

TOWARD RECONCILIATION, HEALING, AND RESTORATION OF THE CHURCH

Introduction

I am, among other things, a professional mediator. In mediation, the goal is to make sure that there is a clear understanding of all the parties' positions in the dispute so that there can be movement toward negotiation and settlement. The most important settlement within the Church is the division that has so long plagued the Church and that has led to a multiplicity of positions without a clear understanding of others' positions. Prejudices and assumptions arise when parties do not sit down and clearly try to understand where the other parties are coming from. The purpose of these articles is to attempt to present Protestant and Catholic positions as clearly and objectively as possible so that dialogue can begin or continue. Much progress is being made within the "ecumenical movement", but even that term raises red flags and suspicions among some Protestants. However, the Spirit of Truth whom Jesus gave to the Church will guide all those who seriously and honestly seek Him if we will humble ourselves and dialogue with other believers in the interest of the unity for which Jesus Christ prayed before he died "so that the world may believe". --Patrick J. Hession

Understanding Protestantism

When speaking of "Protestant", it is important to understand that this term does not always have the same meaning as the word "Catholic" does. Protestantism takes various forms of expressions that can be summarized under four basic headings: Liberalism, Modern Orthodoxy, Fundamentalism, and Evangelicalism.

Liberalism sought to differentiate in Scripture between the "abiding essence of the Christian message and the myths, legends, and stories used to convey that message in the Bible. Liberals did not merely abandon the idea that the Bible was infallible; many of them went even further and refused to accord any special authority to the Scriptures. They increasingly came to look upon the Bible simply as an ancient book that might, if subjected to proper critical study, yield some reliable data about the life of Jesus and the history of Israel.

The most radical expressions of Liberalism threw out the concept of a personal God. The less extreme Liberals continued to believe in a God who transcends the order of nature (as well as works through it) and to insist on the uniqueness of Jesus. The left wing of Liberalism shaded off imperceptibly into humanism, and the whole movement was infected with a strong faith in the perfectibility of man and his society. This led to emphasis on the "social gospel" that commits Christians to work here and now for the elimination of injustice and the bettering of human living standards.

The heart of Modern Orthodoxy lies in loyalty to the faith of historic orthodoxy, not because it is ancient or orthodox, but because it is believed to be true. Modern Orthodoxy believes that in the orthodox Christian tradition we have a precious heritage of truth that must not be thrown overboard just because someone has "split the atom". Nevertheless, it

is willing to understand the old truth more fully insofar as modern thought makes it possible.

Instead of pinning its faith on an infallible book, it focuses on Christ as the only completely trustworthy source of knowledge about God. To treat the words of the Bible as the words of God is to erect an idol. It is to Christ the Revealer that people must look if they wish to encounter the Living God and hear his authentic Word to all people.

No event or teaching is to be guaranteed as authentic merely because it is in the Bible. On the other hand, the Bible is the record of the revelatory events in which God has made himself known to people. It also contains the earliest record of the response of the Apostles and the earliest Christian community to these revelatory events - to Christ, his teaching, his death, and the events associated with his resurrection.

Modern Orthodoxy has not settled on any one doctrine of atonement but takes seriously the basic biblical affirmation that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself." Modern Orthodoxy has retained Liberalism's passion for social justice, while learning to be far more realistic about the obstacles that human nature places in the way of achieving it.

Another distinctive feature of Modern Orthodoxy is its re-discovery of the Church, not as a convenient institution for propagating Christian beliefs but as the mystical Body of Christ. The inevitable result of taking the Church more seriously has been concern about its disunity. It is no coincidence that the ecumenical movement has received its greatest impetus from the main-line Protestant denominations in which Modern Orthodoxy has most thoroughly displaced Liberalism and Fundamentalism.

Fundamentalism can be understood only as a strong emotional reaction against the reductionism of Liberal theology. It upholds the following as "fundamental" Christian doctrines: belief in the inerrancy of the Bible; the Virgin Birth; the physical resurrection of Jesus; a "substitutionary" theory of the atonement (that is, one which holds that Jesus died in man's stead, satisfying the requirements of divine justice through vicarious suffering for the sins of the whole world); and the expectation of a physical "second coming" of Christ when he will judge the world. Fundamentalism singled out these doctrines for defense because they were under attack by Liberal theologians bent on stripping away all "supernatural" elements from Christianity.

The cornerstone of Fundamentalism from the start was an uncompromising insistence on the "verbal inerrancy" of all parts of the Bible. This phrase meant that the Bible was totally without error, and that its very language, as well as its general content, was directly inspired by God. Belief in the "verbal inerrancy" of the Bible is based on logic very similar to that which Catholics use in defending the concept of papal infallibility. God could not take a chance on people misunderstanding the self-revelation that he accomplished through the history of Israel, and supremely in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore, he inspired the writers of the Bible to set down a wholly accurate, completely dependable record. His "superintendency" of writing the Bible extended to the very choice of words. Thus, the Bible must be revered as "the

Word of God" in a quite literal sense.

It should be pointed out that belief in the Bible's infallibility is not the same thing as "taking the Bible literally". The Fundamentalist recognizes that there is poetic and allegorical language in the Bible and that Jesus himself often used vivid figures of speech.

What the Fundamentalist tries to do is to follow the "natural" meaning of each scriptural passage. When the Bible claims to be recording factual history - as it unquestionably does, for example, in the accounts of the resurrection - the Fundamentalist takes it as literally "God's truth".

Fundamentalism focuses its attention on individual salvation and personal piety. It is not indifferent to the ills of society but holds that the best way to deal with them is to "change the hearts of people". It is also much preoccupied with the end of the world, the "End Times", and the traumatic sequence of "last things" that would accompany the return of Christ as Judge. Its ethical concerns often reflect a distrust of modern life and are reflected in prohibitions on dancing, card playing, Sunday movies, and the use of alcoholic beverages and tobacco.

Many of the modern heirs of the Fundamentalist movement prefer to be called "Evangelicals" or "Conservatives". One and all stand firmly on the doctrine of verbal inerrancy. Regarding themselves as the only true "Bible believing Christians", they tend to stand aloof from the ecumenical movement that is drawing other Protestants closer together and to eschew any ties with such cooperative organizations as the National Council of Churches.

--Louis Cassels, "What's The Difference? A Comparison of The Faiths Men Live By, pages 63-77, adapted and edited by Patrick J. Hession

Ecumenical Theology

State Of The Question

With a new sense of the contradiction prevailing between profession of faith in the one Church of Jesus Christ and the actual division in this Church, the notion of "ecumenical" theology has become the touchstone of sincerity in the theology of all denominations and in all their theological disciplines, and a criterion for the alertness of theological thought in general.

The reason is that the one gospel of Jesus Christ, which must be preached in dialogue with the world of today - the gospel of the cross and resurrection, that is, of discontinuity with the world in the matter of salvation (since Christ and not the world is our redemption and salvation) - knows nothing of the non-evangelical scandal of this gospel's being preached by divided churches. On the contrary, it presupposes the unity of the Church in faith and love, something that is not merely of secondary relevance to the credibility of the gospel but is meant to be a sign through which the world may believe.

In this perspective, the divisions between the churches are a scandal that runs counter to the words of Scripture, and one that all churches are bound to remove. This can only be

done if the churches carry on a comprehensive dialogue with one another in which all questions of their self-understanding and their understanding of the world and the faith can be voiced and treated. There has always been confrontation and debate between the churches. Hence, the dialogue demanded today can be regarded as a continuation or counterpart of the past.

Earlier Forms

The real counterpart of ecumenical theology in the past was the comprehensive polemics carried out by the churches. The polemical mentality was due to the conviction on both sides that each alone had a monopoly of the truth while the other was living in error. The salvation of the opponent was in danger because of the errors of which the person was victim. Since this could not be a matter of indifference, every effort had to be made to detach the person from heresy and lead him or her back to the true Church.

The claim to be the true Church was maintained by the Protestant denominations as well as by the Catholics. The conviction of being the sole possession of the truth was formulated in doctrinal articles and propositions. The truths in question were put through a process of fragmentation and isolation in which too little attention was paid to the theological context of each proposition.

Controversy, carried on with a religious intensity that regards all opponents as dangerous heretics, was concerned with defending one's own truth and refuting the adversary point by point. Secondly, matters were often treated as essentials, while essentials were often overlooked so that misunderstandings were bound to arise by the nature of things. It was taken for granted, without critical investigation, that one's own way of thinking was correct. Thus, one's own theses never came up for discussion and the controversialists never seem to have tried to see things except from their own point of view, verifying the saying that "what you see depends on how you look at". This could only lead to a hardening of positions on both sides and to narrow and one-sided views.

Along with controversy, however, there was always a certain amount of irenism. There were theologians who strove passionately for reconciliation and peace between the churches and presented concrete programs for reunion. There were, for instance, the efforts at union inspired directly or indirectly by Erasmus of Rotterdam. The theologians in question kept mainly before their eyes the picture of the primitive Church and gave a large place to the distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental truths of faith. But it must be admitted that, in doing so, they underestimated the historical importance of dogmatic decisions in the teaching and practice of the churches. This is clear from Erasmus's proposition that the dogmatic claims of the various churches should be reduced in such a way as to bring about unity. The Anglican Communion made a similar attempt in the 1920's.

Among the irenical theologians we must also include the mystical "spiritualists" who thought that a radical spiritualization of the notion of the Church had made room for all denominations and so restored unity, though pietism is not a direct prolongation of the thought of the mystical spiritualists.

Zinzendorf regarded the confessional churches as modes and expressions of the one true Church of Christ. Hence, all denominations had their legitimate place in his Herrnhuter Brotherhood. This was his way of keeping open, on principle, a link with all churches without denying the reality of the churches.

In spite of certain differences, the "Branch Theory" of Anglicanism has certain affinities with Zinzendorf's "Theory of Modes". The Branch Theory held that all churches - or at least all churches with Apostolic succession of their bishops - were branches of the one Church of Christ.

Creedal theology went other ways. It was concerned with the understanding, presentation, comparison, and estimation of the doctrine of the various churches. Two procedures may be distinguished here. A purely comparative method concentrated exclusively on study of doctrines, sometimes inspired ultimately only by historical interest. But there was also a "normative" creedal theology that based itself on its own church to work out criteria for judging the doctrines of other churches.

Creedal theology has had a successor in the study of denominations that is concerned with a comprehensive description of the doctrine and life of other churches. A purely historical or descriptive type may be contrasted with the dogmatic and normative studies of E. Wolf and K. Barth.

Finally, there is the controversial theology that is concerned with the theological discussion of matters that divide the churches. Where it presents itself as a basic form of inter-confessional encounter, the question arises as to whether it does not isolate differences too sharply. When these differences are seen in the light of the greater whole of what is believed, confessed, and thought by all churches, however, the ecumenical goal of overcoming them can be better and more promisingly expounded than when deliberate attention is paid to all that divides. Hence, it must be admitted that, while controversial theology is an important part of ecumenical theology, its value must not be overestimated.

The Theological Meaning Of "Ecumenical"

Five different meanings have been given to the word "ecumenical" in the course of church history. Ecumenical means (1) belonging to or representing the whole (inhabited) world; (2) belonging to the Church universal or representing it; (3) possessing universal validity in the Church (the ancient Councils); (4) having to do with relationships among several churches or Christians of various denominations (the sense that the word took on in the modern ecumenical movement); (5) implying knowledge of Christian unity and the desire to attain it (the ecumenical movement). When these five senses of the word are applied to the nature of theology and the goals it serves, the following points arise.

1. Theology must remain conscious of the fact that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and its proclamation by the Church is directed to all people. This universal aspect obliges theology not to confuse the findings of Western theology with the revelation in Jesus Christ. Thus, the way is open for other regions of culture to articulate their understanding of revelation in their own concepts and their own languages. The way is open to real

pluralism in theology.

2. Such a plurality of theologies would be sustained by the one Church and would be established in the certain knowledge that theology is always a function of the Church and has its living roots there. The true task of theology is to assimilate comprehensively the revelation that comes in Jesus Christ. It is to do this properly when confronted with the questions of a highly differentiated modern world, there must be a plurality of several theologies within the one Church but not a plurality of theologies of several churches.

3. In this connection, the question of a norm arises, and of the significance of the traditions of the churches. The questions arise in connection with the normative element in the term ecumenical when used in the validity of ancient Church councils and creeds. Here, the point to be made is the following: in view of the questions put by the modern world and the situation of the present day, the real meaning of Scripture (the gospel, Christ) must be propounded in such a way that it can be heard and grasped. In this process of interpretation, the supreme norm and hence the norm of all other norms is Scripture, of which the inmost center and central content is Christ and his work of salvation.

It is in the light of this central message, and only with reference to it, that the traditions of the various churches and even their common tradition are to be interpreted. The dogmatic tradition of the churches, interpreted in this way and in no other way, but amenable in fact to such interpretation, must be integrated into the truth of the gospel for our own days.

4. The process of re-interpreting the message of the gospel for our own day, into which the tradition of the churches is integrated, can only succeed if the churches are engaged in a comprehensive dialogue with one another. They must allow themselves to be determined exclusively by the word of God and the question of the present time.

5. This dialogue about the heart of the matter and the effort to solve outstanding questions in the light of the common faith will also help to solve the ecclesiological question of Church unity. Hence, an ecumenical theology understood in this sense will not be exclusively concerned with the question of unity of the Church. It will rather consider itself as a way to unity in the most comprehensible sense.

Conclusions

It follows that ecumenical theology in the sense outlined above is not a new special discipline along with other theological disciplines. It is, rather, a structural element and a dimension of all theology in all its disciplines. It is impelled by the question of the division in faith and its possible elimination. It does not simply accept division as a fact that it tries to explain by a theology of history. It sees division as a challenge to overcome divisions "so that the world may believe."

Then, ecumenical theology is a theology of fellowship, a theology that has discovered that what is common is proportionally much greater than the differences and divergences, these being only properly known and estimated in the perspective of the common faith.

Thus, new possibilities of encounter and openness are created. This new openness makes ecumenical theology a theology of mutual understanding that is not merely concerned with understanding others but also strives vigorously to propound its own faith and its own understanding of the faith in such a way that they can be understood by others, in spite of different propositions, in the framework of their theology.

Further, ecumenical theology is a theology of the sources and the origins. It is concerned with Scripture and its relevant preaching today.

Finally, ecumenical theology is a theology of dialogue and is, therefore, aware of the fact that God is constantly engaged in dialogue with mankind and that we are addressing in every person the eternal You of God. A God who does not speak is a dead God, and a Church that remains aloof from dialogue testifies only to the death of God because what it preaches - the word of God that demands to be heard and answered - would no longer be a living word.

This reminds all the churches that only dialogue among the churches, carried on in, with, and under the Word of God, the common dialogue of the churches with the world of today can really help them to accomplish the true task of the Church in accordance with the gospel.

--Heinrich Beck, Encyclopedia of Theology, pages 419-424, edited by Patrick J. Hession

Toward A Dialogue: Understanding Positions

Similarities And Differences

What unites Catholics and Protestants is incomparably more vast than what separates them. Both acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. They also share the basic theological affirmations of Christianity that are spelled out in the New Testament and the ancient creeds. Both acknowledge the continuing presence of the holy Spirit in the Christian community. Both look upon the Bible as a divinely inspired book through whose pages the authentic Word of God can be heard afresh by every generation. Both believe in the forgiveness of sins, the efficacy of baptism, and the promise of everlasting life to those who place their trust in Christ.

Grace

Grace, for Protestants generally, is an attribute *of* God rather than a gift *from* God. It is a short hand term signifying God's determination to love, forgive, and save his human children, however little they deserve it. While not disagreeing with this, Catholics see grace as a supernatural power that God dispenses, primarily through the Church and its sacraments, to purify souls of naturally sinful human beings, to render them capable of holiness.

Faith

For Catholics, faith means giving full and unreserved assent to doctrines that have been defined by the Church as divinely revealed truth and to live out those doctrines in daily life and practice. For Protestants, faith is a "reckless confidence" in the goodness of God.

It is more a matter of placing your trust *in* God than of believing certain propositions *about* God. Here again, there is not much difference in practice between Catholics and Protestants, but the whole Protestant Reformation grew out of the differing definitions of grace and faith outlined above.

Salvation

For Protestants, salvation is a free gift that a gracious God bestows on people through Jesus Christ without their doing anything to merit or deserve it. Here there is agreement between Catholics and Protestants and is the basis and justification for the practice of infant baptism by Catholics and most Protestants.

Justification

"Justification by grace through faith alone" became the slogan of the Reformation and has remained the cardinal principle of Protestant theology until this day. Since the Council of Trent (1545-1563), it has been official Catholic teaching that sinful human beings are justified in the eyes of God - that is, saved - by faith and good works, which are faith put into action, as James explains in his Epistle. The whole Christian life rests on faith. Without faith, the "works", or actions of Christian living, would be without Christian value. Faith, however, itself cannot be the source of a person's salvation unless it is a *living* faith, that is, a faith that flowers in hope and love, and hence in the works of a Christian life of service to God and neighbor.

Authority

How does the Protestant know what Christ is like, what he has taught, commanded, and promised? What is the Protestant's authority for holding any particular belief? The Reformers' answer was "sola scriptura": the Bible is the sole and sufficient authority for all Christian doctrine. However, Protestants have no authoritative guide to the *interpretation* of scriptural passages that may be obscure or confusing. Every person is his or her own ultimate authority on the Bible. This is the so-called "principle of private interpretation". On the one hand, it has served as the final guarantee of freedom of conscience among Protestants. From it has grown the Protestant emphasis on the right - and inescapable responsibility - of each human being to think through his or her own beliefs and to make his or her own decision for or against Christ. On the other hand, it has led to the fragmentation of Protestantism into more than two hundred denominations and sects. Ever since the Reformation, Protestant churches have been splitting apart because of disagreements over interpretations of the Bible.

Authority, for Catholics, resides in the teaching authority of the Magisterium, the college

of bishops united with the Pope as a college that succeeded the college of Apostles established by Jesus Christ himself. Before concluding his ministry on earth, Jesus established the Church to preserve his teachings and to carry on his work among people. He gave the Apostles full power over the Church and, within the "college" of Apostles, vested supreme authority in St. Peter. This power and authority exists in the *office* of the Apostle, not in the person. To make sure that his message could never be lost or distorted, Christ sent the holy Spirit to protect the Church from error. This protection is so effective that the Church's *formal* pronouncements on *essential* matters of faith and morals are considered infallible; hence, they must be accepted as tantamount to the very words of God.

Duly consecrated bishops in every generation are "successors" to the office of the original Apostles and inherit all the powers of that office. St. Peter's supreme authority has passed down to his successor as Bishop of Rome, or Pope. The whole "college" of bishops has a right by the mandate of Christ to share with the Pope in the exercise of supreme authority in the Church. Yet, the Pope remains supreme and *can* do on his own authority anything that he could do in union with his fellow bishops. This specifically includes the promulgation of "infallible" dogmas. However, Popes are presumed to be infallible *only* when they solemnly define issues of faith and morals for the guidance of the whole Church. They can be wrong about such things as politics and the weather.

The concept of authority has the great advantage of providing a clear-cut answer to questions when Christians disagree about the teaching of Christ or the will of God. Who has the last word? This is a question that Protestantism has never settled. Considering the security in matters of faith and morals that it provides to believers, and considering the multiplicity of divisions over interpretations of the Bible as the sole rule of faith, one may wonder why it has been, and continues to be, such an issue to those who are not Catholic.

The Bible itself was the fruit of oral traditions that were circulated in the Church for many years before they were written down. The New Testament expressly says that there were "other things" that Jesus said and did which were not included in the Gospel accounts. These *traditions*, or things handed down in the Church for centuries, may also be considered vehicles of divine revelation.

Catholics are required as a basic point of obedience to accept any particular passage of Scripture in the sense in which it has been interpreted by the infallible teaching authority of the Church. In reality, only seven passages have been definitely interpreted. Even in these few cases, the Church is only defending traditional doctrine and morals. Except for these seven brief passages, Catholics enjoy great freedom in interpreting the Bible. The Church confidently trusts that the one and the same holy Spirit, who inspired all who wrote and assembled the Bible, continues to guide and direct it in every generation. "Faith seeking understanding" has been the motto of Christian scholarship from the beginning.

Mary

Catholics are constantly accused falsely of "worshipping" Mary, the mother of Jesus, when, in truth, all they do is honor her as we would any mother. After all, did not the angel address her as the "most favored one"? And doesn't Scripture say that all generations would call her blessed. If we do not consider it improper to honor earthly mothers, and even have a special Mother's Day, should not Christians all the more honor the mother of our Lord and Savior for her part in bringing him to the earth and walking with him even to the cross, especially since all the other disciples ran away except John? Should not Protestants honor Mary much more than they do?

Mary is thought of as the model, image, and ideal figure of the Church. In her humble, self-effacing obedience and complete trust, she is the prototype of what all members of the Church should be like. And in her willing cooperation with the work of redemption that God accomplished in Christ, she exemplifies the Church's mission on earth.

Catholics pray to a multitude of officially designated saints, in addition to Mary, who have the power to intercede in heaven on behalf of those who seek their help. This is based on the belief in the understanding of the Body of Christ "praying for one another", both those on earth and those in heaven. If it is proper for us to ask fellow believers on earth to pray for us and with us, why is it considered improper for us to ask fellow believers in heaven to pray for us and with us?

Sacraments

By sacraments, both Catholics and Protestants mean an outward sign, or action, instituted by Christ as a channel through which divine help, or grace, is imparted. Catholics recognize five sacraments in addition to baptism and the Eucharist: confirmation, sacrament of reconciliation, anointing of the sick, holy orders, and matrimony. Their counterparts can be found in many Reformation churches. The principal point at issue is whether they are distinctively Christian sacraments on a par with baptism and the Eucharist

Baptism

For Protestants, baptism is a sacrament by which a human spirit is cleansed of "original sin", understood as a person's natural predilection to be self-centered, willful, and disobedient to God, and endowed with a new kind of life. For Catholics, baptism is a sacrament by which a human spirit is cleansed of "original sin", understood as a condition of separation from God, and endowed with a new kind of life in union with God through Christ.

Catholics and most Protestants affirm that baptism is primarily *God's* action, not man's. Fundamentalist and Evangelical Protestants insist on the necessity of a response in faith by the person being baptized. They, therefore, baptize only adults or children after a personal profession of faith. This is known as "believer's baptism." The vast majority of Protestants agree with the Catholic Church that infants can and should be baptized because the efficacy of the action is altogether independent of the attitude of the recipient or the credentials of the one who performs it. Baptist theology affirms that an infant's

departure from their short life on earth takes them immediately into the presence of their heavenly father, but there is no more New Testament scriptural justification for this position than there is for the practice of infant baptism. It would seem, then, that simply "dedicating" babies, while scriptural, actually short-changes the infant because it does not result in the removal of "original sin", thereby leaving the infant separated from God until such time as the child is able to make his or her own profession of faith. For both Catholics and Protestants, what happens to infants and others who die without the opportunity to be baptized is clothed in the mystery of God's grace and mercy and must be left there.

The Eucharist

For Catholics, the Eucharist is a "renewal", or representation of the sacrifice on Calvary. The consecrated bread and wine *are* the body and blood of Christ in a literal sense. They retain the appearance of bread and wine, but their true *substance* has been transformed on the altar.

Most Protestants believe that the Eucharist is a "representation" of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary, and that Christ is "really present" in a mystical and incorporeal sense every time it is celebrated without explaining how. A distinct minority holds that Christians merely perform a "memorial" rite when they celebrate the Lord's Supper.

The question may be raised that, if Catholics *are* correct in saying that the bread and wine are truly the body and blood of Jesus Christ, and this has been believed and taught before the Reformation, and even by many of the Reformers, why should Protestants then have to settle for crackers and grape juice?

--Louis Cassels, *What's The Difference? A Comparison Of The Faiths Men Live By*, pages 41-60, adapted and edited by Patrick J. Hession

Toward A Dialogue: Some Basics

1. From a Christian point of view, mere rejection of unity with the Catholic Church obviously cannot create a *Christian Church* or any sort of unity. The same is true of baptism pure and simple; it *alone* cannot form a Church.
2. The post-Reformation Church must at least be *presumed* to be the true Church of Jesus Christ established by him until the contrary is proved. It's historical continuity with the Church of the past is without doubt more substantial than that of the Protestant Churches since it preserves the unity of the episcopate and communion with the Roman See (which characterized the pre-Reformation Church) and since Protestant Christians themselves can only be a legitimate church to the extent that the old Church is also their Church.
3. The doctrine of the all-sufficiency of Scripture (*sola scriptura*) can certainly not be allowed to mean that the living preaching of the word of God did not precede the written word of God in the Church, demanding the assent of faith and efficaciously at work in the Church before Scripture existed. Scripture objectifies the spoken word and therefore is permanently sustained by the authority Christ bestowed to the Apostles to proclaim the

word of God with binding force.

This is not to deny that the later Church - whose doctrine can contain nothing but the Apostolic preaching and be judged by no other standard - finds in Scripture the normative source of the truth, the permanent criterion of the necessary development of its doctrine, and the fresh actualizations which it must constantly be given. But by the nature of Scripture, this criterion is to be used as a whole, not a decisive critical weapon with which an individual can attack the Church's interpretation of Scripture.

4. The Catholic Church also accepts the doctrine of grace alone (*sola gratia*) if it is rightly understood. From first to last, every salutary act of a person without exception is the fruit of gratuitous, unmerited grace. Everything comes from that grace that indeed is meant for all but that none can claim as a right. A person cannot boast of this grace as his or her possession.

One hopes in faith that he or she possesses it but can never be certain that he or she does. Daily tempted and sinning, a person flees anew to God's mercy, ("Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner!") because he or she never knows for certain whether the temptations and sins that he or she hopes are venial may not forbade or conceal a real rejection of God. Thus, even the Catholic Christian admits that he or she is a sinner while clinging to God's grace as a grace that alone can save him or her. This is the purpose of the sacrament of reconciliation.

At the same time, because grace truly transforms the justified, whatever a person does in the Spirit of God deserves the reward of eternal life - gains that merit of which Scripture is eloquent. This is a statement of fact in praise of divine grace, not a statement of Christian motivation for, in order to find God, one must love him for his own sake and not simply be preoccupied with one's own blessedness.

5. Most Protestants acknowledge that there are sacraments or ordinances in the Church, that is, words that, when spoken by the Church in a sacred rite, issue into act in the individual's concrete religious situation. What is proclaimed becomes real in that individual by God's act (baptism, Lord's Supper).

On the other hand, as Catholic dogma affirms, there is agreement that the sacraments vary in rank and dignity and are not all equally necessary and, needless to say, do not bring about in adult persons what they validly pledge unless they are received by, or produce, a repentant believer.

Protestants affirm that God's word spoken by the Church is not a mere abstract statement but the actual happening of what it announces. Therefore, it is difficult to see why Protestants should not agree with the Catholic Church that all those words in which the Church engages its whole being - as the sign of the fulfilled promise of grace - and pledges God's grace to the individual at decisive moments in his or her life, should be called Sacraments. This is so especially since the words of forgiveness addressed to the sinner (Matthew 16:18; John 20), the bestowal of the Spirit by confirmation (Acts 8), the anointing of the sick (James 5), the transmission of office by the laying on of hands (Acts

6), are well attested in Scripture and St. Paul considers marriage to be a token of Christ's redemptive love for his Church (Ephesians 5).

6. If Protestant theology does not wish to transform the Church, which is a tangible reality in the world confessing Christ its Lord before the world, into a purely invisible, spiritual community of grace (which is not generally the case today at least); if *this* Church, despite all weaknesses and betrayals, has received the promise that the might of grace will always defend it against the powers of death and hell; if *this* Church, in order to be such, must exhibit a certain order and organization, that is, office invested with Christ's authority (however that office and authority may be interpreted in detail); then this Protestant theology must acknowledge that, when this Church repudiates with all its strength unbelief or false belief that would dissolve its very being, founded as it is on personal faith in the Apostolic preaching of Christ, it must be able to pronounce a "No" that is absolutely final and permanently binding, though it must always fall short of the fullness of lived witness to Christ, and that this "No", if it is not to dissolve the Church as true witness to Christ, must be kept from going astray by the power of the Spirit, that is to say, it must be "infallible".

Protestant theology must also recognize that his Magistral "No" must be pronounced by appointed office in the Church if it is really to speak in Christ's name and by his commission. If this office of the Church is permanently organized in a college that succeeds by right to the Apostolic college, under a personal head who perpetuates the office of Peter in the apostolic college, then this supreme authority (the universal episcopate in the Church and its personal head) must be invested with the power to pronounce "infallible" judgment in matters of faith when it acts on behalf of the Church as a whole in the authority of Christ.

In other words, if the Church, whose faith is always threatened, is also constantly protected by a grace, must constantly announce new historical articulations of the faith, and if its authority is vested in certain persons, then there must be a supreme teacher in the Church whom the divine mercy preserves from error when he engages his full authority as supreme teacher of the Church.

That Church that existed both before and after the Reformation must at least be *presumed* to have been founded by Christ and has definitively made its own this conception of the permanent Petrine office, which at any rate is no more unscriptural than the doctrine of the infallibility of Scripture.

It is the Catholic's and the Church's duty continually to rethink and pray over its interpretation of the faith and to elaborate it, asking what it is about Catholicism that makes it difficult or impossible for other Christians of good will to recognize it as the pure, complete development of that Christian faith which they also profess and practice.

On the other hand, it is obviously the duty of non-Catholic Christians not to attempt to justify the old separation by constantly devising new and more complicated theological formulas but to consider how their own convictions can be expressed so that the old Church - which after all is their mother Church - may recognize these as deeper insights

into its own faith.

The Catholic Church must fully realize that unity of faith and unity of the Church in and under the primacy of Peter does not mean uniformity in discipline and theology for the churches to unite.

--Karl Rahner, *Encyclopedia of Theology*, pages 1289-1292, edited by Patrick J. Hession