

“Watchman, what of the night?”



“The hour has come, the hour is striking, and striking at you, the hour and the end!” Ezekiel 7:6 (Moffatt)



► THIS ISSUE'S READING

**FAREWELL, SOLA SCRIPTURA (?)
Will Scripture And Tradition Be
The New Final Authority For
Catholics And Protestants?**

**The Foundation's New Manuscript:
Martin Luther and the Protestant
Reformation - Past & Present pg. 7**

Editor's Preface

Since October 2016, subscribers to the thought paper have been kept informed of the approaching 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's protest. Around noon on the 31st of October 1517, he nailed his 95 theses on the door of the Catholic Church in Wittenberg, Germany. That document led the charge of the Protestant Reformation, which put the Scriptures in the hands of all.

During the year leading up to the celebration, the attention of the world did not appear to be concentrated on this topic. Contemporary secular events seemed to overshadow and dominate the public awareness. Even within the Christian Community, most seemed either unaware or nonchalant concerning the ongoing actions between Catholics and Lutherans to forge a visible unity together. The cry of the Reformers: "The Bible and the Bible alone," is being increasingly brushed aside and ignored for compromise with Romanism.

What is the significance of this phrase? This issue of WNN will provide an answer and more. Speaking of more, the Iowa Foundation has written a new manuscript to help our readers gain a broader view of the Reformation. It is full of history and commentary relevant to today's ecumenical movement. The details are found on Page 7. While there, take notice that we are now on Facebook.

Sola Scriptura - The Only Infallible Foundation Of The Christian Faith

The 500 year anniversary of Martin Luther's "protest" of papal excesses and abuses within the Roman Church is being commemorated in 2017. What appears to be primarily remembered and celebrated, however, is not so much the halting and change in the moral and theological darkness that Luther's reform subsequently initiated. Rather, the main focus seems most concentrated on the division between Catholics and Protestants that was created as a result of reform. In other words, any celebration of the benefits that Luther's action put into motion in 1517 is being veiled, overshadowed, offset, and highly regretted/lamented by the severing of unity throughout Christianity for the past 500 years that was also an outcome of this action. Consequently, the ecumenical (Greek - *oikoumene*, "world union") advances of the last 50 years toward a visible unity among these two parties is the *central* object being extolled and promoted in the "commemoration."

Particularly since the close of Vatican Council II, where the Roman Church signaled its intention to call all the "separated brethren" (non-Catholic Christians) back into a visible unity with itself, the Christian world has untiringly been working toward fulfilling that vision. Shortly after Vatican II, the Joint Lutheran - Roman Catholic Study Commission was formed in 1967 between the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church to work together toward a goal of visibly uniting Lutherans and Catholics together. 1967-2017 is also the Commission's 50th anniversary, which both churches and their "ecumenical partners" are commemorating in the context and same way as the 500 year celebration. It is hoped, among the leadership-

ship within many present-day denominations, along with all the existing ecumenical organizations, that the healing of differences among Lutherans and Catholics will quickly spread and span all of Christendom.

The Roman Church is largely looked upon as providing both the example and leadership toward this union. The commemoration of the official beginning of the Protestant Reformation, for whatever praise given to it, is actually being used as a cleverly concealed backdrop to eventually end the Reformation and celebrate the march of non-Catholic Christianity back into the Roman fold. The widely popular notion that 'Luther's protest is over,' though viewed as a positive component of 2017's festivities, in reality contains a negative insinuation; i.e., 'Luther's protest [bad] is over [good]'. This is in keeping with the overall attitude and mood of the last half century. The break with Rome is now regarded as not only detrimental to the individual Christian's well-being, but more importantly, to Christianity's collective witness. Meeting the challenges of the post-modern world through the visible unity of all Christians under a common banner is billed as the pressing concern of our time. This broadly accepted sentiment, fostered greatly by the Catholic Church and its growing number of allies, has been instrumental in positioning the pope as the dominant moral authority on earth. This gives the papacy a decided advantage in its negotiations with Protestants. As the leading moral "voice" within Christendom, a homage given to the pontiff today by most Catholics and Protestants alike, the papal system is lauded as the rightful model of the visible unity that they are working toward. In comparison to the numerous different sects and denominations that exist in non-Catholic Christianity, Rome claims to exhibit before

the world a united front through an unbroken line of "episcopal succession going back to the Apostles." ¹ This Apostolic Succession invests the Roman Church (effectively, its highest collective leadership) with infallible authority in all matters of faith and practice. This authority is exercised in the Church's Magisterium (Latin - *teaching*), which holds that God's Word is found in *two equally infallible* sources of Divine Revelation - the Scriptures and the Apostolic Traditions. The former is understood as consisting of the *written* Word and the latter consisting of the *unwritten* Word. In contrast, Protestantism holds that God's Word is found in *only one infallible* source of Divine Revelation - the Scriptures *alone* (Latin - *Sola Scriptura*).

Unbeknown (obscured?) to many presently is the fact that this difference was the overriding issue which kept these two parties *irreconcilably* divided for the last 450 years. For Martin Luther, the controversy that he eventually had with Rome was not rooted in the disparity between his teachings and theirs. Rather it centered in the reason *why* those disparities existed. Luther appealed to the authority of the Bible *alone* as the foundation for his understanding of spiritual truth. Contrariwise, the papacy appealed *additionally* to tradition. And since the pope is privileged to determine which traditions are "Apostolic" through the Roman Magisterium, those traditions which he determines as such are cumulatively held forth as the infallible unwritten Word of God. This allows the pronouncements of the post-Apostolic Church fathers, the Church Councils, and the successive teachings of the Roman pontiffs, to be set forth as equally authoritative to the Scriptures. Luther could not accept this because he knew these extra-biblical teachings were not infallible and often contradictory to gospel

truth. This was the real problem that he had with Rome. The Catholic stance permitted the corruption of scriptural truth by adding a slew of questionable doctrines, practices, sacraments, rituals, and ceremonies. In Luther's time, Medieval popes increasingly claimed that they alone were empowered with the Holy Spirit in such a manner as to be preserved from error in their judgments. In response, Luther argued:

"When the teaching of the pope is distinguished from that of the Holy Scriptures, or is compared with them, it becomes apparent that, at its best, the teaching of the pope has been taken from the imperial, pagan laws and is a teaching concerning secular transactions and judgments, as the papal decretals show. In keeping with such teaching, instructions are given concerning the ceremonies of the churches, vestments, food, personnel, and other puerilities, fantasies, and follies without so much as a mention of Christ, faith, and God's commandments." ²

The teaching of papal infallibility eventually became official Church dogma at Vatican Council I on July 18, 1870, and was reaffirmed at Vatican Council II by the document *Lumen gentium*, a principal dogmatic constitution promulgated by Pope Paul VI on November 21, 1964. Accordingly, Rome and other Catholic/Orthodox type of churches have polluted the Christian faith by an ongoing barrage of innovations based on fanciful falsehoods, novelties, superstitions, and pagan influenced precepts, all under the guise and garb of authentic Christianity. Indulgences, veneration of relics, the Immaculate Conception of Mary, prayers for the dead, purgatory, the intercession of dead saints, the substitution of the seventh-day Sabbath with Sunday, exalted as "the Lord's day," use of images in worship, celibacy of the priesthood, the sacrifice of the

mass (transubstantiation of the "Host" - bread and wine - for a non-bloody offering by the priest), the addition of apocryphal books to the biblical canon, and various other spurious tenets are just an example of what the papacy and its ecumenical allies would enforce upon a union of all with itself. And despite the seemingly conciliatory gestures made by Rome toward Protestants in the last 50 years, any substantial change in their position on what constitutes the infallible Word of God is (and will remain) unchanged. For any semblance of visible unity to become a reality, Protestants will ultimately have to abandon the principle of *Sola Scriptura*, as it is completely incompatible with the Catholic principle. Through dogmatization, the Roman Church has been consistently and progressively strengthening its position on this matter during the centuries since the Council of Trent, whereas Protestants have greatly weakened their stance by increasingly questioning the full inspiration, reliability, and authority of the Bible over the last century and a half. Objectively, it does not take a large degree of human prescience to determine which one of these two parties are poised to compromise and finally abandon their position. The foremost factor that must be considered and rightly understood with this entire matter is the nature of the papal opposition, denunciation, and rejection of *Sola Scriptura*.

Many professed Christians, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, simply hold mistaken ideas about this principle. Though it did not originate with the sixteenth century Reformation, it is the maxim that has for the last 500 years been associated with the Protestant position. Articulated as such, *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture only) means that *the Bible alone (the canonical 66 books) is the primary, absolute, and only infallible source for all doc-*

trine, faith, practice, and morals. This principle in no way denies the existence of other sources of divine inspirational revelation outside of Scripture, i.e., extra-biblical revelation given through nature, post-Apostolic messengers/prophets, and even traditions. However, it recognizes all of these as potentially fallible, secondary sources at best; the acceptance or rejection of which to be subjected to and determined by the infallible authority (standard) of the Bible alone. This cuts to the very heart of the papal position, but for many it does not appear so because they are bewildered in regard to the incompatible principles involved between the two positions. On the one hand, Rome professes great faith in the inspiration, authority, and even the infallibility of the Scriptures as the Word of God. This obviously confuses some, as this seems to be at least a nearly similar position as that of the Protestants. But on the other hand, Catholic polemicists, almost simultaneously, vehemently attack and condemn the Protestant position as heretical. This has recently led most to dismiss this dichotomy as an unfortunate anomaly, something based merely on a subjective difference of opinions, rather than any actual objective conflict of principles. The ecumenical excitement of the past 50 years is, tragically, largely responsible for this condition. The placing of extra-biblical traditions on an infallible basis of equal authority with the Bible as the Word of God is an objective principle that contradicts the objective principle of *Sola Scriptura*. This is *forbidden* by Scripture itself:

"Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you." (Deuteronomy 4: 2).

"What thing soever I command you, ob-

serve to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it." (Ibid. 12: 32).

"Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar." (Proverbs 30: 5-6).

"To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." (Isaiah 8: 20).

"And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men *above that which is written*, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another." (1 Corinthians 4: 6, emphasis added).

"For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." (Revelation 22: 18-19).

God's Word is not to be added to or taken away from through outside sources in any manner. All extra-biblical sources, no matter what nature or type, must conform to and be in harmony with the Scriptures. Even then, they must not be elevated to canonical (infallible) status, but be subject to either reformulation or rejection should further illumination from the Bible, upon later examination, determine them to be out of harmony with the truth. (compare 1 Thessalonians 5: 20-21 and 1 John 4: 1, with Proverbs 4: 18).

The Bible also warns against the *dangers* of equating tradition with the Word of God. Speaking of the myriad extra-scriptural written and oral traditions held by the Jewish leadership in the days of Christ's earthly min-

istry, the record states:

"Then came together unto [Jesus] the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables. Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands? He answered and said unto them, Well hath [Isaiah] prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye." (Mark 7: 1-13).

Jesus reveals the dire consequences that can occur when extra-biblical traditions are exalted. When the "heart is far from [God],"

the sufficiency of the Scriptures alone to effect a personal relationship with Him is compromised. Instead, the tendency will be to "honour" God with 'lip service' which often manifests itself in a multiplication of outward practices (traditions). This vain worship exchanges "the word of God" for "the commandments of men," which are taught as "doctrines." This "laying aside the commandment of God [to] hold the tradition of men," is deemed a necessary rejection of the Lord's commandment that the tradition may be kept instead. The biblical examples cited by Jesus from Exodus 20: 12; 21: 17, clearly demonstrates how the Scriptures can be made "of none effect though [extra-biblical] tradition."

In closing, the best paradigm given in God's Word for *Sola Scriptura* is given by Christ Himself toward the outset of His public ministry:

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, *It is written*, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for *it is written*, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, *It is written* again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him,

All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for *it is written*, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him." (Matthew 4: 1-11, *emph. added*).

In this monumental cosmic conflict of the ages, where the Prince of light and the prince of darkness faced off against each other, the authority which Jesus used to settle all three bouts with Satan was the Scriptures, and *only* the Scriptures. When the stakes could not be any higher, our Lord (the living Word), in His humanity overcame the tempter with an "*it is written*" (the written Word). He used absolutely no other sources for authority because there are none that infallibly and finally testify of Him - the prophesied "seed" of the woman (Genesis 3: 15) that would defeat the devil, redeem Adam's failure, bring eternal life to all humanity, and restore oneness to the whole creation. Even Satan did not attempt to use any other sources other than Scripture to tempt Christ. In all this, Jesus gave us an example that Scripture alone, apart from any outside sources, is primary, infallible, final, sufficient, plain on salvific essentials, and self-interpretive. The principle of *Sola Scriptura* stands on a solid foundation which no Catholic apologist, false teacher, or infidel can truthfully refute. Any unity built on a different principle will not last. ❖ GLP

1. Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia De Eucharistia* (Baltimore, MD: The Cathedral Foundation / *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English, April 23, 2003), special insert.

2. Various Authors (Michael Horton), *The Legacy of Luther / Two Planks of Sola Scriptura* (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2016).

* All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

MARTIN LUTHER



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