

# What Divides Catholics and Protestants?

## The Line of Demarcation: Different Sources of Authority

### I. Introduction

#### A. Why do a series on what divides Roman Catholicism (RC) and Biblical Christianity?

1. There has been an ecumenical movement to unite RC and protestants (cf. Gal 1:6-9, 2:15-16).
2. Pastors must protect the flock from false doctrine (Acts 20:28-30).
3. We need to be equipped to reach RC neighbors with the true gospel.

#### B. Caveats: What we are not trying to do

1. Not trying to be disagreeable for the sake of being disagreeable; not motivated by pride.
2. Not setting up strawman arguments.
3. Not saying there aren't genuine believers in the RC church (but it is in spite of the Church's teaching).

### II. Different Source(s) of Authoritative Truth

#### A. The Roman Catholic sources of infallible authority: A three-legged stool

1. **Bible**<sup>1</sup>
2. **Tradition:** The oral teachings of Jesus to his Apostles that were not written in Scripture. Teachings from the past church leaders.

*"Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence."*<sup>2</sup>

3. **Magisterium:** The teaching office of the Roman Catholic Church and consists of the pope together with the bishops in communion with him.

*"[The] meaning of holy scripture must be held to be the true one, which holy mother church held and holds, since it is her right to judge of the true meaning and interpretation of holy scripture. In consequence, it is not permissible for anyone to interpret holy scripture in a sense contrary to this, or indeed against the unanimous consent of the fathers."*<sup>3</sup>

#### B. Biblical Christianity's source of authority: The Bible alone

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<sup>1</sup> Vatican I, Session 3 (April 24, 1870), Chapter 2, "On Revelation," 7.

<sup>2</sup> Vatican II, Dei Verbum, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Vatican I, Session 3, Chapter 2, "On Revelation," 8 & 9

### III. Problems with the Roman Catholic Sources of Authority

#### A. Problems with the RC view of the Bible.

1. They include the Apocrypha (extra books)<sup>4</sup>
2. Should the Apocrypha be considered part of the Old Testament canon?
  - a. *Historically* – the Jews didn't consider it canon (see Josephus *Against Apion* 1.37-43)
  - b. *Jesus* didn't indicate it was part of the canon (Luke 11:49-51)<sup>5</sup>
  - c. The Roman Catholic church did not officially declare them as part of their canon until 1546 at the council of Trent.
  - d. The Apocrypha contains doctrines that do not fit biblical teaching (indulgences/purgatory).

#### B. Problems with RC view of Tradition as Authority

1. RC support for saying tradition is an equal (or greater) authority to Scripture (Acts 2:42).
2. The problem for RC view is that Jesus explicitly warns against human traditions as authoritative (Mark 7:5-9). Tradition is not always bad but must be checked against the authority of Scripture (Acts 17:11).

#### C. Problems with the RC authority of the Magisterium

1. RC support for it (1 Tim. 3:14-15)
2. But biblically it doesn't work when the magisterium has taught false doctrine (1 Tim. 4:1-2)
3. There were evil, wrong, and disagreeing popes.
  - a. A Catholic response is they were mortal men and made mistakes. Even Peter messed up.<sup>6</sup>
  - b. True, but that doesn't line up with the claims they make.
  - c. They claim they are the vicar of Christ (the supreme earthly representative of Jesus who is worthy of honor) and the only ones who teach authoritatively what the Bible means.

### IV. Conclusion: Sola Scriptura or Scripture Plus Tradition, Does It Matter?

#### A. This is the initial point of divergence, but the trajectory shift is far reaching.

#### B. Martin Luther saw this issue clearly and put his life on the line for it:

*Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me. Amen."*  
(Martin Luther, at the Diet of Worms, April 18, 1521)

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<sup>4</sup> Vatican I, Session 3, Chapter 2, "On Revelation," 6. The "old Latin Vulgate" includes the Apocrypha.

<sup>5</sup> Chronologically, Uriah is the *last* prophet killed (Jer. 26:20-23). So, Zechariah is *not* the last martyr in the OT *chronologically*, but he is the last mentioned *canonically* in the Hebrew OT canon order. Thus, Jesus is describing the canon indirectly here.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.catholic.com/video/what-about-the-bad-popes>.