

The Protest of the Protestants

“For in the GOSPEL a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is BY FAITH from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by FAITH.’” – Romans 1:17

In my last newsletter article (7/17/07), I referred to Pope Benedict XVI claim that the only TRUE church was the Catholic Church. According to the front page article of *The Post and Courier*, dated July 11th, the Catholic Pope “...REASSERTED the primacy of the Roman Catholic Church, approving a document released Tuesday that says other Christian communities either are DEFECTIVE or NOT TRUE CHURCHES and that CATHOLICISM provides the only true path to SALVATION.” I believe that it is accurate to infer that if Lorenzago Di Cadore (i.e. Benedict XVI) is saying the only way to be saved is through “Catholicism”, then he is at the same time implying that the traditional Protestant (i.e. Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, etc., etc.) understanding of salvation is not accurate or sufficient for the redemption, justification, and/or sanctification of the human soul. I say this because Paul made it very clear that there was only ONE GOSPEL that led to salvation and all other “so-called” gospels were to be IGNORED (1Cor 15:1-5; Gal 1:8). Thus, THE BIBLE does not allow for TWO DIFFERENT GOSPELS to “both” be a TRUE MEANS of the salvation of the human soul.

This should be a very serious concern for every member of this church who sits under my teaching of doctrine. If “Catholicism” is the only true “God ordained” pathway to heaven, then I am a FALSE TEACHER and you should replace me IMMEDIATELY! However, if my teaching of the gospel is accurate, then we need to humbly recognize that many Catholics are not saved and we need to love them enough to pray for them and share with them the TRUE GOSPEL that comes only through “...the REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST.” (Gal 1:11-12). No one can or should force any one to believe the truth, but LOVE compels us to at least SHARE the truth with those who need to hear it! (1Jn 3:16)

I know that even many well meaning (but misinformed) Baptists today just assume that “conservative” Catholics believe in the exact same things that we do; however, if this was really true, then why is there a PROTEST in the word “Protestants”? Why in 1515 did a Catholic Priest, Monk, and Seminary professor, named Martin Luther, choose to place his life (and his family’s life) in jeopardy by deciding to “protest” against the DOCTRINE of Catholicism?

Many of you should be familiar with Martin Luther’s struggle with trying to faithfully serve the Catholic Church while being in constant “terror” that he was unworthy of God’s love and unconvinced that he was doing enough to be saved. No matter how often he repeatedly punished his body (recommended by great teachers of monasticism), Luther was continually aware of his own sinfulness and struggled with the concept that *good works* and the *sacraments of the Catholic Church* would suffice for him to be justified before God.

Martin Luther was so troubled that he almost gave up the Catholic priesthood until a major revelation from God’s Word penetrated his heart. In 1513, Martin Luther was sent to teach Scripture at the new University of Wittenberg in Germany. Although initially this assignment did little to help him overcome his doubts about his “worthiness” before a holy and righteous God, Luther unexpectedly found the answers his soul was searching for when in 1515 he began to meditate on Romans 1:17 (see above). Luther was thrilled to learn that the “righteousness before God” that he had so longed to achieve was actually a “*righteousness FROM God*” and not from man’s works or achievements through the sacraments. Immediately, this new view of the GOSPEL which was “*by faith from first to last*” changed Luther’s relationship with God and the Catholic Church forever.

On October 31, 1517 Luther made his protest against the doctrines and theologies of the Catholic Church known by nailing his famous “Ninety-five Theses” to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. These ninety-five theses attacked the theological presuppositions of such Catholic practices as the “sale of indulgences” which was sanctioned in Luther’s day by Pope Leo X. These “indulgences” were promoted as a way for sinners to seek true forgiveness from God, but actually they were a way for the Catholic Church to raise huge sums of money so that Leo could finish the great Basilica of Saint Peter. What disgusted Luther was the claim priest’s were making that when a sinner bought one of the Pope’s “indulgences” they would make the sinner “cleaner than when coming out of baptism” and “cleaner than Adam before the Fall”, and that “the cross of the seller of indulgences *has as much power as the cross of Christ.*” According to the renowned church historian Dr. Justo L. Gonzalez, who wrote the two volume set “*The Story of Christianity*”, those who wished to buy an indulgence for a loved one who was deceased were promised that, “...*as soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from PURGATORY springs.*” (Volume II; page 21).

It was these false views of how sin is forgiven, righteousness is achieved, and salvation is “reckoned” held by the Catholic Church, that led to the protests of CATHOLIC priests such as Martin Luther (Germany), Ulrich Zwingli (Sweden), and John Calvin (France). In other words, the PROTESTANT REFORMATION was not started by Presbyterians, Methodists, or Southern Baptists. “Catholic” Priests that had been trying to live by and teach “Catholicism”, eventually recognized “significant differences” between what the official Catholic Church doctrine taught as compared to what was taught in the Word of God, the Bible.

If you study any or each of the writings of these men, you will find that their PROTESTS all had something in common. That is, their firm believe that the Word of God should be the sole source of doctrine about God, the gospel, and the salvation of mankind...NOT THE EXTRA-BIBLICAL WRITINGS and/or BOOKS of the CATHOLIC CHURCH. Also, since each of these men believed that the theology and doctrines being taught by the Catholic Church had strayed so far from what the Word of God clearly taught, they all were willing to risk their livelihoods and their very lives in order to "*contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.*" (Jude 3b).

Next week, I will expound upon the "Council of Trent" which was the Catholic Church's official response to the "anti-Catholic" doctrine taught by the Protestant Reformation. Until then, please do not assume I am trying to make up differences between the "gospel of salvation" as revealed in the Scriptures and "conservative" Catholicism that is being promoted by Pope Benedict XVI. I am just exposing what former CATHOLIC PRIESTS discovered for themselves and rebelled against almost 500 years ago! (Ecc 1:9) - **Pastor Louis**