

# THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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## Roman Catholicism's Recent Claim That It Is the True Church

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On June 29, 2007, the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a brief document containing its "responses" to five questions. The document is titled "Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine of the Church." While the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued it under the name of William Cardinal Levada, Prefect of the Congregation, Pope Benedict XVI ratified, confirmed, and ordered its publication. It has been translated into Latin, Italian, French, English, German, Spanish, Portuguese, and Polish. The five questions and their responses (somewhat abbreviated) are as follows:

### **1. Did the Second Vatican Council change the Catholic doctrine on the Church?**

The Response declares that the Second Vatican Council "neither changed nor intended to change this doctrine, rather it developed, deepened and more fully explained it."

### **2. What is the meaning of the affirmation that the Church of Christ subsists in the [Roman] Catholic Church?**

The Response declares that Christ established only one church that "subsists in the [Roman] Catholic Church, governed by the successor of Peter and the Bishops in communion with him."

### **3. Why was the expression "*subsists in*" adopted instead of the simple "*is*"?**

The Response declares that while it "indicates the full identity of the Church of Christ with the [Roman] Catholic Church," it "brings out more clearly the fact that there are 'numerous elements of sanctification and of truth' which are found outside her structure" in "separated churches and Communities."

### **4. Why does the Second Vatican Council use the term "Church" in reference to the oriental [Greek and**

### **Russian] Churches separated from full communion with the [Roman] Catholic Church?**

The Response declares that "the Council wanted to adopt the traditional use of the term" and offers this explanation: "Because these Churches, although separated, have true sacraments, and, above all — because of the apostolic succession — the priesthood and the Eucharist, by means of which they remain linked to us by very close bonds," they "merit the title of 'particular or local Churches,' and are called sister Churches of the [Roman] Catholic Churches." The response also declares, however, that because these "venerable Christian communities" are not under the Bishop of Rome they "lack something in their condition as particular churches."

### **5. Why do the texts of the Council and those of the Magisterium since the Council not use the title of "church" with regard to those Christian Communities born out of the Reformation of the sixteenth century?**

The Response declares that "these Communities do not enjoy apostolic succession in the sacrament of [priestly] Orders, and are, therefore, deprived of a constitutive element of the Church. These ecclesial Communities which, specifically because of the absence of the sacramental priesthood, have not preserved the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic Mystery, cannot...be called 'Churches' in the proper sense."

In concert with this deliverance, on July 10, 2007, some eleven days later, Benedict XVI declared that churches outside of the Roman Catholic Church are "wounded" churches because they are not in communion with the Roman papacy. While the Roman Church regards the Orthodox churches as "true" churches they nevertheless suffer one wound — they do not submit to the primacy of the pope. But the "wound [of Protestant communities] is still more profound" because they have no sacramental priesthood and thus no true Eucharist.

The candor here is refreshingly abnormal for Rome; all too often its deliverances are conundrums wrapped in obfuscations. So I am grateful that Ratzinger/Benedict XVI has drawn the lines much more clearly than did his recent predecessors. By this Response and Benedict XVI's statement Rome denies that Protestant churches have the right to call themselves churches, stating that at best they are "ecclesial Communities." (By definition, "ecclesial" means "churchly," so Rome winds up doing what it says should not be done.) Of course, there is nothing new here except the terminology. Rome has claimed since the Middle Ages that it is the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church." Why? Because of the presence within it of the Roman papacy, its claim to apostolic succession, and its priestly sacerdotalism. This is the defining issue for Rome.

What should Biblical Protestants say to this? They should say precisely what Protestantism has always said: It is not enough to claim to be the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church." After all, both Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses claim to be the true church. But any church that would claim to be such must exhibit the marks of the true church, which are not papal apostolic succession and the Roman Catholic priesthood but rather (1) the true and accurate proclamation of the written Word of God; (2) the proper administration of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper; and (3) the faithful exercise of church discipline. Judged by these criteria the Roman Catholic Church is "not right on the papacy, not right on the sacraments, not right on the priesthood, not right on the Gospel, not right on the church."<sup>1</sup>

*In sum, the Roman Catholic Church is no church at all!*

This may be seen from the following syllogism: Because the heart of the Gospel is Paul's doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ's preceptive and penal work, the Protestant will argue his position as follows:

*Major premise:* Where there is no doctrine of justification by faith alone there is no church. (This premise is the defining soteric issue for Protestants; see *Galatians* 1:13 in which Paul contrasts "Judaism" where there was no doctrine of justification by faith alone with the "church of God.")

*Minor premise:* There is no doctrine of justification by faith alone in the Roman Catholic Church. (See the dogmatic deliverances of the Council of Trent.)

*Conclusion:* Therefore, the Roman Catholic Church is no church.

Because the Roman Catholic Church officially and formally abandoned the one true Gospel of justification by faith alone at its counter-Reformation Council of Trent in the 1540s, it is, in two words, *irreformably apostate*. Indeed, as *Westminster Confession of Faith*, XXV, vi declares:

There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ: nor can the pope of Rome in any sense be the head thereof; but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalts himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God.

Therefore, Protestants should declare just as candidly and publicly, as does Rome, and in as many languages as this deliverance, that the Roman Catholic Church is no true church and all the hankering after union with Rome on the part of some professing Protestants is a sign of either their gross ignorance or their own rank apostasy. So Protestants should call this worldwide "Community" what it is: the Roman Catholic Vatican State (Vatican for short). But it is undeserving of the name "church." For that matter, it is undeserving of the name "Christian."

We should take seriously the insights of J. C. Ryle (1816-1900), first Bishop of Liverpool in the Church of England and a rare man in his time. Preacher of the Biblical Gospel, champion of Evangelicalism, a Christian of exceptional fortitude with deep insight into Holy Scripture and exceptional writing skills, he zealously believed that "there is no doctrine about which we ought to be so jealous as justification by faith without the deeds of the law." What did Ryle think of Roman Catholicism?

...the absence [in it] of the doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ's work alone accounts for half the errors of the Roman Catholic Church. The beginning of half the unscriptural doctrines of Popery may be traced up to rejection of justification by faith. No Romish teacher, if he is faithful to his church, can say to the anxious sinner, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." He cannot do it without additions and explanations, which completely destroy the good news. He dare not give the Gospel medicine without adding something which destroys its efficacy and neutralizes its power. Purgatory, penance, priestly absolution, the intercession of saints, the worship of the Virgin, and many other man-made services of Popery, all spring from this source. They are all rotten props to support weary consciences. But they are rendered necessary by [Rome's] denial of justification by faith.

Ryle concluded:

Romanism in perfection is a gigantic system of church-worship, sacrament-worship, Mary-worship, saint-worship, image-worship, relic-worship, and priest-worship.... it is, in one word, a *huge organized idolatry*.<sup>2</sup>

In accordance with Ryle's insights we must insist again that the Gospel is neither the bad news that we must "keep the golden rule" in order to go to Heaven, for this is simply sheer legalism. Nor is it the bad news that one must "keep the law of God" in order to be saved, for this no one can ever do perfectly and again this is simply legalism. Nor is it the bad news that one must both believe in Christ and

<sup>1</sup> R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "No, I'm not offended," *Baptist Press*, SBC, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Warnings to the Churches*, Banner of Truth, 1992, 158 (emphasis in the original).

also keep the law in order to be saved, for this mixture of truth and destructive error is a lethal potion. The belief that in addition to faith in Christ one must also keep the law in order to be saved actually renders Christ's work of no effect (*Galatians* 5:2), alienates one from Christ (*Galatians* 5:4), and abolishes the offense of the cross (*Galatians* 5:11). Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians to counteract this very idea. He who so believes, writes Paul, is trusting in "another gospel that is no gospel at all" (*Galatians* 1:7). Nor is the Gospel Rome's variation on this bad news that in addition to faith in Christ one must also look to Mary's "pristine righteousness," to the supererogatory righteousness of Rome's thousand other gods and intercessors, to one's own meritorious works of righteousness, and to one's expiation of his own sins in purgatory in order to be saved. The soul of him who so believes is in eternal peril, because such belief is not the "good news" of the true Gospel but is "another gospel that is no gospel." Such false gospels must be roundly rejected and they *will* be when one comes to understand and believe what the true Gospel is.

Without fear of contradiction we Protestants declare that the Biblical Gospel is the good news that what sinners can never do for themselves — namely, achieve right standing with God and thereby escape divine judgment by unaided human effort — Jesus Christ has done by his preceptive and penal obedience for his people, and that those who place their trust in him will receive his saving benefits. The Gospel is by definition this "good news" — good news that Paul defines precisely in terms of the doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ's saving work apart from works of law. And we are Protestants precisely because we take seriously not only the big words of Scripture such as predestination, sanctification, propitiation, and reconciliation, but also the little words as well, specifically, the little word "one" from which the *solus* in *solus Christus* is derived and which by implication carries along with it the *sola* of *sola gratia* and *sola fide*, the word "one" that is found in the Pauline phrases: "the *one* man Jesus Christ" (*Romans* 5:15), "through the *one*, Jesus Christ" (*Romans* 5:17), "through *one* act of righteousness" (*Romans* 5:18), "through the obedience of the *one*" (*Romans* 5:19), and "there is...*one* mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (*1 Timothy* 2:5). We must add to the obedient work of this *one* man *nothing* — neither our pretentious "works of righteousness" that are as filthy rags (*Titus* 3:5; see *Isaiah* 64:6), nor the works of anyone else.

*Jesus paid it all;*  
*All to him I owe.*  
Sin had left a crimson stain;  
He washed it white as snow.

Christ does not need help, certainly not from sinners, to save those for whom he died. No, he actually and fully redeemed all those for whom he died. *He did it all*, and it is finished. He accomplished full and free salvation for those

who trust him by his saving work. And I have the high and enviable privilege of stating again the good news of Christ's law-free Gospel. Here it is expressed in the fragile, simple words of J. Proctor's children's hymn:

Nothing either great or small,  
Nothing, sinner, no;  
Jesus did it, did it all,  
Long, long ago.

"It is finished!" Yes, indeed,  
Finished, ev'ry jot;  
Sinner, this is all you need —  
Tell me, is it not?

When he, from his lofty throne,  
Stooped to do and die,  
Everything was fully done,  
Hearken to his cry.

Weary, working, burdened one,  
Wherefore toil you so?  
Cease your doing; all was done  
Long, long ago.

Till to Jesus' work you cling  
By a simple faith,  
"Doing" is a deadly thing,  
"Doing" ends in death.

Cast your deadly "doing" down,  
Down at Jesus' feet;  
Stand in him, in him alone,  
Gloriously complete!

All the ordinary religions of the world say, "Do and you shall live." Biblical Christianity alone says, "Live and then you shall do."

All the ordinary religions of the world say, "Do and you shall be saved." Biblical Christianity alone says, "Be saved and then you shall do."

All the ordinary religions of the world, including many major denominations within professing Christendom, including the Vatican State, say, "Something in my hands I bring." Biblical Christianity alone says: "Nothing in my hands I bring; simply to thy cross I cling."

I would urge *all* of you reading this brief article once again to examine yourselves with respect to whether you are trusting solely in the preceptive and penal obedience of the only righteous One, Jesus Christ, for your forgiveness and your needed righteousness before God. You must trust *him* if you would be justified, for it is by faith alone in Christ's obedient doing and dying that sinners are

justified freely before the high tribunal of Heaven. Jesus is enough; the sinner needs no one else to save him.

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## Papal Power

The Trinity Foundation has just published the third edition of Henry T. Hudson's *Papal Power: Its Origins and Development*. Running over 200 pages, the third edition of *Papal Power* is updated, fully indexed (unlike the previous editions), and wrapped in an attractive new cover. It is available from The Foundation for \$12.95, plus shipping. You can order at our website, [www.trinityfoundation.org](http://www.trinityfoundation.org), by mail: POB 68, Unicoi, Tennessee 37692; by fax, 423.743.2005; or by calling us at 423.743.0199. We accept MasterCard and VISA.

This is Dr. Robbins' Preface to Dr. Hudson's book:

The twentieth century saw the emergence of some of the most bloody totalitarian regimes of the second millennium after Christ: the Nazi regime in Germany, which lasted only 12 years but has received the most attention from historians; the Leninist regime in the Soviet Union, which lasted 72 years, and its deepest secrets are still unknown and are now being hidden by a resurgent secret police state; the Maoist regime in China, which has now remained in power for nearly 60 years and has probably killed more people than the Hitler and Lenin regimes together. Then there are the lesser dictatorships such as Cuba, Cambodia, the Congo, Sudan, and Vietnam. These regimes did not suddenly arise from a vacuum, nor did they spring full-grown from the brow of Zeus. They had roots – political, religious, and ideological roots – that connect them to earlier and even more profound forms of totalitarianism.

What the historians of totalitarianism in the twentieth century have largely missed is the connections between the modern regimes and a very ancient institution, the Roman Catholic Church-State, which has existed for centuries – by far the longest surviving, the most intellectually sophisticated, and the most globally dispersed form of totalitarianism. They missed this connection because the twentieth century historians were largely secularists who did not believe that theology plays any major role in modern world affairs. Perhaps, they thought, theology was a major factor in world affairs a thousand years ago, but since we have all become Enlightened, it plays little or no role, and it can be safely ignored. This enormous blind spot in their thinking has caused modern historians to miss the many connections between Romanism and modern totalitarianism.

Long before the early nineteenth-century German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel, who is frequently credited or blamed for the emergence of modern totalitarianism, said that the State is God walking on Earth, the popes had

claimed that the Roman Church, as represented by the pope, was God walking on Earth. When the pope spoke, God was speaking. When the pope spoke, he was infallible. When the pope spoke, all men, not just priests or Roman Catholics, owed instant and entire obedience.

No person or institution has ever made more arrogant claims than this. Hitler claimed to speak for *das Volk*; Lenin claimed to speak for the People, but the popes have claimed to speak for God. They are the "Supreme Pontiffs," the bridges between Heaven and Earth. Their rule is absolute and complete. They not only have power over the living, but over the dead as well, remitting and imposing punishment on them in this life and the next.

Henry Hudson's monograph on the origins and development of papal power fills a gap in modern historiography and is an excellent introduction to a study of the connections between Romanist and modern totalitarianism. He is not laboring under the delusion of so many historians that theology does not influence world affairs. He recognizes that ideas rule the world, and that the most potent ideas are and will always be theological ideas, for they concern the most important questions that human beings can ask.

## Christian Worldview Essay Contest

The winners of the 2007 Christian Worldview Essay Contest are Alex Woehr of Greenville, South Carolina, who received First Prize and \$3,000 for his essay "How Christian Theism Relates to Education." Alex is a student at the Bob Jones University.

The Second Prize and \$2,000 were awarded to Jimmy Li of Los Angeles for his essay "Clark's *Christian Philosophy of Education* for Today." Jimmy is a Marine veteran of the Iraq war and a student at UCLA.

The Third Prize and \$1,000 were won by Jeremy Larson of Charleston, South Carolina, for his essay "Gordon Clark's Successful Essay on Christian Education." Jeremy teaches high school English in a Christian school in Charleston.

Please visit our website, [www.trinityfoundation.org](http://www.trinityfoundation.org), to read excerpts from the winning essays, learn more about the winners, and read about the 2008 Essay Contest, which is now underway. The topic book for this year's Contest is *Freedom and Capitalism* by John W. Robbins. Copies of the book, which retails for \$29.95, are available to those who intend to enter the Contest for \$15 postpaid to any U. S. address. The Contest is open to young people between the ages of 17 and 23. The complete Contest rules are posted at our website.

## Free Book

During January 2008, we are giving away one copy of our refutation of Douglas Wilson's heretical theology, *Not Reformed at All*, to the first 500 people in the U. S. who write to request it. The book and postage are free.