

“Gregg Allison, in *40 Questions About Roman Catholicism*, serves as a trustworthy guide in tracing the development of Roman Catholic thought and practice through the centuries. Offering careful responses to 40 important questions and drawing on the insights of both Protestant theologians and Roman Catholic thinkers, readers are introduced to the foundational beliefs and practices of Roman Catholics, especially since Vatican II. Particularly helpful for readers are the sections that provide insightful comparisons and contrasts between Protestant and Roman Catholic understandings of key doctrines. Though written from the perspective of an evangelical Protestant, Allison—drawing upon his exemplary skills as both church historian and theologian—has given us an excellent introduction to Roman Catholicism. I am delighted to recommend this thoughtful, convictional, accessible, and irenic book to both Protestant and Roman Catholic readers.”

—David S. Dockery,
President, International Alliance for Christian Education,
Distinguished Professor of Theology, Southwestern Seminary

“This book is long overdue. Deftly providing perspective from Scripture and the history of Christian thought, Gregg Allison answers 40 critical questions about Roman Catholic teaching and practice. This outstanding volume will equip you to lovingly and accurately engage with your Catholic friends and loved ones over issues that we all hold so dear.”

—Chris Castaldo,
Lead Pastor of New Covenant Church, Naperville, IL,
Author of *Talking with Catholics About the Gospel: A Guide for Evangelicals*

“There is a pressing need right now to understand more clearly the Roman Catholic Church and all she entails—who she is, what she does, what matters to her, what are her differences and distinctives, what issues she is facing. Confusion on these crucial issues has huge ramifications for Protestants and Catholics alike. But how does one get started? This book is an essential tool in the hands of anyone seeking to understand the Roman Catholic Church today. It does exactly what it promises—with clarity, sensitivity, and expertise. It is born out of years and depth of experience, research, teaching, and ministry in this field, and it shows. It is up-to-date, crystal clear, and expertly written, being wonderfully concise yet thorough. Quite simply, this book knows what it is talking about, and says it brilliantly.

“Whilst written from a self-confessed Protestant perspective, it is always warm and respectful, and yet does not dodge the questions that need to be answered. Dr. Allison does justice to Roman Catholicism, presenting a fair and accurate portrait, continually using the Roman Catholic Church’s own words to do this, while also offering thoughtful, biblical, theological, and historical assessment along the way. It is thoroughly accessible, and just a skim through of the questions it answers makes you want to read this book. Whether you are a specialist in this field, or have fleetingly wondered about these questions, this book will have gems to offer you.”

—Rachel Ciano,
Lecturer in Christianity in History at Sydney Missionary and Bible College,
Co-author of *10 Dead Guys You Should Know*

40 QUESTIONS ABOUT
Roman Catholicism

Gregg R. Allison

Benjamin L. Merkle, Series Editor



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Introduction

With more than one billion members, the Roman Catholic Church is present almost everywhere in the world today. You may have family, friends, neighbors, or work colleagues who are part of the Church.¹ Some of them may be committed Catholics, while others may attend Mass infrequently or may be completely inactive. Perhaps you yourself are Catholic, or used to be Catholic, or want to become Catholic. Alternatively, you may belong to one of the other two main branches of Christianity, either Protestant or Orthodox. Or you may belong to another religion, or to no religion at all. No matter who you are, if you have questions about Roman Catholicism, this book is designed to answer your questions.

But what is Roman Catholicism? It is quite different from the early church, which experienced significant unity as it was rapidly expanding during its initial centuries. It is far removed from the medieval church, which was characterized by renewal through monastic movements and scholastic theology, even as the papacy was cementing its position among the powerful monarchs of the age. It is not the Roman Catholicism that split from Protestantism during the Reformation, a division that expressed itself in damning opponents to hell and sending them there through wars of religion. And it is very different from what it was throughout most of the modern period, thanks in no small part to Vatican Council II and the papacies of John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis.

This book answers questions about Roman Catholic theology and practice, doctrine and liturgy, sacraments and Mariology, contributions and scandals, and other things Catholic. The answers, however, are not given from a Roman Catholic viewpoint. On the contrary, I answer these questions as a Protestant, specifically an evangelical, more precisely a Reformed Baptist, and even more particularly a systematic theologian and local church pastor. I regularly teach courses about Catholic theology and have even written a couple of books about Roman Catholicism from an evangelical

1. When referring to the Roman Catholic Church, the last word (even when it stands alone in a sentence) will be capitalized. When referring to the church in general (e.g., the evangelical church) or to the universal church (e.g., the church is the body of Christ), the word will not be capitalized.

perspective.² If you are a Catholic reading this book, you will hear how a Protestant views your Church. If you are a Protestant reading this book, you will listen in as I answer forty common questions that we as Protestants have about Roman Catholicism.

These forty questions fall into three categories. The first part covers historical and foundational matters, like how Vatican Council II influenced contemporary Roman Catholicism and which doctrines Catholics and Protestants share and which doctrines divide them. The second part covers specific theological questions about revelation and authority, sacraments, salvation, and Mary and the saints. The third part covers contemporary and personal questions, like the contributions of the last three popes and why Protestants leave their churches and join the Roman Catholic Church.

I hope you will find me to be a helpful and reliable guide as we explore *40 Questions About Roman Catholicism!*

2. Gregg R. Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology and Practice: An Evangelical Assessment* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014); Gregg Allison and Chris Castaldo, *The Unfinished Reformation: What Unites and Divides Catholics and Protestants after 500 Years* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016).

PART 1

Historical and Foundational Questions

SECTION A

Historical Questions

In this first section, I explore questions about the origin of the name *Roman Catholic*, trace the history of the Church up to the Reformation, highlight the key events and doctrines that led to the division of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, and conclude with a look at the impact of Vatican Council II.

QUESTION 1

Why Is It Called the Roman Catholic Church?

The story behind the title “the Roman Catholic Church” goes back to the early church and its self-identification. But one specific word in that title did not appear until the beginning of the thirteenth century.

The Four Traditional Attributes of the Church

Early in its history, the church defined itself as “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.”¹ As for *oneness*, the true church is characterized by unity, with special reference to sound doctrine: “The church, though dispersed throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this [one] faith.”² This attribute of oneness is well supported biblically. Jesus prays that we, his followers, would be united (John 17:11, 21–23). The Holy Spirit grants unity to the church, which is one body with one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one Father (Eph. 4:1–6; cf. 4:13). The church is one, identified by unity.

The church’s *holiness* stands in stark contrast to the world and its sinfulness. The holy church is set apart for God and for his purposes. At the same time, the church often falls short of this mark, living as already-but-not-yet pure. This disappointing reality demands that church leaders, like Justin Martyr, call the church to cease from sin and to pursue holiness: “Let it be understood that those who are not found living as Christ taught are not Christians, even though they profess with the lips the teachings of Christ.”³ This attribute of holiness is well supported biblically as seen in the description of the church as a sanctified, saintly assembly (1 Peter 2:9), a

1. Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381).

2. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.10.1–2 (ANF 1:330–31). The text has been rendered clearer.

3. Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 16 (ANF 1:168). The text has been rendered clearer.

depiction that is true even of the worldly church of Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2). Given this status of holiness, church leaders exhort their members to live as holy people (1 Peter 1:14–16).

The term *catholicity* needs clarification. Rather than referring to the particular Roman *Catholic* Church, this descriptor refers to the church's universality.⁴ The church is catholic for two reasons. The first reason is the presence of Christ in it, as Ignatius explained: "Where there is Christ Jesus, there is the Catholic Church."⁵ The second reason is Christ's commission for the church: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). This Great Commission is universal in scope.⁶ Because the true church is catholic, Ignatius warned others: "Whoever does not meet with the congregation/church⁷ thereby demonstrates his arrogance and has separated [or judged] himself."⁸ The church's universality is well supported biblically, as seen above.⁹

Apostolicity means that the church follows the teachings of the apostles. Such apostolicity stands in contrast with counterfeit churches that invent and promote false doctrine. From the beginning, Christ taught his apostles, they planted apostolic churches, and these apostolic churches planted other churches, which in turn planted still other churches.¹⁰ Groups that could not trace their origins to the apostles or to these apostolic churches were false churches. More critically still, apostolicity applies to those churches that obey the written teachings of the apostles—Scripture itself. Apostolicity finds biblical support in the foundational role of the apostles (Eph. 2:20) and their

4. Greek καθολικός (*katholicos*), or universal.

5. Ignatius, *Letter to the Smyrneans* 8 (shorter version; ANF 1:90). Later, Irenaeus would add, "Where the church is, there is the Spirit of God; where the Spirit of God is, there is the church." Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.24.1 (ANF 1:458).

6. As explained by Cyril of Jerusalem, the church is catholic because "it extends over all the world . . . and because it teaches universally and completely one and all the doctrines which ought to come to men's knowledge . . . and because it brings into subjection to godliness the whole race of mankind . . . and because it universally treats and heals the whole class of sins . . . and possesses in itself every form of virtue which is named, both in deeds and words, and in every kind of spiritual gifts." Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 18.23 (NPNF2 7:139–40).

7. Greek ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*), or church.

8. Ignatius, *Letter to the Ephesians* 5 (ANF 1:51).

9. With growing concern about inclusivism at work within the Roman Catholic Church, Leonardo De Chirico issues an appropriate warning: "Catholicity is not a stand-alone ecclesiological parameter but one organically linked to the other three. In this way, it is protected from becoming an omnivore capable of integrating all. If catholicity takes precedence over apostolicity (i.e., biblical teaching), it becomes universalism. If holiness is left out, catholicity becomes a box void of spiritual content. If catholicity loses its connection to unity, it explodes into a myriad of self-referential units." Leonardo De Chirico, "Contested Catholicity: In What Sense Is the Church Catholic?" *Vatican Files* 168, October 1, 2019, <http://vaticanfiles.org/en/2019/10/vf168/>.

10. Tertullian, *Prescription against Heretics* 21, 32 (ANF 3:252, 258).

authoritative instructions (e.g., 1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:4, 6, 10, 12; Titus 1:3; 2 Peter 2:3).

In summary, the early church acknowledged four identity markers: the church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

The Additional Attribute of *Roman*

Up to the beginning of the thirteenth century, these four attributes were sufficient to identify the church of Jesus Christ. The adjective *Roman* was added to this list of descriptors in 1208. The occasion was sparked by an incident involving a pastor named Durand of Osca. He had left the Catholic Church and become a preacher for the Waldensians, a splinter movement condemned as heretical.¹¹ In returning to the Catholic Church, he made this confession: “We believe with our heart and confess with our mouth one church only, not that of the heretics, but the holy church—Roman, catholic, apostolic—outside of which we believe that no one is saved.”¹² To abbreviate, it is the *Roman Catholic Church*.

As we will soon see, the descriptor *Roman* came to be emphasized at this point because the church in Rome was beginning to flex its religious and political muscles and to make exaggerated claims for itself.

***Roman* and *Catholic*: Particularity and Universality**

Today, these two words—*Roman* and *Catholic*—express two distinct but related aspects of the Roman Catholic Church. The first describes its particularity; the second, its universality. According to Leonardo De Chirico:

There’s the *Roman* side, with its emphasis on centralized authority, pyramid leadership structure, binding teaching, and the rigidity of canon law. And there’s the *Catholic* side, which emphasizes a universal outlook, an absorption of ideas and cultures, and the inclusive embrace of cultural practices into the Catholic whole. The human genius of Roman Catholicism and one of the reasons for its survival across the centuries has been its ability to be both, even amid disruptions and tensions.¹³

11. Jean Gonnet and Amedeo Molnar, *Les Vaudois au Moyen Âge* (Torino: Claudiana, 1974), 5.

12. “Nous croyons de notre cœur et confessons de notre bouche une seule Église, non celle des hérétiques, mais la sainte Église romaine, catholique, apostolique, en dehors de laquelle nous croyons que personne n’est sauvé.” Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum: A Compendium of Creeds, Definitions and Declarations of the Catholic Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2012), my translation.

13. De Chirico, “Contested Catholicity.”

As the *Roman Catholic Church*, it expresses its particularity in terms of its claim to be the only true church of Jesus Christ, the possessor of the fullness of salvation, and the ongoing incarnation of Christ with the pope as his vicar, or representative. Its distinctiveness is further seen in its locatedness in Rome, its political and financial organization centered in the Vatican, its spectacle as a medieval monarchical institution, its claim to possess the only true Eucharist, and its grandeur of religious pageantry. As the *Roman Catholic Church*, it expresses its universality as it embraces all ecclesial communities (Protestants and Orthodox), pluralistically respects other religions to which God communicates his grace (e.g., Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Sikhism), and is itself oriented to the salvation of the world. Its comprehensiveness is further seen in its ecclesiology of *totus Christus* (the Church is the *whole Christ*—divinity, humanity, and body), its common liturgy (with its former common liturgical language of Latin), its common confession of faith, and its incorporation of many diverse elements into its theology and practice.¹⁴

This dual identity helps explain why the Church is such a broad-tent movement. Again, De Chirico underscores a key principle of Catholic theology and practice. In Latin, it is “*et—et*.” In English, it is “and—and” or “both—and.” Because it operates on this basis, the Church is able to keep together what appears to many people to be mutually exclusive alternatives—*both X and Y*, even though X and Y are like oil and water. To give several examples, in terms of divine revelation, the Church looks to *both Scripture and Tradition*. It views the accomplishment of salvation as synergistic:¹⁵ *both God and the Catholic faithful work together*. As for its doctrine of justification, the Church believes it embraces *both the forgiveness of sins and moral transformation*. And justification comes about by *both faith and baptism*. Whereas it once fervently maintained that there is no salvation outside the Catholic Church, it now holds that *both Roman Catholics and _____* (fill in the blank: Protestants, Muslims, agnostics) can be saved.¹⁶

14. For further discussion, see De Chirico, “Contested Catholicity.” He notes the important book by Kenneth J. Collins and Jerry L. Walls, *Roman but Not Catholic: What Remains at Stake 500 Years after the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017).

15. Gr. *sun* = with; *ergon* = work; thus, two parties (in this case, God and people) work together.

16. As a recent example of “both—and,” at the Vatican’s Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon region (October 6–27, 2019), several events featured pagan elements from Amazonian culture. These included statues of Pachamama, a pagan fertility goddess. At one point, Pope Francis blessed one of these statues and even prayed in front of one that had been brought into St. Peter’s Cathedral. His critics voiced outrage at this blending of *both orthodoxy and idolatry*. Paul Smeaton, “Did Pope Francis Defend Pachamama Idolatry at Vatican in New Amazon Synod Exhortation?,” *LifeSiteNews*, February 12, 2020, <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/did-pope-francis-defend-pachamama-idolatry-at-vatican-in-new-amazon-synod-exhortation>. The pope’s response to his critics is *Querida Amazonia*, February 12, 2020, Vatican.va.

The Catholic principle of “*et—et*”/“and—and”/“both—and” is the opposite of the Protestant principle of *sola*, that is, *alone*. *Sola Scriptura*: Scripture alone. *Solus Christus*: Christ alone. *Sola fidei*: faith alone. *Sola gratia*: grace alone. *Soli Deo Gloria*: the glory of God alone. Additionally, a Protestant criticism of the Church during the Reformation was that it had become overly Roman and lost its true catholicity.¹⁷ Indeed, the Reformers claimed that the Protestant movement was a return to Christianity’s true foundation—the Bible and the early church (for example, the theology of Augustine). Moreover, they saw the Reformation as a protest against the many accretions that the Church had introduced over the course of many centuries. Their complaint was that these additions had unmoored the Church from its anchor and caused it to lose its historical, traditional catholicity.¹⁸

Summary

For well over a thousand years, the church of Jesus Christ identified itself as *one, holy, catholic, and apostolic*. It was not until the thirteenth century that the descriptor *Roman* was added. Today, the adjective *Roman* describes the Church’s particularity and the adjective *Catholic* expresses its universality. Still, the Roman Catholic system, based on the principle of “*et—et*”/“and—and”/“both—and,” seeks to hold together very diverse elements. Indeed, the Protestant principle of *sola*—“alone”—dissents from “both—and,” maintaining that many opposing positions embraced by the Church are mutually exclusive. They can’t be held together because they are contradictory.

17. For a contemporary expression of this complaint, see Collins and Walls, *Roman but Not Catholic*.

18. As Carl Braaten expressed, “The Reformers made their protest against Rome on behalf of the whole church, out of love and loyalty to the truly catholic church. . . . The Reformation was not intended to bring about a Protestant Church, much less a collection of Protestant churches. The Reformation was a movement of protest for the sake of the one church.” Carl A. Braaten, *Mother Church: Ecclesiology and Ecumenism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 12. Interestingly, within contemporary evangelicalism a movement is developing that seeks to underscore its rootedness in the great catholic tradition. D. H. Williams, *Evangelicals and Tradition: The Formative Influence of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005); Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015); Gavin Ortlund, *Theological Retrieval for Evangelicals* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019); and the books in the Zondervan series *New Studies in Dogmatics*, with Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain as general editors: Christopher R. J. Holmes, *The Holy Spirit* (2015); Fred Sanders, *The Triune God* (2016); Michael Allen, *Sanctification* (2017); and Michael Horton, *Justification* (2 vols., 2018).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. As you think about the four traditional adjectives, how do you assess your own local church in terms of its expression of unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity?
2. How did the Church's addition of the descriptor *Roman* alter its history?
3. In what areas (other than the above examples) do you see the Roman Catholic Church attempting to be a broad-tent movement?
4. Do you find helpful the idea that the Protestant principle of *sola*, that is, *alone*, stands over against the Catholic principle of "*et—et*" / "and—and" / "both—and"?
5. What is your assessment of Scripture alone, Christ alone, faith alone, grace alone, and the glory of God alone?

QUESTION 2

What Are Some Significant Events Prior to the Reformation?

The Early Church

Outside the New Testament, the earliest information that we possess about the Christian faith is from the writings of a group of men known as the “apostolic fathers.”¹ One important contribution was six letters from Ignatius, an early Christian leader, to various churches. Facing the twin dangers of heresy and church divisions, Ignatius proposed a practical solution to ward off these threats: each church should be led by one bishop, who would be the rallying point for all church meetings. He would ensure sound doctrine and would prevent factions among members. Eventually, this monepiscopacy (Gr. *mono* = one; *episkopos* = bishop) developed so that one bishop ruled over numerous churches in his geographical area.² The early church became bishop-led.

The Development of the Papacy

In the mid-third century, a disagreement erupted between two church leaders: Stephen, bishop of Rome, and Cyprian, bishop of Carthage (North Africa).³ Both disputants appealed to Jesus’s promise to Peter: “I tell you, you

1. In 1672 a Frenchman—Cortelier—wrote a book in Latin, the English translation of which is *The Fathers Who Flourished in Apostolic Times*; hence, the phrase “apostolic fathers.”

2. In time, five bishops became the leading authorities for Christianity: the bishops of Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria (Egypt), Constantinople (the capital city of the eastern Roman Empire), and Rome (the capital city of the western Roman Empire).

3. Stephen and Cyprian were at odds over the validity of baptism administered by the Novatian schismatics, a movement that had split off from the church. What was the status of a Christian who had been baptized by a Novatian pastor? Stephen affirmed the validity of that baptism while Cyprian denied its legitimacy.

are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt. 16:18–19). According to Stephen, Jesus conferred on Peter and his successors, the bishops of Rome, the “keys,” or supreme authority in the church. According to Cyprian, Jesus conferred on Peter and all the apostles the “keys,” or equal authority in the church. Eventually, Stephen’s view won the day. The bishop of Rome, as the successor of Peter, became the ultimate authority in the church. By the seventh century, he was called the pope.

There were several other important reasons for the elevation of the papacy in Rome. Rome was the capital and chief city of the western Roman Empire and thus enjoyed political and commercial importance. When Rome was sacked by barbarians in 410, a power vacuum emerged in the western empire. This void paved the way for the emergence of the bishop of Rome as the key leader. Additionally, the orthodoxy of the church of Rome was widely acknowledged; rarely had a bishop of Rome held to false doctrine.⁴ Indeed, he played an increasingly important role in the controversies about Christology in the fourth and fifth centuries.⁵ Moreover, the tradition of Peter’s burial in Rome became an important reason for the elevation of that church and its bishop. Though the Roman church had not been founded by an apostle, it was blessed by the presence of Peter’s bones (as well as those of the apostle Paul) and thus promoted in stature. Finally, several Roman bishops made increasingly exaggerated claims for the importance of the bishop of Rome.⁶

A singular development helped cement the Roman bishop’s claim to authority and dominance. In 754 the city of Rome was under attack by the Lombards, a barbarian tribe. Pope Stephen II appealed to Pepin the Short, king of the Franks—a tribe in what is now France—to repulse the Lombardian invasion. Successful in coming to the aid of Stephen, Pepin recovered much of northern and central Italy from the barbarians and donated them to the pope. Why did he commit such a generous act? Stephen presented to Pepin a document written by Emperor Constantine (306–337) in which the Roman ruler described his miraculous healing from leprosy and his conversion to Christianity through the ministry of the Roman bishop Sylvester I. Out of

4. Two exceptions are Vigilius, bishop of Rome from 537–55, and Honorius I, bishop from 625–38. See Question 14.

5. For example, the Roman bishop Leo I’s *Tome* paved the way for the Chalcedonian Creed—the classical statement of the person of Christ—and its denouncement of the heresy of Eutychianism. At the same time, it should be noted that other bishops of Rome played a minor role in other early general councils such as the Council of Nicaea (325).

6. Damasus I (366–384), Leo I (440–461), Gelasius (492–496), and Gregory the Great (590–604) are examples. For further discussion, see Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 596–98.

gratitude to this man, Constantine had bequeathed “the city of Rome and all the provinces, districts, and cities of Italy,” as well as the western part of the empire, to the bishop of Rome. Thus, by handing over the conquered lands to Pope Stephen, Pepin was fulfilling the terms of (what came to be called) the “Donation of Constantine.” Amassing this huge amount of land enabled the bishop of Rome to become a powerful and extensive landowner—these lands became the Papal States—and the single most important leader in the West. Additionally, the donation stipulated that the pope should exercise authority over all the churches in the world in honor of Peter and Paul who had been martyred in Rome. For centuries to come, all the West would look to Rome for leadership.

It was not until the fifteenth century that the “Donation of Constantine” was exposed as a fraud.⁷ It was probably forged by someone (perhaps Stephen himself) as the pope traveled to enlist Pepin’s intervention. It would serve the purpose of demonstrating to Pepin the authority of the pope. Thus, one of the foundational elements in the emergence of the papacy turned out to be a forgery. Regardless, it expanded papal authority and political control for centuries.

Persecution in the early church had a way of sifting between true Christians and people who only professed the faith. After all, why would anyone risk confiscation of their property, exile, and possible martyrdom unless they were genuine believers? When persecution of the church gave way to the legalization of Christianity with Constantine in the fourth century, an important question arose: How could true Christians live godly lives to the fullest extent possible if “the world” hindered them from such an ideal? The answer was the monastic movement, which focused on different models of Christian piety. Individual monasticism called for people to live as hermits, completely separated from the world and its allurements.⁸ Community monasticism offered groups of Christians the opportunity to pursue purity through ascetic practices.⁹ By the fifth century, monasticism became a notable characteristic of the church.

Monks and monasteries developed different rules that helped to shape monasticism in the church. Augustine, for example, introduced the aspect of a community of monastic clergy living together and serving a local church. Many monastic movements became missionary centers from which the

7. This exposé was the work of the textual critic Lorenzo Valla, who uncovered linguistic and historical errors in the document.

8. An example was Antony (ca. 250–356), who lived an isolated life outside a village. His ascetic—rigorous, self-disciplined—practices consisted of eating and drinking sparingly, fasting regularly, and sleeping little on the bare ground.

9. An example was Pachomius (ca. 290–346) and his monastic community that featured daily prayer and Scripture meditation, compulsory manual labor, regular community fasts, obedience to one’s superiors, chastity, and poverty.

evangelization of Europe took place. Monasteries cared for the needs of the poor, orphans, and widows while providing literacy training and education for boys and young men.

The Middle Ages

In the early Middle Ages, monastic movements played a crucial role in the expansion of Christianity. Examples include Patrick (389–461) and the evangelization of Ireland; Columba of Iona (521–597) and the conversion of the Scots and Picts; Aidan of Lindisfarne (d. 651) and the Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons; and Boniface (680–754), the evangelization of Germany, and the renewal of the church in Gaul (part of the Frankish kingdom, now France). The Carolingian Dynasty of the Frankish Empire produced both Pepin the Short (who we've already seen) and his son Charlemagne, who ruled it for nearly fifty years (768–814) and expanded the kingdom to include much of Europe. On Christmas Day, 800, Charlemagne was crowned Holy Roman Emperor by Pope Leo III. The dream was for a revival of the old Roman Empire, but now with both its emperor and its people transformed by the Christian faith.

Following the death of Charlemagne, the dream was shattered by weak and divided Carolingian kings, chronic European wars, and foreign invasions that devastated civilization. Scandinavian sea raiders—the Vikings—laid waste to the churches and monasteries. Muslim invaders wreaked havoc as well. The papacy became overwhelmed, and the quality of its leadership was eroded by incompetency, fornication, and more. Political struggles and theological disagreements between the pope in Rome and the leader of the Eastern church in Constantinople eventually led to a (still unhealed) split between the (Western) Catholic Church and the (Eastern) Orthodox Church in 1054.¹⁰

Into this darkness stepped new monastic movements that brought renewal to the church and its institutions. Examples include the Cluny monastic movement (founded ca. 900) and the Cistercian monastic movement (founded ca. 1100), with Bernard of Clairvaux as a leading figure. A key factor in this renewal was the appearance of mendicant (= begging) orders: the Carmelites (founded ca. twelfth century), the Franciscans (founded 1209/1210), the Dominicans (founded 1216/1217), and the Augustinians (founded 1244). All four orders combined a monastic lifestyle with the ideals of poverty, chastity, obedience, and community living with preaching to those outside of the

10. The theological division was over the *filioque* (“and the Son”) clause in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. Written in 381 with the affirmation that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father,” the creed was modified in 589 by the inclusion of the word *filioque*. The result was the affirmation that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father and the Son.” The (Western) Catholic Church made the change and the (Eastern) Orthodox Church refused to accept the addition. Other factors that contributed to the split were the iconoclastic controversy of the eighth and ninth centuries and the issue of papal authority.

movements. Also, they all engaged in the practice of begging money for the support of their order and for the poor. Their zeal and unflagging activity sparked significant renewal of the church. At the same time, these orders attacked popular religious movements outside the church. Examples were the heretical Cathari (or Albigenses) and the Waldensians, a pre-Reformation type of protest movement.

In addition to spiritual renewal, the church of the second half of the Middle Ages experienced significant theological development. Indeed, theology arose as the “queen of the sciences.” Of particular importance was scholasticism, a movement that joined theology and philosophy—faith and reason—to better understand God and his ways.

One example of scholasticism is Anselm (1033/1034–1109), who is known primarily for two discussions. The first is the ontological proof for God’s existence. That is, reasoning from the concept that “God is that being than which nothing greater can be conceived,” and assuming that existence is an attribute, the existence of God is proved.¹¹ The second is the satisfaction theory of the atonement. It reasons from the idea that sin is robbing God of his honor, and that sinners must render satisfaction to God so as to restore his honor. Accordingly, the work of Christ in redeeming sinners becomes this: as the sinless God-man who had no obligation to die, Christ’s death on behalf of sinners is passed on to them as a satisfaction for their sins.

A second example of scholastic theology is the work of Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). Among his many contributions are his proofs for God’s existence and his support for the doctrine of transubstantiation. As for the first, Aquinas offered the “Five Ways” to prove the existence of God by reason alone. Four of the ways are cosmological proofs: from the existence of the cosmos (Gr. *kosmos* = world), we must conclude that God exists. The fifth way is a teleological proof: from the fact of order and design (Gr. *telos* = purpose, aim) in the world, we must conclude that God exists.

As for transubstantiation, the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) had already proclaimed this doctrine to be the church’s official position on the presence of Christ in the celebration of the sacrament of the Eucharist (or the Lord’s Supper): “His body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the forms of bread and wine, the bread and wine having been changed in substance, by God’s power, into his body and blood.”¹² To demonstrate the appropriateness of transubstantiation, Aquinas modified two key concepts—substance and accidents—from the philosophy of Aristotle. A substance is that which exists in itself and makes something what it is. For example, think

11. Immanuel Kant later demonstrated that Anselm’s ontological proof is faulty.

12. Fourth Lateran Council, canon 1. For further discussion, see Question 21. The Fourth Lateran Council was the twelfth ecumenical (or general) council convened by the Catholic Church in 1215. The Lateran is a prominent Roman Catholic Church in Rome.

of human nature, or substance, as including both body and soul. Accidents are attributes like color and texture that adhere in a substance and that can be detected by the senses. For example, think of human characteristics, or accidents, such as brown hair and a lean body type. As applied to the sacrament of the Eucharist, at the consecration of the elements, the substance of the bread transubstantiates, or changes, into the substance of the body of Christ. Similarly, the substance of the wine transubstantiates, or changes, into the substance of the blood of Christ. Yet, the bread still smells like, looks like, feels like, and tastes like bread. And the wine still smells like, looks like, feels like, and tastes like wine. By the power of God, the substance of the bread and wine changes but the accidents remain the same. Thus, Aquinas provided an explanation for the doctrine of transubstantiation.

Scholasticism was a powerful movement that continues to shape Catholic doctrine and practice today.

Papal and Church Disasters

At the height of the Middle Ages, the papacy rose to unprecedented status. The peak of papal power came with Pope Innocent III (1198–1216). He declared that as pope he is the vicar (Latin *vicarius* = deputy), that is, “the representative of Christ, the successor of Peter, the anointed of the Lord, the God of Pharaoh set midway between God and man, below God but above man, less than God but more than man, judging all other men, but himself judged by none.” He further claimed that papal authority was preeminent “not only over the universal church, but the whole world.”¹³

Eventually, such exaggerated claims led to the humiliation of the papacy. When Pope Boniface VIII (1294–1303) excommunicated King Philip IV of France and died suddenly thereafter, Clement V, a Frenchman, was elected pope as a result of French pressure. Although he intended to go to Rome, he never left France. And in 1309 he moved the papacy to Avignon (southern France). Thus began what is called “the Babylonian captivity of the Church” (1309–1378).¹⁴ It was not until 1378 that Pope Gregory XI succeeded in bringing the papacy back to Rome. But even this return of the papacy to its original home did not put an end to the papacy’s troubles.

13. Innocent III, “Empire and Papacy,” in Henry Bettenson, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 111. One example of papal power was the Albigensian Crusade against the heretical Cathari (1209–1229). Another was the Fourth Crusade (1202–1204) that, instead of carrying out its intended purpose of recapturing Jerusalem from its Muslim occupiers, was rerouted to seize Constantinople in an attempt to bring it back under Roman Church control.

14. As the Avignon papacy lasted nearly seventy years, it was similar to the Babylonian captivity of the people of Israel (597–538 B.C.). The Avignon popes lived an extravagant, luxurious lifestyle, and sexual immorality among the clergy was not uncommon. Some of these popes were nothing more than puppets of the French kings.

When an Italian, Pope Urban VI, was elected in Rome, the displeased French cardinals voted to depose the Italian pope and elected a French pope, Clement VIII, in his place. Clement took “his” papacy back to Avignon, resulting in what is known as “the Great Schism”: two popes, two administrative headquarters, and the various countries of Europe lined up on one side or the other. The attempt at a solution was worse than the original problem, resulting in three popes instead of two.¹⁵ The Great Schism was eventually healed by the Council of Constance (1414–1418) through its election of Pope Martin V, who ruled in Rome.

In the midst of these struggles, “the notion of church tradition—the unwritten teaching of Christ that was communicated orally from him to his disciples, and from them to their successors, the bishops—gained ascendancy in the Roman Catholic Church.”¹⁶ For example, one leader proposed that divine revelation comes “from the tradition of the Apostles outside of the Scriptures.”¹⁷ Another leader opined, “Many things that are not in the canon of the Bible were communicated to the church by the apostles and have come down to us through episcopal succession.”¹⁸ To be noted is the appeal to “episcopal succession,” or apostolic succession, the doctrine that Jesus delegated his authority to Peter and to his successors. The pope along with the bishops—the Magisterium—of the Roman Catholic Church have the authority to determine the canon of Scripture, that is, the list of writings that belong in the Bible. Additionally, they possess the authority to proclaim official doctrines that are outside of Scripture and are yet divine revelation, that is, Church Tradition. Furthermore, the Magisterium exercises rightful authority in offering the official interpretation of both Scripture and Tradition. These developments in the latter part of the Middle Ages were decisive for the Roman Catholic Church on the verge of the Reformation.

Summary

From a Catholic perspective, from its inauguration on the day of Pentecost to the time of the Reformation, the church made steady progress. According to the plan of God and guided by the Holy Spirit, it developed from simple beginnings to the massive, papal-led, socio-economic-political-military powerhouse that rescued and then dominated European society

15. Cardinals from both Rome and Avignon convened a general council of the church (in Pisa, 1409) to decide who was the true pope. When the council deposed both the Avignon pope and the Roman pope and elected Pope Alexander V in their place, neither pope complied with the council’s decision.

16. Allison, *Historical Theology*, 150.

17. Gerald of Bologna, *Commentary on the Sentences*, 457, as cited in Allison, *Historical Theology*, 150.

18. Gabriel Biel, *Collectorium super 4 Libros Sententiarum*, bk. 4, chap. 7, q. unica, as cited in Allison, *Historical Theology*, 86.

for many centuries. From a Protestant viewpoint, this fifteen hundred years of history is a story with both highlights—the expansion of the church, its constant battles against heresies, its withstanding of fierce persecutions, and important theological developments—and lowlights—the rise of the papacy, the Babylonian Captivity, the Great Schism, and a morally compromised and spiritually bankrupt clergy.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Do you see the history of the church in its first fifteen hundred years as more of a positive development or a negative decline?
2. How was the development of the papacy decisive for the future of the Catholic Church?
3. In what ways were heresies beneficial to or dangerous for the church? In what ways were persecutions beneficial to or dangerous for the church?
4. Why was the development of the idea of Tradition so important for the Church?
5. What conditions can you identify that prepared the church toward the end of the Middle Ages for the Reformations of the sixteenth century?

QUESTION 3

What Led to the Division between Catholicism and Protestantism?

Though historians offer various interpretations of the Reformation—for example, the Reformation was a reaction to the sociological, political, and economic disruptions in European society; or Protestantism was an anticlerical movement—our view focuses on doctrinal and ecclesial matters that led to the split between these two traditions.

Precursors to Reform

Several developments set the stage for the Reformation. In the fourteenth century, the pre-Reformers John Wycliffe and John Hus openly criticized the worldliness of the papacy, the spiritual bankruptcy of the Church, the sale of indulgences, and transubstantiation. Rumbings within the Church itself led to renewal movements such as the *Devotio Moderna* that emphasized practical piety and community life. The cultural and educational movement called humanism promoted a return to the sources of antiquity, leading to a rediscovery of the Hebrew Bible, Greek New Testament, and the writings of the early church (for example, Augustine). Mysticism—for example, St. Francis's stigmata, Thomas Aquinas's beatific vision, and Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*—fostered an intense craving for a direct experience of God. The modern invention of moveable type provided the Reformers with a way to mass-produce their writings and their translations of the Bible for the common people.

Martin Luther

Generally speaking, the Reformation began on October 31, 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his *Ninety-Five Theses* on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. He called for a debate on the sale of indulgences, the remission of the temporal punishment suffered by souls in purgatory. For Luther, Jesus's command to repent (Matt. 4:17) "cannot be understood as referring to the

sacrament of penance, that is, confession and satisfaction, as administered by the clergy.”¹ His action caused an intense and widespread reaction indicative of an underlying restlessness with the pope and discontentment with the Church. Declared a heretic by the Church, Luther lived in constant threat of danger.²

In 1520 Luther authored four writings that expressed his distinctive convictions. His *Sermon on Good Works* (May) protested the Church’s limitation of good works to spiritual activities like praying in church, fasting, and giving alms. By contrast, Luther insisted that good works, when done joyfully according to God’s will and without concern for a reward, could include working well in one’s profession, eating, and drinking. Yet, the greatest of all good works is to believe in Jesus Christ. Luther’s radical perspective attacked the Church’s emphasis on human cooperation in salvation.

To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation (August) lamented the fact that the Church, in self-defense, had erected three walls that led instead to Christendom’s suffering. Luther attacked the first wall, the alleged superiority of the clergy over the laity: “It is pure invention that pope, bishops, priests, and monks are to be called the ‘spiritual estate’; princes, lords, artisans, and farmers the ‘temporal estate.’ . . . [On the contrary,] all Christians are truly of the ‘spiritual estate,’ and there is among them no difference at all but that of office.”³ Thus, Luther proposed the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, that “all who have faith in Christ and are baptized are designated priests and share in Christ’s royal priesthood. This meant that every believer has equal access to the Father through Jesus. The corollary was that every believer has the responsibility to act as a priest to other believers, to minister to them, particularly through proclaiming Scripture to them.”⁴

Luther attacked the second wall, the Church’s claim that the pope possesses the exclusive authority to interpret Scripture. Luther complained that many popes, as unbelievers, had been incapable of understanding the Bible. But every genuine Christian, as part of the priesthood of believers, is competent to grasp the message of the gospel. Thus, “it is the duty of every Christian to espouse the cause of the faith, to understand and defend it, and to denounce every error. . . . When the pope acts contrary to the Scriptures, it is our duty to stand by

1. Martin Luther, *Ninety-Five Theses*, <https://www.luther.de/en/95thesen.html>.

2. From the humble start of the Reformation, the Catholic Church misunderstood this movement. Pope Leo X (papacy from 1513–1521) brushed off Martin Luther’s protest as the ravings of a drunken monk. Moreover, Luther was accused of breaking away from the Church so that he could justify having sexual intercourse and getting married.

3. Martin Luther, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* (LW 44:129).

4. Gregg R. Allison and Rachel Ciano, “Roman Catholic Theology and Practice of the Priesthood Contrasted with Protestant Theology and Practice of Priesthood,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 23, no. 1 (2019): 139–40.

the Scriptures.”⁵ In these sentences we hear the development of Protestantism’s formal principle of *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone as ultimate authority).⁶

Luther attacked the third wall, the Church’s claim that only the pope could convene a general council of the Church. By contrast, Luther insisted that when the pope contradicts Scripture, the secular authorities have the right to call a council to deal with him. In these three ways, Luther struck at important doctrines and practices of the Church, including the mediatorial function of priests to forgive sins, the Church’s limitation of reading and interpreting the Bible to the clergy, and the supreme authority of the papacy.

In his *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (September), Luther paralleled the seventy-year captivity of Israel in Babylon with the seventy-year hiatus of the papacy in Avignon, France. He especially criticized the Church’s sacraments. He complained that the denial of the communion cup to the laity was wrong. Rather, they should partake in both elements—the bread and the cup, as Jesus had instructed (Matt. 26:26–29). Luther protested that transubstantiation is grounded on philosophy and not the Bible; thus, lay people are not bound to believe it. He repudiated the Mass as a good work and sacrifice, complaining that it had become little more than a money-making project. Luther lamented the sorry state of baptism, which hardly anyone took seriously. Finally, he dismissed four other rites—confirmation, anointing of the sick, holy orders, and matrimony—as being sacraments. By the end of this writing, he added penance to the list of non-sacraments. They had not been ordained by Christ himself as a word of promise with an accompanying sign. Only two rites—baptism and the Lord’s Supper—qualified to be considered sacraments.

The Freedom of the Christian Man (November)⁷ proposed an apparent contradiction: “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”⁸ By his first affirmation, Luther referred to the doctrine of justification: through God’s grace alone, received by faith alone in Christ alone, sinful people may be declared not guilty but righteous instead. Thus, they are free from trying to cooperate with divine grace by engaging in good works in an effort to merit eternal life. Justification became

5. Luther, *To the Christian Nobility* (LW 44:136).

6. The term “formal principle” refers to the key framework or structure according to which the Reformation was shaped: biblical authority only rather than the threefold authority of Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium as held by the Roman Catholic Church.

7. Prior to the treatise itself, Luther penned an open letter to Pope Leo X. While he expressed his support for the pope himself, Luther denounced the Curia—the administrative office (the See)—for its corruption of the papal office: “I have truly despised your see, the Roman Curia, which, however, neither you nor anyone else can deny is more corrupt than any Babylon or Sodom ever was, and which, as far as I can see, is characterized by a completely depraved, hopeless, and notorious godlessness.” *Martin Luther, “An Open Letter to Pope Leo X,” in Three Treatises* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 277.

8. Luther, “Open Letter,” 277.

the material principle of Protestantism.⁹ By his second affirmation, Luther insisted that the justified are bound by faith working through love (Gal. 5:6) to work for the good of their neighbors. Thus, good works follow and flow from justification and do not contribute to God's salvation of his people.¹⁰

In his earliest writings, Luther initiated the themes that would characterize much of his career as a Reformer and set in motion the movement that would lead to Protestantism: Indulgences and purgatory. The nature of good works, with the greatest being faith in Christ. The priesthood of all believers. The interpretation of Scripture. *Sola scriptura*. The authority of the papacy. The Eucharist and transubstantiation. Two sacraments instead of seven. Justification through God's grace alone embraced by faith alone in Christ alone. To these topics Luther added a fresh approach to biblical interpretation (a "literal" or "grammatical-historical" hermeneutic¹¹ that is Christocentric¹²), an insistence on the clarity of Scripture,¹³ and a rejection of the apocryphal writings.¹⁴ His decisive break from the Catholic Church is seen in his two marks of a true church: "The church is the congregation of the saints in which the gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments rightly administered. And unto the true unity of the church, it is sufficient to agree concerning the doctrine of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments."¹⁵

John Calvin

As a second-generation Protestant, John Calvin (1509–1564) authored the theological masterpiece of the Reformation, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (final edition, 1559).¹⁶ By contrast with Thomas Aquinas's proofs for the existence of God—the Catholic starting point for religious knowledge—Calvin addressed the knowledge of God the Creator and the knowledge of God the Redeemer. While some knowledge of God may be obtained from

9. The term "material principle" refers to the key doctrine on which the Reformation was centered: justification as God's declaration of forgiveness and righteous standing rather than the life process consisting of forgiveness, regeneration, and sanctification through the sacraments as held by the Roman Catholic Church.

10. In this writing, Luther again underscored his full submission to Scripture. Speaking directly to Pope Leo X, Luther insisted: "I have no dispute with any man concerning morals, but only concerning the word of truth. In all other things I will yield to anyone, but I neither can nor will forsake and deny the Word." Luther, "Open Letter," paragraph 4.

11. Martin Luther, *Answers to the Hyperchristian, Hyperspiritual, Hyperlearned Book by Goat Emser in Leipzig* (LW 39:181).

12. Martin Luther, *Prefaces to the New Testament* (LW 35:396).

13. Martin Luther, *On the Bondage of the Will* (LCC 17:101–334).

14. Martin Luther, *Prefaces to the Apocrypha* (LW 35:337–54).

15. Augsburg Confession, 7, in Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols. (New York: Harper, 1877–1905), 3:11–12.

16. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960) (LCC vols. 20 and 21).

general revelation in the created order and through an innate sense of God, such knowledge is ultimately not beneficial due to human sinfulness. The only corrector for this weakened vision is Scripture, which, “gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God.”¹⁷ The Bible, pointing sinful people to God the Redeemer in Jesus Christ, resonates in their hearts as the inspired, authoritative Word of God through the secret testimony of the Holy Spirit.¹⁸

The doctrine for which Calvin is most known is predestination. It is absolute, not conditioned on God’s foreknowledge of human faith and salvation, but solely on God’s good pleasure and will. It is particular, applying to individual people, not to groups. It is double in the sense that God ordains some to eternal life—election—and others to eternal damnation—reprobation. More specifically, the planning of predestination is double but its application is different, because God causes the salvation of the elect but does not cause the sin and condemnation of the non-elect. A matter that is far beyond theoretical, predestination leads to intense evangelization and provides comfort and assurance to believers.

Calvin reinforced many of Luther’s important themes: *Sola scriptura* as the formal principle of Protestantism. Justification through God’s grace alone embraced by faith alone in Christ alone as the material principle of Protestantism. The priesthood of all believers. The interpretation of Scripture and its clarity. The rejection of the apocryphal writings. The rejection of the authority of the papacy. The Eucharist and transubstantiation. Two sacraments instead of seven. Like Luther, his contrast with the Catholic Church is evident in his two marks of the true church: “Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists.”¹⁹

The Reformation’s Impact

The combined impact of Luther and Calvin—together with other Reformers like Huldrych Zwingli, Philip Melancthon, Heinrich Bullinger, and Theodore Beza—was widespread. The Lutheran Reformation initially spread into part of Germany and throughout the Scandinavian countries. The Calvinist Reformation initially expanded into Switzerland, Scotland, and the Netherlands. For theological and other reasons, the Reformation transformed England through the development of the Anglican Church. These so-called Magisterial Reformations²⁰ were joined by the so-called Radical Reformation

17. Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.6.1 (LCC 20:70).

18. Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.7.4–5 (LCC 20:78–81).

19. Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.9 (LCC 21:1023).

20. The term “Magisterial” is used because these movements incorporated an important role for the magistrates, or civic authorities, in church matters. This centuries-old state-church

of the Anabaptists and, later in the seventeenth century, the Baptists. Featuring distinctives such as regenerate church membership, baptism by immersion for believers (not infants), and the repudiation of the state-church relationship, baptistic churches continued the legacy of the early Reformers while making significant alterations to worship, church government, pastoral offices, and more.

As might be expected, the Catholic Church did not approve of this upstart Reformation movement. In 1542 Pope Paul III created the Roman Inquisition to stamp it out. Through its Sacred Congregation of the Roman Inquisition, one of the Church's measures was to list books written by Protestants or favorable to Protestant doctrines on the Index of Forbidden Books. These writings were banned from public reading. In its four sessions from 1546 to 1563, the Council of Trent denounced many Protestant doctrines and practices. As the movement spread, Protestants were fiercely persecuted in various countries. As one example, the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre (1572) resulted in the deaths of thousands (tens of thousands?) of Protestants in France.

Summary

Though various individuals and movements had sought to bring reform to the Church prior to the sixteenth century, the Reformation was decisive in a unique way. Martin Luther and John Calvin, among other Reformers, articulated and defended the key Protestant issues that contrasted with the Roman Catholic Church of their day. For example, the formal principle of *sola Scriptura* and the material principle of justification established Protestantism on axioms that were far removed from foundational Catholic theology. Other examples include a new vision of the nature and role of the laity, a fresh approach to the interpretation of Scripture (which did not include the Apocrypha), a renumbering of the sacraments (two instead of seven), a rejection of papal authority, and the establishment of true churches characterized by two marks.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Do you think that the Reformation was a mistake?²¹ If yes, why? If not, why not?
2. How did each of Martin Luther's 1520 writings—*Sermon on Good Works*, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, *Babylonian Captivity of*

relationship, embraced by Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Anglicanism, was denounced by the Radical Reformers.

21. This phrase is borrowed from the title of Matthew Levering's book *Was the Reformation a Mistake? Why Catholic Doctrine Is Not Unbiblical* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017).

the Church, and *The Freedom of a Christian Man*—contradict key Catholic Church doctrines and practices and spark the Reformation?

3. Why were the two principles of Protestantism—*sola Scriptura* and justification—so revolutionary in the religious situation of the sixteenth century?
4. Why were the two marks of the true church—the right preaching of the Word of God and the proper administration of the sacraments—so revolutionary in the religious situation of the sixteenth century?
5. As a Catholic, how do you assess the Roman Catholic Church's reaction to the Reformation? As a Protestant, how do you assess the Church's reaction to the Reformation?