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"For other FOUNDATION can no man lay that is laid, which is JESUS CHRIST" 1 Corinthians 3

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selected articles from:

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A MAGAZINE OF BIBLICAL FUNDAMENTALISM

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Has Roman Catholicism

Changed?

by Matt D. Costella

©FOUNDATION Magazine, Nov - Dec 1998

Pope John Paul II's Latest Encyclical Renews A Call for Roman Catholic Bishops To Reject "Scripture Only" As The Means of God's Revelation to Man

IN RECENT YEARS, the Roman Catholic Church has become the latest friend of Protestant evangelicals. Roman Catholic theologians and apologists such as Keith Fournier, Peter Kreeft, Michael Novak and others are often defined as "evangelical Catholics." They write best-selling books that are lauded by evangelical Protestants and widely read and endorsed by even those who claim to be Fundamentalists. Para-church organizations often refuse to evangelize Catholics and, instead, say they will work together with Catholics in an attempt to reach the world for Christ. The Promise Keepers Movement, for example, not only encourages the participation of Roman Catholics but has even altered its doctrinal statement in order to accommodate its Catholic constituency. Conservative political coalitions seek to unify Protestants and Catholics under the banner of political or moral reform. Lutherans and Roman Catholics, after 500 years of theological division, recently proposed a Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. Highly respected Protestant evangelists such as Billy Graham work hand-in-hand with Roman Catholics during evangelism crusades, even receiving the endorsement of local Roman Catholic archbishops. Charles Colson, Bill Bright, Max Lucado, James I. Packer and many other evangelical Protestants have signed the "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Gift of Salvation" document which attempts to re-define key soteriological terms in order to find a unity with Roman Catholics. Eastern Orthodox leaders such as the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomeos I have praised the ecumenicity of Pope John Paul II and are searching for ways to dialogue with the Vatican and heal the rifts that have divided the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches for hundreds of years.

At this point, any discerning believer must begin to wonder why the shift toward an acceptance of Roman Catholicism has become so popular. Has the Roman Catholic Church actually changed its doctrine? Do the post-Vatican II *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the decisions of the ecumenical councils no longer apply to today's Roman Catholics? These questions have been asked not only by Fundamentalists and Evangelicals who noticed a trend toward unity with Rome but also by many Roman Catholics. Pope John Paul II has struggled with those Catholics who deny much of the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church as well as with the secularists who deny the plausibility of religion as a whole. In his latest encyclical to the Roman Catholic bishops, *Fides et Ratio* (Faith and Reason), the pope has sought to answer those Catholics who seek to undermine the authority of the Roman Catholic Church and those secularists who claim that faith and reason are incompatible. This latest letter should be an eye-opener to all Fundamentalists and Evangelicals, for it proves beyond a reasonable doubt that Roman Catholicism still upholds the unbiblical doctrines it has held since its inception.

Many Roman Catholics accuse Fundamentalists of misrepresenting or misinterpreting Catholic beliefs. They often claim that Fundamentalists should read a particular book written by a certain Roman Catholic theologian or apologist in order to understand what the Roman Catholic Church actually teaches. While it may be true that some Fundamentalists have haphazardly handled or taken out of context some Roman Catholic teachings, most of the time

the accusers themselves are confused and deceived concerning the teaching of their own church. Throughout its 70-year history, the Fundamental Evangelistic Association has sought to draw upon only the authoritative documents of the Catholic Church when addressing the issue of Roman Catholic doctrine. The FEA has refrained from citing a particular theologian or apologist's interpretation of Roman Catholic dogma but rather has documented and expounded upon the authoritative, clear statements of the Roman Catholic Church itself.

The *Papal Encyclical on the Relationship Between Faith and Reason* harmonizes well with both the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the Vatican II documents, both of which are authoritative sources concerning Catholic dogma. Therefore, it can be reasoned that the contents of the latest encyclical, especially concerning the Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church, are definitive and authoritative for today's Roman Catholics. The entire 154-page encyclical is much too large to reproduce here, but one particular portion of the encyclical is especially pertinent to Bible-believing Christians who are contemplating any association with the Roman Catholic Church or considering lending credibility to the belief that Roman Catholicism is a viable "Christian" denomination. It is this portion of the papal letter which will soon be evaluated in the light of Scripture.

Early in the encyclical, Pope John Paul II reinforces the importance of the Eucharist. In a section entitled "The Revelation of God's Wisdom," the Pope discusses the mysterious revelation of God's truth to man. He writes to the bishops:

In a sense, then, we return to the sacramental character of Revelation and especially to the sign of the Eucharist, in which the indissoluble unity between the signifier and signified makes it possible to grasp the depths of the mystery. In the Eucharist, Christ is truly present and alive, working through his Spirit; yet, as Saint Thomas said so well, "What you neither see nor grasp, faith confirms for you, leaving nature far behind; a sign it is that now appears, hiding in mystery realities sublime."

This statement stands in complete agreement with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The Catechism expressly states:

1374. ...In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist: "the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, *the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained*" (Council of Trent, 1551: DS 1651). "This presence is called 'real'-by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as if they could not be 'real' too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a *substantial* presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present" (Paul VI, MF 39).

Fundamentalists firmly believe that no "sacramental character of Revelation" exists. On the contrary, God revealed Himself through His Son, Jesus Christ. After Christ's death, resurrection and ascension, the Holy Spirit guided the New Testament writers into all truth (John 14:26; John 16:13). Through the miracle of inspiration, the New Testament writers recorded only the words that the Holy Spirit led them to write, and the canon of Scripture was soon finished. God's complete and final Revelation to man was accomplished once the final New Testament book had been written.

Later in the encyclical, Pope John Paul II reinforces the historic teaching that the Roman Catholic Church is the guardian and expositor of God's revealed truth by writing:

It is the Church's duty to indicate the elements in a philosophical system which are

incompatible with her own faith. In fact, many philosophical opinions-concerning God, the human being, human freedom and ethical behavior-engage the Church directly, because they touch on the revealed truth of which she is the guardian.

This teaching also coincides with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Fundamentalists, however, believe that the Roman Catholic Church is certainly not the guardian of God's revealed truth as the pope claims. Fundamentalists believe the Catholic Church has actually distorted and perverted the true Gospel message of Jesus Christ, which can only be found in the Word of God.

Yet most striking of all is Pope John Paul II's attack against what he calls "biblicism." The following excerpt from the Papal encyclical is the most recent public statement by the pope which reveals, without question, that the Roman Catholic Church has certainly not changed its theology:

There are also signs of a resurgence of fideism, which fails to recognize the importance of rational knowledge and philosophical discourse for the understanding of faith, indeed for the very possibility of belief in God. One currently widespread symptom of this fideistic tendency is a "biblicism" which tends to make the reading and exegesis of Sacred Scripture the sole criterion of truth. In consequence, the word of God is identified with Sacred Scripture alone, thus eliminating the doctrine of the Church which the Second Vatican Council stressed quite specifically. Having recalled that the word of God is present in both Scripture and Tradition, (73) the Constitution *Dei Verbum* continues emphatically: "Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture comprise a single sacred deposit of the word of God entrusted to the Church. Embracing this deposit and united with their pastors, the People of God remain always faithful to the teaching of the apostles." (74) Scripture, therefore, is not the Church's sole point of reference. The "supreme rule of her faith" (75) derives from the unity which the Spirit has created between Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the Magisterium of the Church in a reciprocity which means that none of the three can survive without the others. (76)

Moreover, one should not underestimate the danger inherent in seeking to derive the truth of Sacred Scripture from the use of one method alone, ignoring the need for a more comprehensive exegesis which enables the exegete, together with the whole Church, to arrive at the full sense of the texts.

This portion of Pope John Paul II's encyclical to the bishops speaks for itself. Again, the *Catechism* as well as the authoritative documents of the Roman Catholic Church completely agree with the Pope's statements. Roman Catholicism has certainly not changed. The Roman Catholic Church still dogmatically clings to tradition as a means through which God communicates His saving grace. The Roman Catholic Church still dogmatically rejects the belief that Scripture alone is the believer's sole authority for faith and practice. The Roman Catholic Church still dogmatically opposes those who fail to accept its false teachings.

How is it possible for any evangelical Christian to confidently believe he can join with Roman Catholics for evangelism or spiritual growth after reading such a statement? Today's ecumenical movement, through avenues such as Promise Keepers, the Billy Graham crusades and Campus Crusade for Christ, has successfully deceived the world into believing that the Roman Catholic Church either has changed its doctrine or has always been an acceptable way to God. Groups such as these have deceived many into thinking that the loyal Roman Catholic does not need to be evangelized or "proselytized." In fact, Billy Graham's latest evangelistic crusade in Tampa, Florida, has received complete support from the local Roman Catholic


Diocese of St. Petersburg, Florida. Diocese spokesman Bill Urbanski told the *Tampa Tribune* that Catholics welcomed Graham because "the crusade isn't trying to recruit Catholics to become Protestants."

Many times, evangelicals attempt to rationalize their ecumenical efforts by claiming to unite with those who call themselves Roman Catholics but who say they do not actually believe the doctrines of the Catholic Church. It is certainly possible for one who calls himself a Roman Catholic to be a true believer in Christ. However, if a Roman Catholic disagrees with his own church on the vital doctrinal issues that pertain to an individual's salvation, then he should certainly separate from the Church, not remain in it and claim to accept the label "evangelical Catholic." If he refuses to separate from the Catholic Church and if he still desires to label himself a Roman Catholic, then no Christian should seek to join him in any religious endeavor, thereby identifying himself with such diabolical error.

Pope John Paul II is one of the most unique popes to occupy the primary position in the Holy See for the following reason: He often is called one of the most ecumenical popes as well as one of the most conservative. This combination is not only unique but also is especially dangerous to Christendom. While striving for greater ecumenical ties, Pope John Paul II remains steadfastly loyal to the dangerous doctrines of the Catholic Church. He will not compromise Roman Catholic dogma. The unity that arises from his ecumenical endeavors must occur on his terms, and it cannot conflict in any way with traditional Roman Catholic doctrine regarding the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, the Magisterium of the Church and the doctrine of salvation.

The recent evangelical strides for unity and ecumenical ties with Rome combined with the doctrinal position of the pope bring the true believer to a devastating conclusion: The evangelical world is quickly drifting into the arms of the Roman Catholic Church, and it does not even realize what truth is sacrificed nor what inestimable damage is done to the souls of millions. All who embrace the Roman Catholic Church or give credibility to the Roman system as a viable means to God are not winning the Christian battle or even "breaking even" with Rome as they might wish. Ecumenical ties with the Vatican only benefit the Catholic Church itself and actually lead millions to an eternity apart from Christ. God's salvation is found only through Jesus Christ and is revealed only in the inerrant, written Word of God (Romans 10:17). Any additional "truth" derived from Rome is "another gospel" which bears God's curse (Galatians 1:9).

*This resource has been expanded and updated and now is available in pamphlet form which has been posted on this website under the same title. [updated 4/25/99]

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