For that it hath no end Christ indeed declared when he said, "Their fire shall not be quenched, and their worm shall not die" (*Homily 9 on 1 Corinthians* 3:12-15 **[circa A.D. 388]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Homosexuality

There are people who believe that homosexual acts are not contrary to the teachings of the Bible. Their arguments, at best, are nothing more than wishful thinking. Some would say that God loves us all. And that is true, He does. But it does not mean that He condones every act we engage in. The Scriptures are clear and so are the teachings of the early Church. Engaging in homosexual acts is wrong. While the inclination may not be wrong, acting upon it is.

Athenagoras

For those who have set up a market for fornication and established infamous resorts for the young for every kind of vile pleasure, – who do not abstain even from males, males with males committing shocking abominations, outraging all the noblest and comeliest bodies in all sorts of ways, so dishonoring the fair workmanship of God (*Plea for Christians* 34 **[A.D. 177]**)

Clement of Alexandria

The fate of the Sodomites was judgment to those who had done wrong and instruction to those who hear. The Sodomites had fallen into uncleanness because of much luxury. They practiced adultery shamelessly and burned with insane love for boys (*The Instructor* 3:8 **[A.D. 193]**).

Tertullian

So, too, whoever enjoys any other than nuptial intercourse, in whatever place, and in the person of whatever woman, makes himself guilty of adultery and fornication. Accordingly, among us, secret connections as well — connections, that is, not first professed in presence of the Church— run risk of being judged akin to adultery and fornication; nor must we let them, if thereafter woven together by the covering of marriage, elude the charge. But all the other frenzies of passions— impious both toward the bodies and toward the sexes — beyond the laws of nature, we banish not only from the threshold, but from all shelter of the Church, because they are not sins, but monstrosities (*Modesty* 4 **[A.D. 220]**).

Origen

But observe here that every great sin is a loss of the talents of the master of the house, and such sins are committed by fornicators, adulterers, abusers of themselves with men, effeminate, idolaters, murderers (*Commentary on Matthew* 14:10 **[A.D. 248]**).

While those who call themselves wise have despised these virtues, and have wallowed in the filth of sodomy, in lawless lust, "men with men working that which is unseemly" (*Against Celsus* 7:49 **[A.D. 248]**).

Cyprian

Oh, if placed on that lofty watchtower, you could gaze into the secret places – if you could open the closed doors of sleeping chambers and recall their dark recesses to the perception of sight – you would behold things done by immodest persons that no chaste eye could look upon; you would see what even to see is a crime; you would see what people imbruted with the madness of vice deny that they have done, and yet hasten to do – men with frenzied lusts rushing upon men, doing things that afford no gratification even to those who do them (Letters 1:9 **[A.D. 253]**).

Eusebius

Having forbidden all unlawful marriage, all unseemly practices, and the union of women with women and men with men, [the Word] adds: "Do not defile yourselves with any of these things, for in all these things the nations were defiled, which I will drive out before you [Lev. 18:24] (*Proof of the Gospel* 4:10 **[A.D. 319]**).

Basil the Great

He who is guilty of unseemliness with males will be under discipline for the same time as adulterers (Letters 217:62 **[A.D. 367]**).

Apocalypse of Paul

And I saw other men and women covered with dust, and their countenance was like blood, and they were in a pit of pitch and sulphur and running down into a fiery river, and I asked: Sir, who are these? And he said to me: These are they who committed the iniquity of Sodom and Gomorrah, the male with the male, for which reason they unceasingly pay the penalties (39 **[A.D. 380]**).

John Chrysostom

For such is the burning of Sodom, and that conflagration! And they know it well that have been at the place, and have seen with their eyes that scourge divinely sent, and the effect of the lightnings from above. (Jude 7.) Consider how great is that sin, to have forced hell to appear even before its time! For whereas many thought scorn of His words, by His deeds did God show them the image thereof in a certain novel way. For that rain was unwonted, for that the intercourse was contrary to nature, and it deluged the land, since lust had done so with their souls. Wherefore also the rain was the opposite of the customary rain. Now not only did it fail to stir up the womb of the earth to the production of fruits, but made it even useless for the reception of seed. For such was also the intercourse of the men, making a body of this sort more worthless than the very land of Sodom. And what is there more detestable than a man who hath pandered himself, or what more execrable? Oh, what madness! Oh, what distraction! Whence came this lust lewdly reveling and making man's nature all that enemies could? or even worse than that, by as much as the soul is better than the body. Oh, ye that were more senseless than irrational creatures, and more shameless than dogs! for in no case does such intercourse take place with them, but nature acknowledgeth her own limits (*Homily 4 on Romans* **[A.D. 391]).**

Augustine

I read also what is added, a little further on, in the same epistle: "Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God" (Letter 29:5 **[A.D. 395]**).

Therefore, those offences which be contrary to nature are everywhere and at all times to be held in detestation and punished; such were those of the Sodomites, which should all nations commit, they should all be held guilty of the same crime by the divine law, which hath not so made men that they should in that way abuse one another. For even that fellowship which should be between God and us is violated, when that same nature of which He is author is polluted by the perversity of lust (*Confessions* 3:8:15 **[A.D. 397-400]**).

Sulpitius Severus

He supposed them to be human beings, and welcomed them to share in his hospitality, and provided an entertainment for them in his house, but the wicked youth of the town demanded the new arrivals for impure purposes. Lot offered them his daughters in place of his guests, but they did not accept the offer, having a desire rather for things forbidden, and then Lot himself was laid hold of with vile designs. The angels, however, speedily rescued him from danger, by causing blindness to fall upon the eyes of these unchaste sinners (*Sacred History* 1:6 **[A.D. 403]**).

John Cassian

For whoever after baptism and the knowledge of God falls into that death, must know that he will either have to be cleansed, not by the daily grace of Christ, i.e., an easy forgiveness, which our Lord when at any moment He is prayed to, is wont to grant to our errors, but by a lifelong affliction of penitence and penal sorrow, or else will be hereafter consigned to the punishment of eternal fire for them, as the same Apostle thus declares: "effeminate, nor defilers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous persons, nor drunkards, nor railers, nor extortioners shall possess the kingdom of God" (*Conference* 23:15 **[circa A.D. 430]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Sabbath or Sunday

It is true that the early Church changed the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday. And contrary to what Seventh Day Adventists claim, they were well within their rights to do so. Christians live under the New Covenant and not the Old. The Church, in its God given authority (Matthew 16:15-19), made the change in honor of the day that Jesus rose from the dead. Scripture records the early Church meeting on the first day of the week (Sunday). For instance, in Acts 20:7 we read the following: "On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them…" The term "to break bread" refers to the Eucharistic celebration, which has been the center of Christian worship for the last two thousand years. We also see that money was collected for the needs of the Church on Sunday (1 Corinthians 16:2). And finally, Paul tells us Christians are not to be judged for failing to observe the Jewish Sabbath (Colossians 2:14-16).

The Didache

But every Lord's Day . . . gather yourselves together and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one that is at variance with his fellow come together with you until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be profaned (14 **[A.D. 70]**).

Letter of Barnabas

Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day [a reference to Sunday] with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead. And when He had manifested Himself, He ascended into the heavens (15 **[A.D. 74]**).

Ignatius of Antioch

[T]hose who were brought up in the ancient order of things [i.e., Jews] have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day, on which also our life has sprung up again by him and by his death (*Letter to the Magnesians* 8 **[A.D. 110]**).

Justin Martyr

On the day called Sunday all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen (*First Apology* 67 **[A.D. 151]**).

The Didascalia

The apostles further appointed; On the first day of the week let there be service, and the reading of the holy scriptures, and the oblation [sacrifice of the Mass], because on the first day of the week [Sunday] our Lord rose from the place of the dead, and on the first day of the week he arose upon the world, and on the first day of the week he ascended up to heaven, and on the first day of the week he will appear at last with the angels of heaven (*Didascalia* 2 **[A.D. 225]**).

Victorinus

The sixth day [Friday] is called parasceve, that is to say, the preparation of the kingdom. . .. On this day also, on account of the passion of the Lord Jesus Christ, we make either a station to God or a fast. On the seventh day he rested from all his works, and blessed it, and sanctified it. On the former day we are accustomed to fast rigorously, that on the Lord's Day we may go forth to our bread with giving of thanks. Let the parasceve become a rigorous fast, lest we should appear to observe any Sabbath with the Jews . . . which Sabbath he [Christ] in his body abolished (*The Creation of the World* **[A.D. 300]**).

Eusebius

They [the early saints of the Old Testament] did not care about circumcision of the body, neither do we [Christians]. They did not care about observing Sabbaths, nor do we. They did not avoid certain kinds of food, neither did they regard the other distinctions which Moses first delivered to their posterity to be observed as symbols; nor do Christians of the present day do such things (*Church History* 1:4:8 **[A.D. 325]**).

[T]he day of his [Christ's] light . . . was the day of his resurrection from the dead, which they say, as being the one and only truly holy day and the Lord's day, is better than any number of days as we ordinarily understand them, and better than the days set apart by the Mosaic Law for feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths, which the Apostle [Paul] teaches are the shadow of days and not days in reality (*Proof of the Gospel* 4:16:186 **[A.D. 319]**).

Athanasius

The Sabbath was the end of the first creation, the Lord’s Day was the beginning of the second, in which he renewed and restored the old in the same way as he prescribed that they should formerly observe the Sabbath as a memorial of the end of the first things, so we honor the Lord’s Day as being the memorial of the new creation (*On Sabbath and Circumcision* 3 **[A.D. 345]**).

Cyril of Jerusalem

Fall not away either into the sect of the Samaritans or into Judaism, for Jesus Christ has ransomed you. Stand aloof from all observance of Sabbaths and from calling indifferent meats common or unclean (*Catechetical Lectures* 4:37 **[A.D. 350]**).

Council of Laodicea

Christians should not Judaize and should not be idle on the Sabbath, but should work on that day; they should, however, particularly reverence the Lord's Day and, if possible, not work on it, because they were Christians (canon 29 **[A.D. 360]**).

John Chrysostom

When he said, "You shall not kill" . . . he did not add "because murder is a wicked thing." The reason was that conscience had taught this beforehand, and he speaks thus, as to those who know and understand the point. Wherefore when he speaks to us of another commandment, not known to us by the dictate of conscience, he not only prohibits, but adds the reason. When, for instance, he gave commandment concerning the Sabbath — "On the seventh day you shall do no work"— he subjoined also the reason for this cessation. What was this? "Because on the seventh day God rested from all his works which he had begun to make" [Ex. 20:10]. And again: "Because you were a servant in the land of Egypt" [Deut. 21:18]. For what purpose then, I ask, did he add a reason respecting the Sabbath, but did no such thing in regard to murder? Because this commandment was not one of the leading ones. It was not one of those which were accurately defined of our conscience, but a kind of partial and temporary one, and for this reason it was abolished afterward. But those which are necessary and uphold our life are the following: "'You shall not kill... You shall not commit adultery... You shall not steal." (*Homilies on the Statues* 12:9 **[A.D. 387]**).

You have put on Christ, you have become a member of the Lord and been enrolled in the heavenly city, and you still grovel in the Law [of Moses]? How is it possible for you to obtain the kingdom? Listen to Paul's words, that the observance of the Law overthrows the gospel, and learn, if you will, how this comes to pass, and tremble, and shun this pitfall. Why do you keep the Sabbath and fast with the Jews? (*Homilies on Galatians* 2:17 **[A.D. 395]**).

Apostolic Constitutions

And on the day of our Lord's resurrection, which is the Lord's Day, meet more diligently, sending praise to God that made the universe by Jesus, and sent him to us, and condescended to let him suffer, and raised him from the dead. Otherwise, what apology will he make to God who does not assemble on that day . . . in which is performed the reading of the prophets, the preaching of the gospel, the oblation of the sacrifice, the gift of the holy food (*Apostolic Constitutions* 2:7:60 **[A.D. 400]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on The Filioque Clause

Contrary to the claims of the Orthodox Churches, Catholics did not invent the idea that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Scripture teaches it in several places. For instance: “He saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior” (Titus 3:5-6).

Tertullian

I believe that the Spirit proceeds not otherwise than from the Father through the Son (*Against Praxeas* 4:1 **[A.D. 216]**).

Origen

We believe, however, that there are three persons: the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; and we believe none to be unbegotten except the Father. We admit, as more pious and true, that all things were produced through the Word, and that the Holy Spirit is the most excellent and the first in order of all that was produced by the Father through Christ (*Commentaries on John* 2:6 **[A.D. 229]**).

Maximus the Confessor

By nature, the Holy Spirit in his being takes substantially his origin from the Father through the Son who is begotten (*Questions to Thalassium* 63 [A.D. 254]).

Gregory the Wonderworker

[There is] one Holy Spirit, having substance from God, and who is manifested through the Son; image of the Son, perfect of the perfect; life, the cause of living; holy fountain; sanctity, the dispenser of sanctification; in whom is manifested God the Father who is above all and in all, and God the Son who is through all. Perfect Trinity, in glory and eternity and sovereignty neither divided nor estranged (*Confession of Faith* **[A.D. 265]**).

Hilary of Poitiers

Concerning the Holy Spirit . . . it is not necessary to speak of him who must be acknowledged, who is from the Father and the Son, his sources (*The Trinity* 2:29 **[A.D. 357]**).

Didymus the Blind

As we have understood discussions . . . about the incorporeal natures, so too it is now to be recognized that the Holy Spirit receives from the Son that which he was of his own nature. . .. So too the Son is said to receive from the Father the very things by which he subsists. For neither has the Son anything else except those things given him by the Father, nor has the Holy Spirit any other substance than that given him by the Son (*The Holy Spirit* 37 **[A.D. 362]**).

Epiphanius of Salamis

The Father always existed and the Son always existed, and the Spirit breathes from the Father and the Son (*The Man Well-Anchored* 75 **[A.D. 374]**).

Basil the Great

[T]he goodness of [the divine] nature, the holiness of [that] nature, and the royal dignity reach from the Father through the only-begotten [Son] to the Holy Spirit. Since we confess the persons in this manner, there is no infringing upon the holy dogma of the monarchy (*The Holy Spirit* 18:47 **[A.D. 375]**).

Ambrose of Milan

The Holy Spirit, when he proceeds from the Father and the Son, does not separate himself from the Father and does not separate himself from the Son (*The Holy Spirit* 1:2:120 **[A.D. 381]**).

Gregory of Nyssa

[The] Father conveys the notion of unoriginate, unbegotten, and Father always; the only-begotten Son is understood along with the Father, coming from him but inseparably joined to him. Through the Son and with the Father, immediately and before any vague and unfounded concept interposes between them, the Holy Spirit is also perceived conjointly (*Against Eunomius* 1 **[A.D. 382]**).

The Athanasian Creed

[W]e venerate one God in the Trinity, and the Trinity in oneness. . . . The Father was not made nor created nor begotten by anyone. The Son is from the Father alone, not made nor created, but begotten. The Holy Spirit is from the Father and the Son, not made nor created nor begotten, but proceeding (**A.D. 400**).

Augustine

Why, then, should we not believe that the Holy Spirit proceeds also from the Son, when he is the Spirit also of the Son? For if the Holy Spirit did not proceed from him, when he showed himself to his disciples after his resurrection, he would not have breathed upon them, saying, 'Receive the Holy Spirit' [John 20:22]. For what else did he signify by that breathing upon them except that the Holy Spirit proceeds also from him (*Homilies on John* 99:8 **[A.D. 416]**).

Cyril of Alexandria

Since the Holy Spirit when he is in us effects our being conformed to God, and he actually proceeds from the Father and Son, it is abundantly clear that he is of the divine essence, in it in essence and proceeding from it (*Treasury of the Holy Trinity*, thesis 34 **[A.D. 424]**).

Council of Toledo

. . . The Spirit is also the Paraclete, who is himself neither the Father nor the Son, but proceeding from the Father and the Son. Therefore, the Father is unbegotten, the Son is begotten, the Paraclete is not begotten but proceeding from the Father and the Son (**A.D. 447**).

Fulgence of Ruspe

Hold most firmly and never doubt in the least that the same Holy Spirit who is Spirit of the Father and of the Son, proceeds from the Father and the Son (*The Rule of Faith* 54 **[A.D. 524]**).

John Damascene

And the Holy Spirit is the power of the Father revealing the hidden mysteries of his divinity, proceeding from the Father through the Son in a manner known to himself, but different from that of generation (*Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 12 **[A.D. 712]**).

I say that God is always Father since he has always his Word [the Son] coming from himself and, through his Word, the Spirit issuing from him (*Dialogue Against the Manicheans* 5 **[A.D. 728]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Military Service

The concept of a just war is not a new one. Christians have debated the issue for centuries. Opponents will point to verses of Scripture that command us to be peacemakers. And they are right to do so. But that does not tell the whole story. In Romans 12:18 we are told: "If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all." Note that it says: "If possible." There are times when an aggressor makes it impossible. That is why Ecclesiastes 3:8 says there is: "a time for war, and a time for peace." In several instances God told the Israelites to go to war against their enemies. See Numbers 31:1-3, Joshua 6:2-5, and 1 Samuel 15:2-3.

While making a point on the necessity of being totally committed to discipleship, Jesus uses the example of a king preparing for war (Luke 14:31). In Ephesians 6:17 the Word of God is called, the "Sword of the Spirit." If war were illicit for all involved, why would Jesus legitimize it by using it as a teaching tool? And why would Paul use a weapon of war as a symbol of truth? So yes, military action can be justified to protect the innocent and prevent greater evils. The Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it this way: "Governments cannot be denied the right of lawful self-defense, once all peace efforts have failed" (CCC 2308).

Irenaeus

When they further maintain that it is incumbent on them to have experience of every kind of work and conduct, so that, if it be possible, accomplishing all during one manifestation in this life, they may [at once] pass over to the state of perfection, they are, by no chance, found striving to do those things which wait upon virtue, and are laborious, glorious, and skillful, which also are approved universally as being good. For if it be necessary to go through every work and every kind of operation, they ought, in the first place, to learn all the arts: … those, again, connected with a maritime life, gymnastic exercises, hunting, military and kingly pursuits, and as many others as may exist (*Against Heresies* 2:32:2 **[A.D. 189]**).

Tertullian

We pray for life prolonged; for security to the empire; for protection to the imperial house; for brave armies, a faithful senate, a virtuous people, the world at rest, whatever, as man or Cæsar, an emperor would wish. These things I cannot ask from any but the God from whom I know I shall obtain them (Apology 30 **[A.D. 197]**).

Clement of Alexandria

Sail the sea, you who are devoted to navigation, yet call the while on the heavenly Pilot. Has [saving] knowledge taken hold of you while engaged in military service? Listen to the commander, who orders what is right (*Exhortation to the Heathen* 10 **[A.D. 195]**).

… and the Hebrews afterwards going forth, departed carrying much spoil from the Egyptians, not for avarice, as the cavillers say, for God did not persuade them to covet what belonged to others. But, in the first place, they took wages for the services they had rendered the Egyptians all the time; … Whether, then, as may be alleged is done in war, they thought it proper, in the exercise of the rights of conquerors, to take away the property of their enemies, as those who have gained the day do from those who are worsted (and there was just cause of hostilities. The Hebrews came as suppliants to the Egyptians on account of famine; and they, reducing their guests to slavery, compelled them to serve them after the manner of captives, giving them no recompense) …, but rather had robbed them (*Stromata* 1:23 **[A.D. 202]**).

Tactics belong to military command, and the ability to command an army is among the attributes of kingly rule. Legislation, again, is also one of the functions of the kingly office, as also judicial authority. … Now, generalship involves three ideas: caution, enterprise, and the union of the two. And each of these consists of three things, acting as they do either by word, or by deeds, or by both together. And all this can be accomplished either by persuasion, or by compulsion, or by inflicting harm in the way of taking vengeance on those who ought to be punished; and this either by doing what is right, or by telling what is untrue, or by telling what is true, or by adopting any of these means conjointly at the same time (ibid 1:24)

Julius Africanus

Among all the areas of knowledge, that of war is especially valuable. ... Thus, one must not only attack adversaries with an open battle; it is also necessary to combat enemies with a crowd of ruses, even the most secret. ... [For example, one could] simulate a precipitous retreat and abandon...in the face of the [enemy], one's camp filled with [poisoned] food. (*The Seventh Cestus* 1-2 **[A.D. 229]**).

Origen

And to those enemies of our faith who require us to bear arms for the commonwealth, and to slay men, we can reply: "Do not those who are priests at certain shrines, and those who attend on certain gods, as you account them, keep their hands free from blood, that they may with hands unstained and free from human blood offer the appointed sacrifices to your gods; and even when war is upon you, you never enlist the priests in the army. If that, then, is a laudable custom, how much more so, that while others are engaged in battle, these too should engage as the priests and ministers of God, keeping their hands pure, and wrestling in prayers to God on behalf of those who are fighting in a righteous cause, and for the king who reigns righteously, that whatever is opposed to those who act righteously may be destroyed! (*Contra Celsus* 8:73 **[A.D. 248]**).

Adamantius

[The Old Testament] is not contrary [to the New Testament], but the circumstances are different: in the one instance, some were sent from Jerusalem by Christ, commissioned to preach peace; in [the Book of Exodus] certain people were driven out of Egypt by their own servants. [The Egyptians], since they had chosen war, had necessarily to be destroyed by war; even the Gospel recognizes the right of retaliation and the slaying of evil men. Thus, it says, 'The lord of that evil servant will come on a day when he knows not, and in an hour when he is not expecting, and will cut him in two and will assign him a place among the unbelieving' [Luke 12:46]. Hence it is right to wage a just war against those who go to war unjustly. (*Dialogue on the True Faith* 1:10 **[A.D. 300]**).

Council of Arles

Those who throw down their arms in time of peace are to be separated from the [Church] (Canon 3 **[A.D. 314]**).

Eusebius

[The way of life] permits men to join in pure nuptials and to produce children, to undertake government, to give orders to soldiers fighting for right; it allows them to have minds for farming, for trade, and the other more secular interests as well as for religion…[for] all men, whether Greeks or barbarians, have their part in the coming of salvation, and profit by the teaching of the Gospel (*Proof of the Gospel* I:8 **[A.D. 319]**).

Lactantius

[The passions] are not evil of themselves, since God has reasonably implanted them in us; but inasmuch as they are plainly good by nature—for they are given us for the protection of life—they become evil by their evil use. And as bravery, if you fight in defense of your country, is a good, if against your country, is an evil, so the passions, if you employ them to good purposes, will be virtues, if to evil uses, they will be called vices (*Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 61 **[A.D. 320]**).

Athanasius

For in other matters also which go to make up life, we shall find differences according to circumstances. For example, it is not right to kill, yet in war it is lawful and praiseworthy to destroy the enemy; accordingly, not only are they who have distinguished themselves in the field held worthy of great honors, but monuments are put up proclaiming their achievements. So that the same act is at one time and under some circumstances unlawful, while under others, and at the right time, it is lawful and permissible (Letter 48 **[circa A.D. 350]**).

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The Early Church Fathers on Questionable Entertainment

Quite often we tolerate lewd or violent entertainment with the thought that it is harmless. After all it is just entertainment. We have no intention of imitating the things we see. But exposure to certain ideas have a way, over time, of changing who we are. Put simply, the atmosphere that we live in shapes our perception of reality. And if we are exposed to something long enough, we can develop a tendency to accept it as normal. Multiply that by ten for the children who watch what we do. Ralph Waldo Emerson once said: “A man is what he thinks about all day long.” And that is why Paul tells us: “Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Philippians 4:8).

Taitian the Syrian

What wonderful or extraordinary thing is performed among you? They utter ribaldry in affected tones, and go through indecent movements; your daughters and your sons behold them giving lessons in adultery on the stage. Admirable places, forsooth, are your lecture-rooms, where every base action perpetrated by night is proclaimed aloud, and the hearers are regaled with the utterance of infamous discourses! Admirable, too, are your mendacious poets, who by their fictions beguile their hearers from the truth! (*Address to the Greeks* 22 **[A.D. 160]**).

Athenagoras

When they know that we cannot bear even to see a man put to death, though justly, who of them can accuse us of murder or cannibalism? Who does not reckon the contests of gladiators and wild beasts among the things of greatest interest, especially those which are given by you [the ones in Rome, put on by the emperor, to whom this plea is addressed]. But we, because we believe that to watch a man be put to death is much the same as killing him, avoid such spectacles (*A Plea for the Christians* 35 **[A.D. 177]**).

Theophilus

But neither may we see the other spectacles, lest our eyes and ears be defiled, participating in the utterances there sung. For if one should speak of cannibalism, in these spectacles the children of Thyestes and Tereus are eaten; and as for adultery, both in the case of men and of gods, whom they celebrate in elegant language for honors and prizes, this is made the subject of their dramas. But far be it from Christians to conceive any such deeds; for with them temperance dwells, self-restraint is practiced, monogamy is observed, chastity is guarded, iniquity exterminated, sin extirpated, righteousness exercised, law administered, worship performed, God acknowledged (*To Autolycus* **[A.D. 181]).**

Irenaeus

The "most perfect" among [the gnostics] addict themselves without fear to all those kinds of forbidden deeds of which the Scriptures assure us that "they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." ... some of them do not even keep away from that bloody spectacle hateful both to God and men, in which gladiators either fight with wild beasts or individually encounter one another. (*Against Heresies* I:6:3 **[A.D. 180-190]**).

Tertullian

Are we not, in like manner, enjoined to put away from us all immodesty? On this ground, again, we are excluded from the theatre, which is immodesty's own peculiar abode, where nothing is in repute but what elsewhere is disreputable. So, the best path to the highest favor of its god is the vileness which the Atellan gesticulates, which the buffoon in woman's clothes exhibits, destroying all natural modesty, so that they blush more readily at home than at the play, which finally is done from his childhood on the person of the pantomime, that he may become an actor (*On the Shows* 17 **[inter A.D. 200-206]**).

Commodianus

Thou art going to vain shows with the crowd of the evil one, where Satan is at work in the circus with din (Writings 57 **[inter A.D. 240-260]**).

Lactantius

What of the stage? Is it more holy -- on which comedy converses on the subject of debaucheries and amours, tragedy of incest and parricide? The immodest gestures also of players, with which they imitate disreputable women, teach the lusts, which they express by dancing. For the pantomime is a school of corruption, in which things which are shameful are acted by a figurative representation, that the things which are true may be done without shame (*Epitome of Divine Institutes* **[inter A.D. 303-311]**).

Ambrose of Milan

Is anything so conducive to lust as with unseemly movements thus to expose in nakedness those parts of the body which either nature has hidden or custom has veiled, to sport with the looks, to turn the neck, to loosen the hair? Fitly was the next step an offence against God. For what modesty can there be where there is dancing and noise and clapping of hands? (*Concerning Virgins* 3:6:27 **[A.D. 377]**).

And so one must be on one's guard, lest, deceived by any common interpretation of this saying, one should suppose that the movements of wanton dances and the madness of the stage were commended; for these are full of evil in youthful age (*On Repentance* 6:42 **[A.D. 384]**).

Council of Laodicea

Christians, when they attend weddings, must not join in wanton dances, but modestly dine or breakfast, as is becoming to Christians (Canon 53 **[A.D. 390]**).

John Chrysostom

Thirdly again, in addition to this, which is the crown of all these benefits, by these very points he will be showing his own judgment, that indeed he has no pleasure in any of these things, and that he will moreover put an end to everything else in keeping with them, and will never so much as allow the existence either of dances, or of immodest songs (*Homily 20 on Ephesians* Ver 33 **[A.D. 393]**).

Apostolic Constitutions

Avoid also indecent spectacles: I mean the theatres and the pomps of the heathens; their enchantments, observations of omens, soothsayings, purgations, divinations, observations of birds; their necromancies and invocations…. You are also to avoid their public meetings, and those sports which are celebrated in them…. Abstain, therefore, from all idolatrous pomp and state, all their public meetings, banquets, duels, and all shows belonging to demons (2:62 **[A.D. 400]**).

Council of Carthage

And [it seemed good] that the sons of bishops should not take part in nor witness secular spectacles. For this has always been forbidden to all Christians, so let them abstain from them, that they may not go where cursing and blasphemy are to be found (Canon 15 **[A.D. 419]**).

Furthermore, it must be sought that theatrical spectacles and the exhibition of other plays be removed from the Lord's day and the other most sacred days of the Christian religion, especially because on the octave day of the holy, Easter [i.e., Low Sunday] the people assemble rather at the circus than at church, and they should be transferred to some other day when they happen to fall upon a day of devotion, nor shall any Christian be compelled to witness these spectacles, especially because in the performance of things contrary to the precepts of God (ibid Canon 61).

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Doctrinal Concordance of the Bible

The Church

Matthew 16:18 - Jesus established and protects His Church
Matthew 28:20 - Jesus promises to be with His Church always
John 16:13 - The Holy Spirit guides the Church into all truth
1 Timothy 3:15 - The Church (not the Bible) is the pillar and foundation of truth
Ephesians 3:21 - The Instrument by which "all generations" will know God's wisdom
Matthew 18:17-18 - If someone refuses to listen to the Church cast him out
Matthew 28:18-20 - The Churches authority is Jesus' authority
1 John 4:6 - Anyone who knows God listens to the Church
Luke 10:16 - He who rejects the Church rejects Christ
Matthew 16:19 - The Church has power to legislate
Acts 15:28 - Decisions of the Church are decisions of the Holy Spirit
Acts 15:6-29 - Apostles and elders settle disputes authoritatively through councils
Acts 16:4 - People are to observe the decisions of the Apostles and elders
Acts 1:15-26 - The Apostles choose successors (bishops)
Titus 1:5 - Bishops appoint presbyters (priests)
1 Peter 5:5 - Be subject to the elders
Hebrews 13:17 - "Obey your leaders and submit to them"
John 10:16 - The Church must be one
Ephesians 4:4-5 - There is one body, one Lord, one faith and one baptism
Romans 16:17-18 - Avoid those who create dissensions
1 Corinthians 1:10 - There must be no divisions among you
Philippians 2:2 - Be in full accord and of one mind
John 17:21 - Jesus prayed that we would be one

Apostolic Succession

Ephesians 2:19-20 - The Church is built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets
Ephesians 4:11 - That some should be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers
Acts 1:23-26 - Matthias is chosen to replace Judas
Acts 9:26-30 - Paul is approved by the Apostles
Acts 14:14 - Barnabas is also called an apostle
Titus 1:5 - Titus performs the duties of an apostle
1 Timothy 1:3-7 - Timothy is instructed to exercise the authority of an apostle
1 Timothy 3:1-7 - Qualifications for bishops (successors to the apostles)
1 Timothy 4:14 - The office of bishop was conferred upon Timothy by the laying on of hands

The Pope / Infallibility

John 1:42 - Simon is named Cephas (Peter) which means rock
1 Corinthians 1:12, 3:22, 9:5, 15:5, Galatians 2:9, 2:11, and 2:14 - Paul refers to Peter as Cephas
Matthew 16:18 - Jesus builds His Church on Peter the rock
Matthew 16:19 - Jesus gives Peter the keys of the kingdom, the power to loose and bind
John 21:15-17 - Jesus entrusts the care of His sheep to Peter
Luke 22:32 - Jesus tells Peter to strengthen his brethren
Acts 1:15-26 - Peter presided over the meeting that elected Matthias to replace Judas
Acts 2:14-42 - Peter preached the first public sermon (Pentecost)
Acts 3:6-8 - Peter performs the first miracle after Pentecost
Acts 5:1-11 - Peter inflicts the first punishment (Ananias and Saphira)
Acts 10:9-16 - It is revealed to Peter that Gentiles can be admitted into the Church
Acts 10:44-48 - Peter baptizes the first Gentiles
Matthew 10:2-4, Mark 3:16-19, Luke 6:14-16, Acts 1:13 - Peter is always listed first

The Bible Alone?

* 2 Timothy 3:16-17 - Scripture is profitable for teaching, that the man of God may be complete
Acts 8:26-35 - But guidance is needed to interpret the Scriptures
1 Timothy 3:15 - The Church (not the Bible) is the pillar and foundation of truth
Acts 2:42 - Church followed apostolic teaching (no Bibles, printing press not invented yet)
2 Peter 1:20 - Scripture is not a matter of one's own interpretation
2 Peter 3:16 - The ignorant and unstable twist Scripture to their own destruction
Proverbs 3:5 - Do not rely on your own insight

Tradition

* Matthew 15:3, Mark 6:8, Mark 7:9, and Colossians 2:8 - Human traditions condemned
2 Thessalonians 2:15 - Believers commanded to hold fast to Sacred Tradition
2 Thessalonians 3:6 - Shun those not living according to Sacred Tradition
1 Corinthians 11:2 - Corinthians commended for maintaining the traditions handed down to them
Romans 16:17 - Avoid those who are in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught

Justification

* Romans 1:17 - The just shall live by faith
Galatians 5:6 - "Faith working through love"
2 John 6 - Love is following His commandments
Romans 12:9-13 - "Let love be genuine, hold fast to what is good"
Acts 16:30-31 - Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved
Mark 10:17 - "What must I do to be saved?"
Mark10:19-21 - Obey the commandments
1 John 2:3-5 - "He who says, 'I know him' but disobeys His commandments is a liar"
Revelation 20:12, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Romans 2:2-8, 1 Peter 1:17 - We are judged by our deeds
Romans 2:13 - Doers of the law not hearers of the law will be justified
James 2:14-26 - "Faith without works is dead"
Matthew 25:31-46 - The saved are those who feed the poor and cloth the naked
John 14:6 - Jesus is the only way to salvation
Matthew 25:40 - Reject your neighbor, and you reject Jesus
* Ephesians 2:8-9 - We are saved by grace not our works
Hebrews 4:15-16 - God gives us grace in time of need, we do nothing on our own
Romans 1:5 - Jesus provides the grace to bring about the obedience of faith
1 Corinthians 10:13 - No temptation is too great, grace provides a way out
1 Corinthians 6:9-10 Serious sin condemns
1 Corinthians 12:3 - We cannot even say that Jesus is Lord without grace
Philippians 4:13 - We can do anything with Christ (works performed by grace are not our works)
Matthew 7:21 - [that's why] Only those who do the will of the Father will enter the kingdom

Have You Been Saved?

Ephesians 2:5-8, 2 Timothy 1:9, Titus 3:5-7 - I have been saved
Philippians 2:12 - I am being saved
Matthew 10:22, Matthew 24:13, Titus 3:5-7, Philippians 3:11-14 - I hope to be saved
1 Corinthians 9:25-27, Romans 11:22, Hebrews 10:26 - Salvation can be lost
2 John 8, Hebrews 6:4-8 - Salvation can be lost
Luke 24:46-47 - Repentance is necessary for salvation
Romans 2:4 - Even Christians need to repent to be forgiven
Revelation 2:5 - Even Christians need to repent to be forgiven
Acts 26:20 - There should be evidence of your repentance
2 Peter 3:9 - Repent or perish
1 Corinthians 4:2-5 - Paul does not even claim to be saved

Regenerative Baptism

John 3:5 - You must be born of water and of Spirit to enter the kingdom
Acts 2:38 - Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins
Titus 3:5 - We are saved by the washing of regeneration
Acts 22:16 - "Be baptized and wash away your sins"
Romans 6:4 - "We were baptized into Christ's death that we might walk in newness of life"
1 Peter 3:21 - "Baptism now saves you"

Infant Baptism

Colossians 2:11-12 - Baptism replaces circumcision
Genesis 17:12 - Circumcision took place on the eighth day after birth
Mark 10:14 - Children can receive spiritual benefits
Luke 18:15 - "Now they were bringing even infants to Him"
Acts 16:15 - She was baptized with all her household (children?)
Acts 16:33 - He was baptized with all his family (children?)
1 Corinthians 1:16 - Paul baptized the household of Stephanus (children?)
Acts 2:39-39 - Be baptized, "the promise is to you and to your children"

Sunday Worship

Colossians 2:14-16 - Christians are not to be judged for not observing the Jewish Sabbath
Romans 6:14 - Christians are not bound by Jewish ceremonial law
Galatians 4:9-11 - Paul considers adherence to the Jewish days of observance as possible evidence of straying from the faith
Acts 20:7 - The disciples met on the first day of the week (Sunday) to break bread (The Eucharist)
1 Corinthians 16:2 - The Corinthians collected money for the Church on the first day of the week (Sunday)

The Mass

Malachi 1:11 - Foresees a pure sacrifice that takes place among the nations (Jews & Gentiles)
Matthew 26:26-28 - At the Last Supper Jesus broke the bread and gave it to His disciples
Acts 2:42 - The early church devoted itself to the Apostles teaching and the breaking of bread
Acts 2:46 - They attended temple (Liturgy of the Word) and broke bread (Liturgy of the Eucharist)

Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist

Exodus 12:8, 46, Leviticus 6:24-26 - Under the Old Covenant the sacrificial lamb was eaten
1 Corinthians 5:7 - Jesus is the sacrificial lamb of the New Covenant
John 6:53 - Under the New Covenant the sacrificial lamb must also be eaten
John 6:35-71 - The Eucharist is promised
John 6:35, 48, 51 - Jesus says, "I am the Bread of Life"
John 6:51, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57 - Jesus says, "The bread which I give is my flesh"
John 6:66 - Jesus disciples took him literally, and He didn't correct them
Isaiah 9:20 - To symbolically eat one's flesh meant to do harm
Isaiah 49:26 - To symbolically eat one's flesh meant to do harm
Micah 3:3 - To symbolically eat one's flesh meant to do harm
Matthew 26:26-28 - The Eucharist is instituted, "This is my body this is my blood"
1 Corinthians 10:16 - The bread and wine are a participation in the body and blood of Christ
1 Corinthians 11:23-26 - This is my body this is my blood
1 Corinthians 11:27-29 - Receiving unworthily is profaning the body and blood of the Lord

Confession / Reconciliation

Mark 2:5 - Jesus forgives sins
John 20:21 - Jesus says: "As I have been sent so I send you"

2 Corinthians 5:18 - Christ gave us the ministry of reconciliation
John 20:23 - If you (the apostles and their successors) forgive the sins of any they are forgiven
John 20:23 - If you (the apostles and their successors) retain the sins of any they are retained
Romans 2:4 - "Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?"
Acts 3:19 - Repentance needed for forgiveness
Matthew 6:15 - Believers may not retain the sins of anyone

Purgatory

Numbers 20:12 - Moses and Aaron, though forgiven, are still punished
2 Samuel 12:13-14 - David, though forgiven, is still punished
1 John 5:16-17 - There is sin that is not deadly
Revelation 21:27 - Nothing unclean shall enter heaven
Hebrews 12:23 - All in heaven have been made perfect
Matthew 12:36 - "On judgment day men will account for every careless word they utter"
Matthew 18:23-35 - In the kingdom of heaven you will remain in prison until your debt is paid
1 Corinthians 3:11-15 - Fire will test each ones work. He will be saved but only as through fire
Luke 12:41-48 - There are different degrees of punishment after death
2 Maccabees 12:42-45 - He prayed for the dead that they might be freed from their sin
2 Timothy 1:16-18 - Paul prays for his dead friend Onesiphorus

Redemptive Suffering

2 Corinthians 1:6 Paul is afflicted for their salvation
Ephesians 3:13 Paul speaks about his afflictions for the Ephesians
Colossians 1:24 Paul rejoices in his suffering for their sake

Praying to Saints

* Deuteronomy 18:10-11 - Critics liken praying to saints to divination
1 Samuel 28:3-14 - Divination is conjuring information from the dead (not asking for their prayers)
* 1 Timothy 2:5 - "There is one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus"
Hebrews 9:15 - Specifically: "He [Jesus] is the mediator of a new covenant" (when someone prays for you, they are not mediating a new covenant)
1 Corinthians 12:13 - "We were all baptized into one body"
Romans 12:5 - We are one body and individually members of one another
Colossians 1:18 - Christ is the head of the body
Romans 8:35-39 - Death cannot separate us from Christ (or the rest of the body either)
1 Corinthians 12:26 - If one suffers all suffer
Galatians 6:2 - We are to bear one another's burdens
James 5:16 - We are to pray for one another
James 5:16 - The prayer of the righteous has great power
Luke 15:7 - Those in heaven (very righteous) care for us
Revelation 4:8 - Those in heaven pray constantly
Matthew 18:10 - The angels pray for us
Revelation 5:8 - The angels and saints present our prayers to God
Revelation 8:3-4 - The angels add their prayers to ours and present them to God
Tobit 12:12 - An angel presented Tobit and Sarah's prayer to God
2 Maccabees 15:11-14 - The deceased Onias and Jeremiah pray for Israel

Mary Ever-Virgin

* Matthew 1:25 - Joseph knew her not until she had born a son
Luke 1:80 - The word until in Greek does not imply that anything happened after the fact
Matthew 13:55 - "Are not His [Jesus] brethren James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?"
Matthew 27:56 - Mary the mother of James and Joseph is also -
John 19:25 - Mary the wife of Clopas (not Joseph)

Matthew 28:10 - Jesus said, "Tell my brethren to go to Galilee and there they will see me"
Matthew 28:16 - "The eleven disciples went to Galilee" (Are they His siblings too?)
Mark 6:3 - Jesus is the son of Mary not a son of Mary
John 19:26-27 - Jesus entrusted the care of His mother to the apostle John as He had no siblings

The Immaculate Conception

Genesis 3:15 - Enmity between Satan and Mary (if she sinned there would be no enmity)
* Romans 3:23 - All have sinned (Paul is saying there is no advantage for Jew or Gentile)
Luke 1:28 - "Hail full of grace," in Greek indicates something that was completed in the past
* Luke 1:47 - "My spirit rejoices in God my savior" (Jesus saved Mary by preserving her from sin)

The Assumption

2 Kings 2:1-13 - Elijah is assumed into heaven
Hebrews 11:5 - Enoch is assumed into heaven
John 5:28-29 - All the righteous will be assumed into heaven

The Mother of God

Luke 1:43 - Elizabeth calls her "The mother of my Lord" Jesus is Lord because He is God

Statues and Images

* Exodus 20:4-5 - "You shall not make a graven image…you shall not bow down and serve them"
Exodus 25:18 - "And you shall make two cherubim of gold (for the Ark of the Covenant)"
Exodus 26:1 - The curtains around the ark have cherubim on them
Exodus 26:31 - The linen veil had cherubim placed on it
Numbers 21:8-9 - The Lord tells Moses to make the bronze serpent (did He forget Exodus 20?)
1 Kings 6:23 - By God's design the temple had engraved cherubim
1 Kings 6:35 - Doors in the temple had Cherubim, flowers and palm trees carved on them
1 Kings 7:25-45 - By God's design the temple had bronze oxen and lions

Relics

2 Kings 13:20-21 - A dead man comes to life after touching the bones of Elisha
Matthew 9:20-22 - A woman is cured by touching Jesus' garment
Acts 19:11-12 - People were healed by handkerchiefs or aprons that touched Paul

Holy Medals and Scapulars

Numbers 15:37-40 - The Israelites wore reminders of God

The Trinity

Genesis 18:1-2 - "And the Lord appeared to him…he beheld three men"
Genesis 1:26-27 - God says: "Let us make man in our image…God made man in His image"
Matthew 28:19 - "Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"
2 Corinthians 13:14 - "The grace of Jesus, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit"

Jesus is God

Isaiah 9:5-6 - Prophecy concerning Jesus: "He will be called…Mighty God"
John 1:1 - Jesus is the Word and the Word is God
John 8:58 - Jesus claims to be the great "I Am" (God, Exodus 3:14)
John 10:30-33 - Jesus said: "The Father and I are one"
John 10:38 - Jesus said: "I am in the Father and the Father is in me"
John 14:9 - Jesus said: "He who has seen me has seen the Father"

John 20:28 - Jesus accepts Thomas calling Him "My Lord and my God"
Colossians 2:9 - "In Him [Jesus} dwells the fullness of deity"
Titus 2:13 - "Awaiting our great God and Savior Jesus Christ"
Hebrews 1:8 - God the Father refers to Jesus as "God"

The Holy Spirit is God

Acts 5:3-4 - Lying to the Holy Spirit is lying to God
2 Corinthians 3:17-18 - "The Lord is the Spirit"
Hebrews 3:7-9 - The Holy Spirit claims to be God

The Holy Spirit is a Person Not a Force

John 14:26 - The Holy Spirit will teach you all things
Acts 8:29 - "And the Spirit said to Philip"
Acts 13:2 - "The Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul'"
Romans 8:27 - "The Spirit intercedes for the saints"
1 Corinthians 2:11 - "No one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit"
1 Corinthians 12:11 - "The Spirit apportions to each one as He wills"
Ephesians 4:30 - "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit"

Confirmation

Acts 8:14-17 - Peter and John pray for baptized Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit
Acts 19:5-6 - Paul lays hands on those already baptized and they receive the Holy Spirit

Holy Orders

Luke 22:17-19 - Jesus institutes the priesthood at the Last Supper
John 20:22 - The Apostles are given the authority to forgive sin
Acts 6:2-6 - The first deacons are ordained
Acts 14:23 - Paul and Barnabas appoint elders for the churches at Derbe
Titus 1:5 - Titus, a bishop, is to appoint presbyters (priests) in every town

Celibacy

* 1 Timothy 4:1-3 - Forbidding marriage is a doctrine of demons
Ephesians 5:21-33 - Marriage is good, a symbol of Christ and His Church
Matthew 19:12 - Jesus praises celibacy
1 Corinthians 7:8 - The apostle Paul was celibate
1 Corinthians 7:32-35 Celibacy is recommended for those in ministry

Anointing of the Sick

Mark 6:13 - The Apostles anointed the sick with oil and healed them
James 5:14-15 - The presbyters (priests) pray over and anoint the sick with oil

Chastity

Mark 7:21-23 - Fornication is called evil
1 Corinthians 6:18 - Flee fornication, it is a sin against your body
1 Thessalonians 4:3 - Abstain from fornication, control your body in holiness not in lust
1 Corinthians 7:1 - It is well for a man not to touch a woman
1 Corinthians 7:2 - Because of the temptation to immorality each man should have his own wife
1 Corinthians 7:2 - And each woman her own husband
Galatians 5:19-21 - Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity...those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God
Ephesians 5:5 - No fornicator has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God

Revelation 22:15 - Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers …
Colossians 3:5-6 - Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity...

Matrimony

Matthew 19:5 - A man leaves his father and mother to be joined to his wife
Matthew 19:6 - What God has joined together let no man put asunder
Ephesians 5:21-33 - Marriage is an image of the relationship between Christ and His Church

Artificial Birth Control

Genesis 1:28 - Adam and Eve told by God to be fruitful and multiply
Genesis 38:9-10 - Onan killed for spilling his seed on the ground
Deuteronomy 25:5-10 - Penalty for defying the Leverite law was not death
Galatians 5:20 - The word sorcery, pharmekeia in Greek, refers to abortifacient potions

Divorce and Remarriage

Matthew 5:31-32 - "Whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery"
Matthew 19:9 - Whoever divorces and marries another commits adultery
Mark 10:10-12 - Whoever divorces and marries another commits adultery
Luke 16:18 - Divorce and remarriage is adultery
Romans 7:2-3 - A woman is bound to her husband for life. If she lives with another it's adultery
1 Corinthians 7:10-11 - When divorce is necessary remain single or reconcile

Homosexuality

Genesis 2:18 - It is not good that man should be alone
Genesis 2:18 - I will make him a helper fit for him
Genesis 1:27 - Male and female He created them
Genesis 1:28 - He said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply"
Genesis 2:24 - Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife
Leviticus 18:22 - You shall not lie with a male as with a woman, it is an abomination
Romans 1:27 - Homosexuality called unnatural and shameless
1 Corinthians 6:9 - Practicing homosexuals will not go to heaven
Matthew 25:31-45 - Jesus is the one who will judge (that is not the job of believers)
Matthew 19:19 - You shall love your neighbor as yourself (homosexuals are your neighbors)

The Rapture

* 1 Thessalonians 4:17 - We shall be caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air
* Matthew 24:40 - Two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left
Matthew 24:47 - One man is rewarded (salvation)
Matthew 24:51 - The other is punished (hell) (that leaves no one on earth)
1 Thessalonians 4:15 - Jesus is coming back once more (not twice for a rapture and judgment)
Acts 3:20-21 - Jesus must stay in heaven until that time
Acts 1:11 - When He returns He will be coming all the way down to the earth (not hover above it)
Matthew 25:31-45 - When He comes He will come to judge the living and the dead
Matthew 25:46 - Some go to eternal punishment, some to eternal life (no one left on earth)

* Denotes a verse that is used in opposition to Catholic teaching

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Peter Was the Leader of the Early Church

by Sebastian R Fama

In Matthew 16:19 Jesus gives Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Earlier in verse 16, we see that God the Father revealed to Peter alone who Jesus was. Catholics, of course, acknowledge that Jesus was making Peter the head of His new Church. But our Protestant friends disagree. Some claim that James was the leader of the new Church. Others claim there was no leader. But Jesus Himself speaks of leaders:

> A dispute arose among them, which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, **and the leader** as one who serves" (Luke 22:24-26).

Notice that Jesus said the leader of the apostles must be one who serves. The point here is that there would be a leader. So, what did Jesus mean in Matthew 16. Did He give Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven? Or, was he speaking in riddles? The book of Acts records the activities of the early Church. Reviewing what each of the apostles did following our Lord's ascension should prove helpful. All the apostles are listed in Acts 1:13. However, only four of them are named for being involved in specific situations. The four are Peter, John, James, and Philip. Their activities were revealed as follows:

1. **Peter** leads the others in choosing a replacement for Judas (Acts 1:15-26).
2. **Peter** preaches on Pentecost, 3,000 are converted (Acts 2:14-38).
3. **Peter** and **John** asked for alms (Acts 3:3).
4. **Peter** cures a crippled beggar (Acts 3:4-10).
5. **Peter** once again addresses the public, another 2,000 convert (Acts 3:12-4:4).
6. **Peter** and **John** brought before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:7).
7. **Peter** answers the charges of the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:8-12).
8. **Peter** and **John** defy the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:19).
9. **Peter** pronounces judgment on Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11).
10. **Peter** and the apostles answer to the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:27-32).
11. **Peter** and **John** sent to Samaria (Acts 8:14-17).
12. **Peter** denounces Simon for trying to buy the power of Holy Spirit (Acts 8:18-24).
13. **Philip** instructs the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-39).
14. **Philip** preaches the Gospel from Azotus to Caesarea (Acts 8:40).
15. **Peter** heals Aneas (Acts 9:33-35).
16. **Peter** raises Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9:40-42).
17. An angel of God tells Cornelias to summon **Peter** (Acts 10:4-6).
18. God reveals to **Peter** that Gentiles are acceptable (Acts 10:9-16).
19. **Peter** baptizes the family of Cornelias (Acts 10:34-49).
20. **Peter** defends the decision to baptize Cornelius and the arguing stops (Acts 11:2-18).
21. **Peter** rescued from prison by an angel (Acts 12:6-10).
22. Paul and Barnabas appeal to the apostles at Jerusalem to rule on the Judaizers (Acts 15:2-5).
23. **Peter** rises and presents God's will on the matter (Acts 15:7-11).
24. **James** acknowledges **Peter's** authoritative statement and offers a solution (Acts 15:13-21).
25. **James's** suggestion is accepted by all and passed on for observance (Acts 15:28).
26. **James** is visited by Paul (Acts 21:18).

When Peter speaks at the Council of Jerusalem, he speaks for all. No agreement is needed. When James speaks at the council, it must be approved by all. In the Gospel we see Peter given the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 16:19). In the book of Acts we see Peter using the keys of the kingdom of heaven. In the Gospel, Peter is told to confirm his brethren (Luke 22:31-32). In the book of Acts we see Peter confirming his brethren. Peter is clearly the leader and visible head of the early Church.

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The Scriptures on Works

by Sebastian R Fama

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God – not because of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Salvation is only possible because of what God did. On their own, men can do nothing to attain salvation. However, the Bible makes a distinction between the works performed by man's own strength and those accomplished by the grace of God. The apostle Paul puts it all together in Philippians 2:12: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Why does he say "work"? And if we have assurance of salvation, as some contend, why would "fear and trembling" be a part of it? Paul qualifies his meaning of the word work in verse 13: "For God is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." So, when a Catholic say's he works for his salvation, it is shorthand for: "I can do all things in Him [Jesus] who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

Only those acts **performed by God, through man,** can lead to eternal salvation. This is an important distinction, a distinction which explains why the following passages of Scripture do not contradict Ephesians 2:8-9:

> Matthew 7:21-23 – "**Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father** who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.'"
>
> Matthew 19:16-17 – And behold, one came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?" And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? One there is who is good. **If you would enter life, keep the commandments."**
>
> Mathew 25:31-46 – "When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, **'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'** Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, **'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'** Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.' And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."
>
> Romans 2:4-11 – Do you not know that **God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance**? But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. **For he will render to every man according to his works**: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, **but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury**. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality.

Romans 2:13 – For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of **the law who will be justified.**

1 Corinthians 10:6-12 – Now these things were warnings for us, not to desire evil as they did. **Do not be idolaters** as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to dance." **We must not indulge in immorality** as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. **We must not put the Lord to the test**, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents; nor grumble as some of them did and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come. **Therefore, let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.**

2 Corinthians 5:10 – **For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body.**

Colossians 3:5-8 – **Put to death therefore what is earthly in you**: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you once walked, when you lived in them. But now put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth.

1 Timothy 6:18-19 – They are to do good, to **be rich in good deeds**, liberal and generous, thus laying up for themselves a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life which is life indeed.

Titus 1:15-16 – To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure; their very minds and consciences are corrupted. **They profess to know God, but they deny him by their deeds;** they are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good deed.

James 2:18-26 – But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. Do you want to be shown, you foolish fellow, that **faith apart from works is barren? Was not Abraham our father justified by works**, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works, and the scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness;" and he was called the friend of God. You see that **a man is justified by works and not by faith alone**. And in the same way was not also Rahab the harlot justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so **faith apart from works is dead.**

Revelation 20:11-12 – Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it; from his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also, another book was opened, which is the book of life. **And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done.**

At the end of the day the Bible means exactly what it says. Allowing God to work through us is necessary if we are to be saved. It is important to note that not one of these passages of Scripture is in opposition to any of the passages that are used to discount the value of works. As we pointed out earlier, all the works in question are accomplished by the grace of God. Indeed, even our belief in God is an act of grace: "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3). Scripture gives other examples that illustrate the role of grace and our response to it:

Romans 1:4-6: Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom **we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith** for the sake of his name among all the nations, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:10: But **by the grace of God I am what I am**, and his grace toward me was not in vain.

2 Corinthians 1:12: For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience that we have behaved in the world, and still more toward you, with holiness and godly sincerity, **not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God.**

Ephesians 4:7: **But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.**

Philippians 4:13: **I can do all things in him who strengthens me.**

2 Timothy 2:1: You then, my son, **be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.**

Titus 2:11-12: **For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world.**

Hebrews 4:15-16: For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning. **Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**

James 4:6: **God** opposes the proud, but **gives grace to the humble.**

1 Peter 4:8-10: Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins. Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another. **As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.**

Merit, in human relationships, generally refers to something earned. However, merit, in the theological sense, is not something earned but a reward:

Matthew 19:17: If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor **and you will have treasure in heaven.**

Luke 6:38: **Give, and it will be given to you**; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. **For the measure you give will be the measure you get back**.

1 Corinthians 9:16-17: For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! **For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward.**

Ephesians 6:6-8: As servants[a] of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to men, **knowing that whatever good any one does, he will receive the same again from the Lord.**

Salvation, like an inheritance, cannot be earned. But just like an inheritance it can be lost, by betraying the one who bestowed it upon us. The apostle Paul underscores this fact when he refuses to consider even himself to be saved:

1 Corinthians 4:2-5: Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. **I do not even judge myself. I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore, do not pronounce judgement before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.** Then every man will receive his commendation from God.

In other words, Only God can say who is saved and who is not. And that will not be done until the second coming. In a general sense we can say people are being saved. And that is because we see the Gospel bearing fruit. But when it comes to any particular individual, the judgement is God's and God's alone.

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Partial List of Messianic Prophecies

One thing that Jews and Christians agree on is that a passage of Scripture can have more than one level of meaning. It can apply to the event being described as well as to some future event. Jews refer to this method of interpretation as “midrash aggadah.” Using this method, we can see many passages in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) that speak of the Messiah. When we compare them to New Testament accounts of Jesus' life, it becomes clear that Jesus is the promised Messiah. There are hundreds of prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) that speak of the Messiah. And Jesus fulfilled them all. Here are some of those passages:

1. The Messiah would be born in Bethlehem: “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days” (Micah 5:2).

Fulfilled: “And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn” (Luke 2:47).

2. He will be called Immanuel (God is with us): “Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14).

Fulfilled: “And the angel said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God’" (Luke 1:35).

3. The Messiah would be God and man: “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The Lord [Jehovah] is our righteousness"’ (Jeremiah 23:5-6).

Fulfilled: “In the beginning was the Word [Jesus], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.” (John 1:1-3).

4. A prophet would come to prepare the way for the Messiah: “Behold, I send my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming” (Malachi 3:1).

Fulfilled: “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light… John bore witness to him, and cried, this was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, for he was before me’” (John 1:6-8, 15).

5. The Messiah is God and He will reign from David’s throne forever: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and for evermore” (Jeremiah 9:6-8).

Fulfilled: “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:31-33).

6. The Messiah would heal the sick: “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy” (Isaiah 35:5-6).

Fulfilled: “And Jesus answered them, ‘Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them’” (Matthew 11:4-5).

7. The Messiah would enter Jerusalem hailed as a king riding on an ass: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass” (Zechariah 9:9).

Fulfilled: “The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the ass and the colt, and put their garments on them, and he sat thereon. Most of the crowd spread their garments on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him shouted, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!’ And when he entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, ‘Who is this?’ And the crowds said, ‘This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee’” (Matthew 21:6-11).

8. The Messiah will make a new covenant with His people: “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord” (Jeremiah 31:31-32).

9. Melchizedek offered up bread and wine. The Messiah would be like him: “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchiz′edek’” (Psalm 110:4).

Eight and nine fulfilled: Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:26-28).

10. The blood of the lamb prevented temporal death: “The blood shall be a sign for you, upon the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall fall upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt” (Exodus 12:13).

Fulfilled, the blood of the Lamb of God prevents eternal death: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:54).

11. A pure sacrifice will be made among the nations (Gentiles): “For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place, incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts” (Malachi 1:11).

Fulfilled: “And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19). As commanded by Christ, Catholics, to this day, continue to celebrate the last supper, which is a participation in the perfect offering or sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. This is done using bread and wine just as Jesus and Melchizedek had done.

12. The Messiah would be rejected by his own: “For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not” (Isaiah 53:2-3).

Fulfilled: “Again the high priest asked him, ‘Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?’ And Jesus said, ‘I am; and you will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.’ And the high priest tore his mantle, and said, ‘Why do we still need witnesses?

You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?' And they all condemned him as deserving death" (Mark 14:61-64).

13. God would provide a male lamb for sacrifice, a lamb that would have thorns on His head: "And Isaac said to his father Abraham, 'My father!' And he said, 'Here am I, my son.' He said, 'Behold, the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?' Abraham said, 'God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.' So they went both of them together… And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket [of thorns] by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son" (Genesis 22:7-8, 13).

14. The Messiah would be beaten and insulted: "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I hid not my face from shame and spitting" (Isaiah 50:6).

Thirteen and fourteen fulfilled: "And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe upon him, and plaiting a crown of thorns they put it on his head, and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him they mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' And they spat upon him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe, and put his own clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him" (Matthew 27:28-31).

Note: A ram is an adult male sheep. Jesus was an adult male. A lamb is a young sheep. There is no contradiction here. Jesus is called "The Lamb of God" because He submitted to his persecutors as a lamb would: "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter…" (Isaiah 53:7). And of course, we see the fulfillment of that in Matthew 27:12-14: "But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he made no answer. Then Pilate said to him, 'Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?' But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge." Rams are known for their aggressive behavior. And so the term "Ram of God," although proper in one sense, wouldn't convey the fact that Jesus chose to humble Himself.

15. Soldiers would gamble for His garments: "They divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots" (22:18).

Fulfilled: "And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots" (Matthew 27:35).

16. The Messiah would be challenged to save Himself: "All who see me mock at me, they make mouths at me, they wag their heads; 'He committed his cause to the Lord; let him deliver him, let him rescue him, for he delights in him!'" (Psalm 22:7-8).

Fulfilled: "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him; for he said, 'I am the Son of God'" (Matthew 27:42-43).

17. The Messiah would be pierced: "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of compassion and supplication, so that, when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a first-born" (Zechariah 12:10).

Fulfilled: "But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water" (John 19:33-34).

18. The sky would darken at the Messiah's death: "And on that day," says the Lord God, 'I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight'" (Amos 8:9).

Fulfilled: "Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour" (Matthew 27:45). Note: At the time Hebrews referred to the hours between sunrise and sunset as a day. Evidence of this is found in John 11:9 where Jesus says: "Are there not twelve hours in a day?" Therefore, the sixth hour would equal noon.

19. The Messiah would be resurrected from the dead: “For thou dost not give me up to Sheol, or let thy godly one see the Pit” (Psalm 16:10-11).

Fulfilled: “And he said to them, ‘Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him’” (Mark 16:6).

20. The Messiah would be put to death before the destruction of the temple: “And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off [killed], and shall have nothing; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary [temple]” (Daniel 9:26).

Fulfilled: Jesus was crucified in 30 or 33 A.D. The temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. If Jesus is not the Messiah who is?

We need to focus on prophecy number two for a moment as there is much more to the story. Christian bibles would word Isaiah 7:14 a little differently. Most would render the verse as: “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: the **virgin** shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.” A Hebrew Bible would refer to her as merely a **young woman**.

So why the difference? The Septuagint version of the Jewish Bible records it as “virgin.” And given the context, that would seem most accurate. The Hebrew word (Almah) can mean; a lass, damsel, maid, or virgin. Given the times, they all seem to point in the same direction; a young unmarried woman. And, in ancient times, that would mean a virgin.

Also, the young woman in question was to be a sign. What kind of sign would a pregnant young woman be? Most young women got married. And soon after they would be with child. It was quite the common occurrence. In fact, if a pregnancy did not occur, it was viewed as a curse (Luke 1:24-25). A real sign would have to be something unique, something that would stand out and draw your attention.

Think of it this way. A friend invites you to his new home in the country. You ask for directions and he says, in part: “Once you get off the highway you will see a sign. There will be a tree by the side of the road.” But once you get off the highway, you see thousands of trees by the side of the road. Obviously, what your friend called a sign, was no sign at all. But what if he said: “Once you get off the highway you will see a sign, there will be a 1927 Rolls Royce in the front yard.” Now that would be an unmistakable sign. Likewise, a pregnant virgin would be an unmistakable sign. And as we noted earlier; Mary was that virgin and Jesus was that son.

In the year 70 A.D. the Romans destroyed the temple in Jerusalem. That was just a few decades after Jesus was crucified. The temple was an important part of Jewish worship and identity. No temple meant no more sacrifices, no more Holy of Holies, no ark of the covenant, and no high priest. Thus, the Jews were no longer able to worship in the manner that God had instructed them. Could it be that God allowed the temple to go out of existence because it was no longer needed? We were told above that the Messiah would make a new covenant with His people (Jeremiah 31:31-32). And that would make the old one obsolete.

And then there is the historical evidence. Dr. James Allen noted in 1926:

Nineteen centuries have come and gone
And today Jesus is the central figure of the human race
And the leader of mankind’s progress
All the armies that have ever marched
All the navies that have ever sailed
All the parliaments that have ever sat
All the kings that have ever reigned put together
Have not affected the life of mankind on earth
As powerfully as that one solitary life

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How Old is Your Church?

Name of Church	Year Founded	Name of Founder
Catholic	33	Jesus Christ
Orthodox Churches	1439	Separated from Catholic Church
Lutheran	1517	Martin Luther
The Church of England	1534	King Henry VIII
Presbyterian	1560	John Knox
Congregationalist	1582	Robert Browne
Baptist	1605	John Smyth
Dutch Reformed	1628	Michaelis Jones
Quaker	1652	George Fox
Amish	1693	Jacob Amman
Methodist	1744	John & Charles Wesley
Unitarian	1774	Theophilus Lindley
Episcopal	1789	Samuel Seabury
Disciples of Christ	1804	A group of Presbyterian ministers
Mormon	1830	Joseph Smith Jr.
Seventh Day Adventist	1860	Ellen White
Salvation Army	1865	William Booth
Christian & Missionary Alliance	1865	Albert Simpson
Jehovah's Witnesses	1872	Charles Taze Russell
Christian Scientist	1879	Mary Baker Eddy
Assemblies of God	1914	A group of Pentecostal preachers
Foursquare Gospel	1918	Aimee Semple McPherson
United Pentecostal	1945	A merger of Oneness churches
United Church of Christ	1957	A union of different traditions
Calvary Chapel	1965	Chuck Smith

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Epilogue

I have heard people say: “It makes no difference what church we belong to as long as we all worship Jesus.” But a true follower of Jesus would accept everything He taught. And of course, Jesus would provide a means for us to know exactly what He taught. In John 16:13 He tells His apostles: “When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13).

We know that the Catholic Church is the Church established by Jesus because its teachings have remained unchanged for 2,000 years. The churches or denominations established by men are subject to change because men have a fallen nature. Jesus does not have that problem as He is God. Therefore, what He establishes cannot change. As the Scripture says: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

In an effort to justify their departure from authentic Christian doctrine, one church proudly proclaims: “God is still speaking.” That is true. God is always reaching out to us. But He never contradicts Himself. Perhaps they are unaware of Paul’s admonition: “So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter” (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

The Catholic Church offers us advantages not found elsewhere. Here are just a few of the more prominent ones:

1. Established by Jesus Christ – Thus, it is not capable of officially teaching error as Jesus promised to be with His Church until the end of time (Matthew 28:20).
2. Unchanging doctrines – Jesus entrusted His teachings to His apostles. If a teaching cannot find its roots in the apostolic age, it is probably false.
3. The Eucharist – In John 6:53 Jesus said: “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.” You can only receive a valid Eucharist in the Catholic and Orthodox churches as they are the only churches with a valid priesthood.
4. Prayers for the souls in Purgatory – Purgatory is a reality and those who are there need our assistance. That may seem like a small issue to those of us on earth. But it is a major issue for the souls who are there.
5. Sacrament of Confession – It is the normative way that Jesus forgives our sins and gives us the grace to avoid sin in the future (John 20:21-23).
6. Knowing that salvation can be lost – We know the Protestant doctrine of “Assurance of Salvation” is false because it contradicts Scripture (1 Corinthians 4:2-5, 1 Corinthians 9:25-27, Hebrews 6:4-8). On a practical level it gives people a false sense of security which causes many to be lax when it comes to repenting of serious sin. And repentance is necessary for forgiveness (Revelation 2:5). And forgiveness is necessary for salvation (Acts 26:18).
7. Prayers of the saints in heaven – Once in heaven we do not cease to be members of the body of Christ. And we do not cease caring about our brothers and sisters here on earth (Luke 15:7). And as the Bible records, those in heaven do pray for us (Matthew 18:10, Revelation 5:8, Revelation 8:3-4).

In short, the Catholic Church offers you the best chance for holiness and heaven. And that is because it gives us access to all that Christ has to offer. That some may not like certain Church doctrines does not mean that they are not true. God is always calling us to a higher standard. That we struggle with holiness is natural and to be expected. But God has not left us orphans (John 14:18). He is always there to help. As the Scripture says: “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). And: “I can do all things in Him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).

Doing “what works for us” may not work for God. Remember that God is perfect and we are not. When we insist on doing things our own way, it can prove disastrous. As the Scripture says: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death” (Proverbs 14:12). We must always remember that God is our “lawgiver and judge” (Isaiah 33:22). Hence, we should always strive to do His will, and not our own.

In his letter to the Galatians, the apostle Paul said:

> I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different Gospel – not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:6-9).

He does not mean a gospel, other than that which was preached by the various Protestant Reformers. Nor does he mean a gospel other than that which is preached by your favorite preacher. He means a gospel other than the one preached by the one Church established by Jesus Christ. And that Church, as we have shown, is the Catholic Church, "which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). Note that Paul said that those preaching another gospel should be "accursed." Strong words indeed. But they underscore the importance of getting the Gospel right.

It is not uncommon to hear people talk about accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior. But if Jesus is truly Lord, we must accept Him on His terms, and not our own. Jesus said to His apostles: "He who rejects you rejects me" (Luke 10:16). Thus, if we reject the one true Church established by Jesus, we reject Him.

The essays in this book are by no means comprehensive. They are designed for two purposes, to disarm the skeptic and to strengthen the faithful. In both cases they are meant to be a starting point. For a complete understanding of the faith, further study is needed. Thus, I would recommend that you seek out good resources that are loyal to the Magisterium. Some examples would be; Ignatius Press (Ignatius.com), Sophia Institute Press (https://sophiainstitute.com/), Catholic Answers (Catholic.com), Our Sunday Visitor (osv.com), and Tan Publishers (tanbooks.com).

Vivat Jesus