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The Word of God Reveals the True Church

The Catholic-Protestant debate has continued for centuries since the time of the milestone Protestant Reformation. Often this debate becomes very heated and emotional because major issues are involved. It is important to make a few points clear.

No matter which side is right, a true Christian is required by Jesus Christ to respect and love others, even his enemies. In fact, according to Christ, one's ability to do this is proof that he or she is really a true child of God (Matthew 5:44). We are also required by God to put away "all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking," and to "be kind one to another" (Ephesians 4:32). There is no excuse for slander, nor for the manifestation of "any root of bitterness" (Hebrews 12:15). Jesus Christ, our example, even prayed for his persecutors as He hung upon the cross. Truth has nothing to hide. It can afford to be fair, and to look at all the evidence. Those who resort to sarcasm and mockery do not strengthen their position before any intelligent person.

In an age of increasing inter-faith cooperation, many might inquire - Why bring up these issues at all? Why not just put the past behind us, bury our differences, and come together in Christian love? This is a fair question that should be answered. First of all, as I have already mentioned, Christians should love others no matter what. And it's true, Jesus Christ Himself does want His children to be united. In one of His last prayers before His death, Jesus prayed that we "may be made perfect in one" (John 17:23). Nevertheless, there is something else in this prayer that must not be overlooked. Jesus also said, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (vs. 17). Thus Christ not only wants unity, but also sanctification through the truth. He defines "the truth" as God's "word."

In our desire for unity, we cannot afford to sacrifice truth. The Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of truth" (John 16:12). God is "the God of truth" (Isaiah 65:16). Christians are to "obey the truth" (Gal. 3:1) and to be "purified" through "the truth" (1 Peter 1:22). We are warned that many "will turn their eyes away from the truth, and be turned to fables" (2 Tim.4:4). And finally, we are even told that many will "perish because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (2 Thess. 2:10). Thus truth is a life and death matter.

It is no secret that the Roman Catholic Church claims to be the true Church of Jesus Christ. She has definite reasons for believing this. She also claims that the Pope is the legitimate Head of Christianity, under Jesus Christ. In spite of ecumenical developments, RCC (For the remainder of this article the abbreviation "RCC" will be used for "Roman Catholic Church") has not relinquished these claims. The Vatican today is one of the most powerful organizations on earth, and the Pope is also one of the world's most influential individuals.

The purpose of this article is to examine these claims in the light of "the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). It hopes to be fair, honest, and as objective as possible. Its primary goal is to help its readers "obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Tim. 2:10).

There are many differences between Protestants and Catholics. These differences are important, for they affect our life, faith and salvation. In this article, the following key issues will be examined: The Supremacy of Scripture; The Place of Peter; The Place of Mary; Confession to Priests; and the Sacrifice of the Mass.

1) The Supremacy of Scripture: Paul wrote, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly equipped for every good work. I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! ... For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned to fables." 2 Tim. 3:15,16; 4:1,3,4. Here we are told that the Scripture defines doctrine, not the Church. The Scripture is to "correct" us when we stray. Through the Scriptures we can be "perfect." In the light of Christ's return, we are to "Preach the word!" not the doctrines of men. Paul said many will turn from the truth to fables. How can we tell what is "truth" and what is a "fable"? By the Word. Jesus wants to "cleanse [the church] with the washing of water by the word." Eph. 5:26.

2) The Place of Peter: The RCC declares that God's Church is "built on Peter," and that "Peter will remain the unshakable rock of the Church." Catechism of the Catholic Church, p. 141. (1994). Is this the truth or a fable? How can we find out? By the Word. The primary passage used to support The RCC's idea is Mat. 16:18. The context reveals that Peter acknowledged who Jesus Himself was - the Christ (vs. 16). Then Jesus said, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock will I build My church" (vs. 18). Rome says Jesus meant that Peter was the Rock, yet Christ did not say this. He didn't say, "You are Peter, and on you I will build my church." Rather, He said, "You are Peter, and on this rock ..." Protestants believe "this rock" is Jesus Christ Himself, not Peter. The Bible says, "...that Rock was Christ." 1 Cor. 10:4. David said, "The Lord is my Rock." Psalm 18:2. "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation ..." 1 Cor. 3:11,12. Thus the Word says we should build on Christ, not Peter.

The RCC says Peter was the first Pope - that is, Number 1 among the apostles. Yet Peter himself said he was only "a fellow elder." 1 Peter 5:1. Peter would not let anyone bow down at his feet in reverence (Acts 10:25,26). Paul rebuked Peter (Gal. 2:11). James led the Jerusalem council, not Peter (Acts 15:13,19). If Peter was the first Pope, and God intended His church to believe this, then why didn't Paul mention Peter even one time in his letter to the Church of Rome? Paul's epistle to the Romans never mentions his name. This is highly significant. If we stick to the Word, we do not find the supremacy of Peter.

3) The Place of Mary: Mary was the chosen vessel through whom Christ was born. Mat. 1:20-23. The angel Gabriel said she was "highly favored," and "blessed among women." Luke 1:28. When Jesus grew up, He did honor his mother in the Gospels, but He did not exalt Mary above other women. In fact, Jesus even said, "For whoever does the will of

My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother." Mat. 12:50. Thus anyone who does God's will is just like His mother. Outside the Gospels, we discover that the name of Mary is hardly mentioned in the rest of the New Testament! Peter, who was supposedly the first Pope, didn't say a word about Mary in his letters. And Paul, in his letter to the Romans, mentions the name of Mary only once (Romans 16:6), yet he was probably not speaking about the mother of Jesus. There is absolutely no reference to Mary in any of his other epistles, which were practical letters written to the early churches. No Christian was taught in the New Testament to say a prayer to Mary. The RCC says that Mary now has a "saving office" that can bring us "the gifts of eternal salvation," and that she carries "the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix." Catechism of the Catholic Church, p. 252. Yet not only are these titles not applied to Mary in the Bible, they are also contrary to the Word, which says, "There is one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus." 1 Tim. 2:5.

4) Confession to Priests: The RCC says we should confess our sins to priests, yet the Word doesn't teach this. James wrote, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed." James 5:16 (KJV). This is not the same as confessing sins to a priest, but rather means that we should confess our faults to each other, and pray for each other. David wrote, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, and You forgave the iniquity of my sin." Ps. 32:5. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9. Thus we should confess our sins to God who alone can forgive. The practice of confessing ones sins to another sinner is not only degrading to the confessor, but harmful to the hearer. Paul said "it is shameful even to speak" of certain sins. Eph. 5:12. If we sin against someone, we should make it right with them, but otherwise, we should not confess our sins to another sinner. If we do, we are planting the seeds of evil in another mind. Paul wrote, "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers." Eph. 4:29. If we confess our sins to a priest, we are disobeying this Word, and will only impart evil "to the hearers." We should confess our sins to Jesus Christ! He can handle it, and He will forgive us.

5) The Sacrifice of the Mass: The RCC says that when her priests break the communion bread, this is an actual reenactment of the very Sacrifice of Jesus Christ. "The Mass is an unbloody re-enactment of the sacrifice of Calvary." The Faith of Millions: The Credentials of the Catholic Church, by Rev. John A. O'Brien. p. 355 (1955). In the Mass, "Christ Is Sacrificed Again." Ibid. 354. Is this truth or a fable? How can we find out? By the Word. The book of Hebrews is clear. Paul wrote about "the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Heb. 10:10. "But this Man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God" (vs. 12). "For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are being sanctified" (vs. 14). Thus the Bible is clear. There is only one Sacrifice, and it occurred on the cross. Christians should put their total faith in what Jesus has already done two thousand years ago. Any teaching about another sacrifice is really a denial of what Jesus Christ has already done "once for all" (Heb. 10:10) and represents a diversion away from Christ's love and truth.

In conclusion: Upon closer examination of the claims of the Roman Catholic Church that they are the "True Church of Jesus Christ," it can be concluded by Biblical examination that the RCC has not upheld the Word of God as the only authority as it relates to the Christian Church. The Word of God will always stand firm to the end as a beacon of Truth. The RCC has by and large, substituted Scriptural authority with its own

authority, much of the time. It is of the utmost importance that we understand God has His people in every church, but we must also understand that a system that is not wholly based on the Word of God is not the true representative of the church of God.