

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. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

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The Battle over the Identity of the Catholic Church at the Time of the Reformation and Afterwards (AD 1517 – 1820) Part 1

by Ronald N. Cooke

Editor's Note: This Review is excerpted from Dr. Cooke's Tract Twenty by the same title in his series on A Protestant View of Church History. To obtain any or all of the Tracts in the series, write to Dr. Ronald Cooke, 4927 E. Lee Hwy, Max Meadows, VA 24360.

The Protestants explained the fact that their doctrinal affiliations lay with those who had been condemned by the medieval church, such as Wycliffe and Huss, and armed themselves with a defense against catholic charges of innovation and particularity. The visible church, far from being an infallible custodian of the truth, was itself a battlefield between the children of light and the children of darkness. – D. M. Loades, lecturer in Modern History at the University of Durham

...As between the world and the kingdom of Christ there is a continual repugnance, so between the two parts of this visible church aforesaid groweth great variance and mortal persecution, insomuch that sometimes the true church of Christ hath no greater enemies than those of its own profession and company. – John Fox, the Martyrologist

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. You shall know them by their fruits. (Matthew 7:15) – The Lord Jesus Christ

(Are there any false prophets today coming to the church as sheep and yet are wolves? Or have the wolves all disappeared and no longer exist?)

All the efforts of the Roman Catholic Church since (the Reformation) have been directed to the work of Counter-Reformation—to re-establish the political and social order of pre-Reformation times.... The political and social order that resulted from the Reformation, both in Europe and America, is regarded by the Roman Catholic Church as pagan and anti-Christian. – L. H. Lehmann, converted Roman Catholic priest

Introduction: God's War

One of the greatest proofs of the almost total ignorance of a knowledge of church history is the way the word *catholic* is used today not only by the secular news media, not only by the Papal Dominion, not only by the ecumenical "non-Catholics," but even by those who purport to be defending the truth and contending for the faith. There is nothing that demonstrates the victory of the Papal Dominion in America today more than the use of the word "catholic" to describe the religion of the Papacy.

The ecclesiastical field has now been conceded to the popes of Rome and their religion. The Reformers, the Puritans, and the Protestants who followed them did *not* concede the ecclesiastical field to the popes of Rome and their false religion. They set forth in their teachings and in their confessions of faith what the true Catholic Church was and is. Also to avoid any possible confusion with the Papal Dominion, they also set forth what this great worldwide false religion was and is. They did not pussyfoot around as the Tractarians, and the modern men who follow the Tractarians, do. They defended with Scriptural

arguments their teaching about the Body of Christ, the Catholic Church on Earth, and clearly contrasted the Catholic Church with the Papal Dominion of Antichrist.

As we have already seen, the hermeneutical war of the Reformation was real then; it is still real today. The Reformation was not a study in irenics; it was a profound, long-drawn-out, polemical and hermeneutical struggle. Indeed, it can be said that the Reformation was *total* exegetical warfare. Millions of those who followed the hermeneutics of the Reformers were killed in sieges, wars, and massacres. Yet the reason for the devil and his antichristian forces launching such lethal persecution against those who followed the Reformers was basically *hermeneutical*. It was because they sought to build their church on an exegesis of Scripture *alone!* This is what the Protestant Reformation was all about: *the exegesis of Holy Scripture!*

The *exegesis* of Scripture brought to the world the *identity of the true* Christian Church, the identity of the Head of that Catholic Universal Body of Christ, and the identity of the great enemy of Christ and His Church. Many of the great truths that the Protestant Reformers and the Puritans brought to light have since been lost. First, through the efforts of the Jesuits; then, through the efforts of the Tractarians; and now, through the efforts of those engaged in the irenic dialogues of the ecumenical movement.

Ignorance is a great evil. The Lord Jesus Christ said, “You shall know the truth; and the truth shall make you free” (*John* 8:32). Therefore where the truth is not known the worse forms of slavery and tyranny rule. Men have been conscious of the ignorance of truth in the church. For where the ignorance of the Gospel reigns, there the god of this age is triumphant. For he seeks to blind the *minds* of those that believe not the Gospel; to keep that glorious message of truth from shining into their ignorant hearts and minds.

Even some men, enveloped in the darkness of medieval religion, could see the gross ignorance of their times. Archbishop Peckham, in his *Constitutions* of AD 1281, dwelt on the “illiteracy of the clergy” of his times and the evils arising from it. He stated, “The ignorance of priests precipitates the people into the pit of error; and the folly of boorishness of clerks, who

are commanded to instruct the minds of the faithful in the catholic faith, sometimes *increases error* rather than doctrine.”

Shortly after, Bishop Quivil of Exeter, in 1287, said, “Since ignorance was the mother of all errors and ought above all to be shunned by priests, whose office consisted in preaching and teaching, each archdeacon should inquire which vicars, rectors, or priests were ‘enormously illiterate’ and report them.”

The degree of ignorance at this time can be seen by the criteria used to show what “enormous illiteracy” meant. It meant the inability “to say by heart the commandments, seven sins, seven sacraments, and the creed.” This meant that you were not considered “enormously illiterate” if you could repeat this meager amount of knowledge. It also meant that the ignorance of the Gospel was not even mentioned. Surely, according to the Bible, the ignorance of God’s Word and the glorious Gospel revealed there, is the worst ignorance of all!

Amid the plethora of electronic devices and the information tsunami of the Internet there are still three great “ignorances” in North America today. 1. The ignorance of God’s inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word. 2. The ignorance of the great doctrines, and a systematic theology built upon those doctrines, derived from the Word of God. 3. The ignorance of the titanic struggle of the Protestant Reformers and those who followed them to maintain these great truths in the face of a determined demonic onslaught from hell, that was out to eradicate such truths from the minds of men. Indeed, they sailed through very bloody seas to maintain and to spread the glorious doctrines of redeeming grace to lost sinners everywhere.

As the old archbishop said, ignorance “increases error.” It certainly can never *diminish* error or overcome error. Only the truth, known and taught, can ever diminish or overcome error.

The true identity of the Christian Church is not even known today by writers who repudiate the Papal Dominion. This disturbing fact highlights the loss of the identity of the true Catholic Church, that is present everywhere today.

The whole effort to write a Protestant view of Church history, has been, still is, and will continue to be, to demonstrate that the *Papal Dominion has never been the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ, the Catholic-universal Church on Earth; that it is not now the Catholic Church on Earth; and that it will never be the Catholic Church on Earth!*

During the Dark Ages the true Catholic Church existed here and there where the persecuting evil system of the Papal Dominion could not extirpate it. It was mainly an underground church, just as it is in many countries of the world today.

These Dissenters *never* conceded that what they called the Great Wild Beast of the Apocalypse manifesting itself in the garb of the Papal Dominion, that was so grievously persecuting God's elect, was the Catholic-Universal-Body of Christ on Earth. They regarded it as the Mystery of Iniquity, which was present when Paul wrote his *Epistle to the Thessalonians*, and which had developed into the great falling away from the truth, and which then manifested itself in history, in the form of the antichristian Papal Dominion.

Ronald Cooke
May 8, 2016

The Identity of the Catholic Church Based upon the Protestant Reformation

One of the *main* teachings that came out of the hermeneutics of the Reformers was the truth that the Papal Dominion was not the Catholic Church. All the Reformers taught that the Papal Dominion was the Antichrist.

Today, the term *Catholic Church* is now applied indiscriminately by the news-media to the Papal religion ruled by the pope of Rome. He is called repeatedly "the Head of the Catholic Church." It is obvious that the word *catholic* needs examination; for almost everyone misconstrues its meaning today.

When teaching students about the "Catholic Epistles," strange looks come upon their faces. Indeed, some churches that still recite the Apostles' Creed have changed the word "catholic" to "Christian." "We believe in the Holy Christian Church." They do not repeat the Creed as it has been repeated for

generations: "We believe in the holy catholic Church." This shows how the ecclesiastical field has now been almost universally conceded to the emissaries of the Papal Dominion.

True Protestants rejoice with the Protestant Reformers and those who followed them and marvel at their grace and power in *never* conceding the ecclesiastical, soteriological, eschatological, and indeed the historical field, to the Jesuits of Rome. They stayed on these exegetical battlefields, wielded the sword of the Spirit, waged a good hermeneutical warfare, and remained at their posts through some of the worst times of church history to win their theological war. Their weapons were not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.

Up until Vatican II, the Papal Dominion called itself the Roman Catholic Church. After Vatican II the word *Roman* was dropped, and the pope and his Papal Dominion sought to steal the name of the true church of God's elect and give it to their false religion.

Since then the term *Catholic Church* has become synonymous with the Papal Dominion; and the antichristian pope is now everywhere addressed as the head of the Catholic Church. It was a masterstroke of the devil to try to take the name of the true Body of Christ, dethrone Christ as the true Head of His universal Church, the home of God's elect, and give it all to Antichrist.

The efforts of the Protestant Reformers and the Puritans in dismissing the pope as the head of the true church and identifying him and his apostate religion as Antichrist were, at one time, widely known throughout Protestant Churches and beyond them. Their exegesis was later attacked by the Jesuits so successfully, that it is virtually unknown in what are still called "Bible-believing" circles today.

The ignorance of Protestant history is monumental today. The hermeneutical labors of the Reformers and the Puritans to showcase the Scriptural basis of the true Catholic Church on Earth, have been eclipsed by the Jesuits, repudiated by the Tractarians, ignored by evangelicals, so as to become virtually unknown in the "non-Papal" churches and academia today. At one time such truths were universally known in Protestant

Churches and were adopted into their creeds, which still exist today.

Cardinal Manning, during the Tractarian era in England, said that few Protestants then knew anything about their creeds. This was true a hundred and twenty years ago. It is so much worse now than then. The ignorance of the creeds of Protestantism is now almost total. Yet at one point in history, millions subscribed to the creeds of Protestantism. In the following pages we will look at excerpts from the writings of some of the Reformers, then at relevant passages from the different creeds of Protestant churches, and finally at the argument from church history, all in order to establish what constitutes the true church of God's elect, headed up by the Lord Jesus Christ, in contrast to the enduring deception and corruption of the Papal Dominion.

Martin Luther

Early on in his ministry, Luther began to have questions about the Papal Dominion in which he was laboring. He began to criticize certain errors and practices in the only "church" he had ever known. He had very little in the way of a precedent to follow. He was feeling his way along step by step.

In his early work, *The Papacy in Rome*, he leveled certain accusations against the Papacy. In his later writings he would become much more convinced of the evils in the Papal System. Finally, he came to regard the whole Papal Dominion as the antichrist.

Luther, in his debate with Eck made some points early on in his ministry against the pope as the Head of the Church.

Eck claimed, "There is in God's Church a primacy derived from Christ Himself. The Church militant has been set up in the likeness of the Church triumphant. But this latter is a monarchy, wherein everything ascends hierarchically to its sole head— God Himself. Therefore it is that Christ has established a similar order upon earth. How monstrous would the Church be without a head."¹

¹ D'Aubigne, J. H. Merle, *History of the Reformation*, Vol. II, New York: Robert Carter, 1843, 47.

Luther, turning to the assembly stated, "When the doctor declares that it is most needful that the Church universal have a Head, he says well. If there be any one among us who affirms the contrary, let him stand forth. I hold no such thing."

Eck: "If the Church militant has never been without its one Head, I would beg to ask who he can be, but the Roman Pontiff?"

Luther, raising his eyes to Heaven stated, "The Head of the Church militant is Christ himself, and not a mortal man. I believe this, on the authority of God's testimony, whose word says, 'He must reign until his enemies be put under his feet.' Let us then no longer give ear to those who put away Christ to the Church triumphant in heaven. His kingdom is a kingdom of faith. We see not our Head, and yet we are joined to him."

Eck, not discomfited but turning to other arguments, resumed, "It is from Rome, as St. Cyprian tells us, that sacerdotal unity proceeded."

Luther: "As regards the Western church, agreed. But is not this Roman Church herself derived from that of Jerusalem? And to speak correctly, the church of Jerusalem was mother and nurse of all the churches."²

Eck: "St. Jerome affirms, that if authority above that of all other churches is not lodged with the pope, there will be in the Church as many schisms as there are bishops."

Luther: "I admit it, that is to say, that if all the faithful were consenting, this authority might, agreeably to the principles of human legislation, be rightfully ascribed to the chief Pontiff. Neither would I deny that if the whole body of believers should consent to acknowledge as first and chief bishop—the bishop of Rome, or of Paris, or of Magdeburg, it would be our duty to acknowledge him as such, from respect to this general consent of the whole church: but that is what the world has never seen nor ever will see. Even in our own day, does not the Greek church withhold her consent to Rome?"

Part 2 will conclude in the next Trinity Review.

² D'Aubigne, 48.