

The Whole Kit and Caboodle—Catholicism as a Satisfying Worldview

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1. Foundational Commitments

I grew up within the Wesleyan Holiness movement of American Evangelicalism. All of my extended family was committed and devout, and I was taught to care about the truth even when it cuts against what I might like. For the most part, I think my family's beliefs aligned with truth, but there were parts that I could never quite piece together; this had the effect of pushing me to seek ways to piece together all the parts, which resulted in me being where I am now—on the cusp of converting to Catholicism.

For a couple years now, I've wanted to articulate my own faith in a way that is compelling to myself—my inner critic—who is informed by a dozen or so individuals who are my deep friends and who are all Evangelicals. These people are broadly Wesleyan to broadly Reformed. Emphases of theirs includes obedience to God, the paramount place of Sacred Scripture, sanctification, Arminianism about predestination, knowing Christ and his love for us, and that there is freedom in Christ as we increasingly grasp the totality of what he has done for us. Mainly, I want to attempt to make a brief but thorough case that Catholicism pieces together the philosophical and theological commitments that I hold in a more satisfying way than any other branch of Christianity. I first and foremost seek to satisfy my inner critic, so this will be argumentative. I am also aiming to keep this fairly informal and non-academic; I therefore usually give general characterizations of specific doctrines and beliefs, not those of a specific person. This is because I also aim to convince others; I don't want to just write to myself or a handful of professionals.

I retain elements of my tradition of birth. But, these emphases contain elements that I do not retain. What I retain, by itself, would not be a systematic worldview; it would not give a full economy of salvation, for instance. Such systematicity is needed though. Otherwise, we are left with a postmodern Christianity in which we shed our "baggage" and either pick up other baggage or are left with just a shell of a worldview. Christianity, however, is inadequate if it is not systemic and all encompassing. This thought should be held as the backdrop for everything I say. We need adequate answers to the Big Questions: What am I? How do I relate to the rest of the world? Is it a purely material world? What is the condition of everything in the world and what *should* it be? How, if at all, will that condition be achieved? What are my obligations, in light of what I am and what everything else is, and in light of what we should become? So, my becoming Catholic is a supplementation of what I retain of my Wesleyan-Arminianism.

There are some philosophical and theological claims that I will take for granted. These include that we have robust, "libertarian" free will as well as the "classic" understanding of the nature of God—God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent. Those are philosophical assumptions. Theologically, I take for granted the notion that this Perfect Being's nature is one of perfect love. Regarding the human condition, we are marked by the stain of original sin.¹

¹ I cannot go along with the way some Reformed theologians talk about this—that we are *born guilty*. How can one be guilty when one has not committed any acts? Rather, I say that we are born such that we will be guilty if we are so lucky to get the chance. We are born with fallen

Now, you could try fixing this state on your own and you might actually get part way toward being a nice person. You might be virtuous in many regards. We see that all the time with people who are lukewarm in their faith, or who lack faith entirely. This endeavor is doomed ultimately though, for the very notion of “doing it on your own” is fatally flawed. Such “pull myself up by my own bootstraps” humans are able to do so because they are the beneficiaries of common grace. They are able to realize what discipline is, or what kindness is, or what generosity is, by the grace of God. The world, chockfull of meaning and significance, can’t help but point us toward God. So, their ability to “be good on their own” is simply a failure to see that their goodness is also related to God’s grace—we are swimming in a sea of grace and have varying degrees of awareness of it at various times. There is no pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps when you properly see the nature of the world.

But even if you managed to be a pretty virtuous person, there would still be all the wrongs you committed on the way to becoming a good person. Many of these wrongs we aren’t even aware of. We can’t go back and change the past; once we’ve sinned, it’s etched as a fact that I did so for the rest of eternity. It would seem that we are hopeless apart from God’s grace. Such is the human condition. These are my foundational commitments, briefly explained. I’m now going to argue that these commitments are inconsistent with the Protestant idea that salvation is accomplished by faith *alone*.

2. Faith and Works

When I introduce my students to the classic conception of God, without exception, someone will raise his hand and wonder how these attributes could be consistent with us having libertarian free will. The worry is that God’s foreknowledge gets in the way of our freedom. I

natures and dispositions, lacking sanctifying grace. It’s downhill from there, for, “...when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death” (James 1:15).

The human condition is not one of total depravity, however. We retain some of the reflection of God’s image. What would it mean to be totally depraved? The words themselves suggest complete bankruptcy in terms of goodness. This seems straightforwardly false to me; we do retain *some* of the goodness with which we were created. There are various ways that Reformed thinkers characterize total depravity. Some have held that non-Christians are literally incapable of good works, regardless of how it seems to us. Sorry, Pagan Jim, there was *nothing* good about all those hours volunteering in the community soup kitchen! Other Reformed thinkers don’t go so far; they’ll say that our total depravity is complete, it is thorough, and it affects every aspect of our being—our bodies, our minds, our wills, and so on. This, I have no problem with, so long we simultaneously hold that we retain *some* amount of the goodness with which we were created. But if that’s all the majority of Reformed thinkers have ever meant by total depravity, I don’t see what it adds to the doctrine of original sin apart from confusion. It’s enough that I can’t save myself from my very fallen state.

think this also relates to how we think about salvation, especially predestination. Of course, there is Scriptural support for each of the various positions taken on predestination. Getting the Scriptural witness on this issue correct is very important, but our philosophical and theological background commitments often influence what we think that Scriptural witness is. For instance, Reformed theologians traditionally want to uphold the classical conception of God, often in terms of what is called Meticulous Providence—God is ordering every jot and tittle of the universe. At the same time, they are at pains to reject anything that smacks of salvation via works. These two commitments together pushed them to the doctrine of double predestination. If our choice of accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior makes us part of the elect, then it seems that our choice saved us and not God. Furthermore, it seems that we ordered that particular event, making an event that God wasn't meticulously governing.

These philosophical and theological implications were not acceptable, leading Reformed theologians and philosophers to adopt the doctrine of double predestination as a core commitment of the Reformed tradition. Briefly, the doctrine of double predestination holds that God foreordains who the elect are and who the damned are. For some, he foreordains that they will respond with acceptance to His gift of grace, whereas others, that they will harden their hearts.

Unsurprisingly, Reformed philosophers are more likely to favor what is called *compatibilism* in the free will debate, which is the view according to which free will is compatible with determinism. I am convinced that this position is unstable and collapses into either libertarian free will or plain-old hardline determinism—there is no free will.

Of greater concern to me is the seeming incompatibility with God's goodness and this doctrine of double predestination. It amounts to God creating beings who were determined to go to hell, come what may. A good God would not create beings that are deterministically destined for eternal hell. And even if this could be squared with God's goodness, we are still left with a question about why in the world God would create these beings predetermined to not accept his grace in the first place; they would be mere means whose existence is justified by their purpose of sharpening the elect on their journey toward glorification, but no humans are mere means.

Sensitive to these concerns, Reformers have always carefully and emphatically said that God Himself does not directly cause sin in a person so as not to implicate God as the cause of evil. This is good, but I think it's beside the point. It's contrary to God's goodness that people be determined for damnation, even if God is not the direct cause of their sin. Sinners need the robust option of having done otherwise than reject God in order to be held responsible. This ability to do otherwise, in the libertarian sense, is an essential part of what makes damnation justifiable.

I suggest that such a created world would be incompatible with deep, genuine love—the kind that reflects the very nature of God. Suppose I am incapable of doing other than what I do, such that if I accept God, I was incapable of rejecting God, or if I reject God, I was incapable of

accepting God. If this is the situation, then the elect could not have rejected God's grace. I think genuine, deep love carries with it the possibility of a person choosing other than what they chose. Analogously, suppose it turned out that my wife was predetermined to "love" me; she could not have chosen otherwise. How unsatisfying! How much deeper her love seems, knowing that she could have done otherwise, yet chooses to love me anyway! What satisfaction is there for God in "winning over" the love of agents that he determined to be won over. It seems to me that this is love in appearance only. Deep down, the Reformed theological positions (as opposed to many of its adherents) have deep trouble with holding to God's goodness and love.

The Arminian tradition of Protestantism, particularly, Wesleyanism, is sensitive to these problems. They thus will say that we choose a relationship with God, our choice is not predestined (determined in advance), and we have libertarian free will. Those in the Reformed tradition will say this is Pelagianism—a heresy according to which we can will our own salvation. For many within the Reformed camp, this is *the* central theological issue. To say that we choose a relationship with God is to walk right back into one of the chief things that the Catholic church is wrong about. Consequently, those in the Reformed camps tend to aggressively police the line of what counts as orthodox and what counts as Pelagian, even accusing those within the Reformed confines of Pelagianism sometimes. That said, they have a gripe against Arminians that should be taken seriously, and it's a gripe that I didn't take seriously enough as a Wesleyan. If God has not predetermined who will choose Him and I must freely choose him to be saved, then it seems like my free act is what does the saving work.

Now, Wesleyans are always quick to point out that the choice isn't sufficient to save, in and of itself. It has to be coupled with Christ's sacrificial death. Is that enough to save them from the Pelagianism objection? The devil is in the details. If Christ's sacrificial work is taken as a given, and I have to reach out and accept it completely of my own accord, then it still seems like I am a primary cause in my own salvation. That sounds like Pelagianism to me. Fortunately, I think many Wesleyans know this wouldn't be right, which is probably why John Wesley talks of *prevenient grace*—grace that goes before. Before what? Before becoming a Christian, which occurs when one repents of his or her sins and acknowledges Jesus as Savior.

The way that Arminians avoid the Pelagian objection puts them squarely inside of Catholic doctrine on the issue of free will and predestination. They might say, for instance, that it is by God's grace that we freely choose Him. Did this grace determine that we would accept Christ? No, that would eliminate free will. Nevertheless, there would be no accepting Christ without this grace. Perhaps then, predestination amounts to God knowing who will, by his grace, freely accept the grace of his sacrifice, and who will, by his grace, freely reject the grace of his sacrifice, which is offered to all.² Thus, God's atonement is universal, not limited. God does not offer it to some, but not others. If he did this, he would act in violation of his loving nature. This

2. Some find tension in this notion of God knowing what we will freely choose. This is a topic for another time. Suffice it to say that I stand with those who think this is a seeming tension only. God's knowledge does not causal impact me.

is not to say that Arminians who take this tack are forced into Catholicism, but on this one issue, there is little difference between what Catholics have long held and what Arminians say.

Now, Arminians might object to this characterization on the grounds that their development of the above position could not be Catholic, since they also vehemently object to the idea that there is salvation through works, which Catholicism openly embraces. Let's address this "salvation by works" issue head-on, then.

Protestants typically think that Catholicism holds a doctrine of salvation by works. After all, it was Luther who famously declared that justification was accomplished *sola fide*—through faith alone, and he was excommunicated for this (and other things). There is nothing one could do to earn one's salvation. Indeed, one of the central issues of the counter-Reformation and the Council of Trent was articulating a rejection of Luther's position on justification. Contemporarily, the waters are further muddled by Catholics. On the one hand, in a fashion that verges on flaunting, some Catholics will often fully endorse the idea that works are required for salvation, confirming Protestant's (especially Reformed Protestants) worst fears. On the other hand, in documents such as the "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification" between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation, we see the Catholic Church embracing justification by faith through grace. Anecdotally, I seem to recall hearing an apologist on the radio show *Catholic Answers* go as far as saying that Catholics can endorse "justification by faith *alone*", so long as it is properly understood. This sounds inconsistent with historic Catholic teaching at first blush.

Unfortunately, much of the dialogue between Protestants and Catholics goes right past each other. When some Catholics adopt rhetoric that seemingly wholeheartedly embraces justification through works, they often don't mean it how Protestants think they mean it. Also, when Catholics take a more conciliatory approach and say that justification is by faith and grace, they often mean it differently than Protestants, so confusion results either way.

Catholicism does indeed hold that one is saved by faith and grace; at the same time, "works"—obedience to God, acts of charity and love—are required for salvation. Salvation by faith *alone* is only acceptable if such works are understood as a part of faith. This is a flat rejection of the all too common notion, at least in these contexts, of faith as simply a mental acceptance of the fact that Christ died for us. But there is no sense in which one could earn God's forgiveness. You could spend every morning of the rest of your life in prayer, go to every church service you could get to, and donate everything you owned to the poor, and it wouldn't earn God's forgiveness. James 2:17, however, tells us that faith without works is dead. So faith alone won't justify you either.

Taking the Catholic position really helps me avoid a lot of mental gymnastics. Many Wesleyan-Arminians, wanting to remain thoroughly Protestant, will follow Luther and say that you are saved through faith *alone*. This pushes toward this idea that I just mentioned of faith simply being mental affirmation of Christ's sacrifice, despite Protestants typically wanting to rightly say that faith encompasses one's whole life. But faith can't be something you do, because

then it would be work. The problem is that a notion of faith stripped of the condition that doing things is involved, is incoherent. For even a mental acceptance or affirmation typically involves doing something. So if we are saved by faith without works, where works are construed as any old thing we might do, then even mental affirmation becomes a work. What then is faith, if it is not a work? If we construe "work" too broadly, it seems to rule out faith and trust. Having faith in something, and placing our trust in something, are things we do. So, things we do have a causal role in justification, or faith is not something we do. The latter implies determinism, so I will take the former.

Some will object that mental affirmation, or acceptance, is not something that we can do voluntarily. In philosophy, most people who have thought about the topics of belief and knowledge think that doxastic voluntarism, the idea that we can choose what we believe, is false. I could not choose to believe that $2+2=5$, for instance. Likewise, no one chooses to believe that Christ raised from the dead; they believe it because, based on what they take to be the case, belief in Christ's resurrection impresses itself upon the believer.

But even if we can't choose our beliefs, forming a belief is still something you do, albeit involuntarily. Faith would still be a work, strictly speaking. Furthermore, it's still the case that we can voluntarily put ourselves in positions that will affect what beliefs we form (choosing to study or ignore certain material, or choosing to go to church, etc.). Why not just dispense with this attempt to sensibly hold together the notions that we are saved by faith *alone*, we are required to do good works, but those good works play no causal role in our justification? Just get rid of the *alone* part and add that the required works *do not merit* God's grace, but that He has seen it fit to, through his grace, also use works to fully justify us. Despite being quite close to the Catholic and Orthodox positions on justification and works, historical and sociological factors typically restrain Wesleyan-Arminians from making these moves; they trace their religious identity through Luther and his proclamation that salvation is by faith alone.

The situation for Wesleyan-Arminians, then, seems to be this. Either justification is through faith alone, and works have nothing to do with it, or justification is not through faith alone. If it's through faith alone, we should give up that God requires us to do certain things. Some reformers have remained consistent on this and have indeed given up on the notion that God requires something of us. But most know that there is something wrong with this. The overall witness of Scripture and reason is that there are expectations that we do certain things if we are to remain in good standing before God. A straightforward way of holding this position is to simply embrace that faith and works are required.

The position that I've just articulated seems to me to fit very well with Paul's message in Romans on faith, which is significant, since Luther appealed to Romans to establish *sola fide*. First, note that throughout Paul's epistles, and especially in Romans, he wants to emphasize that *the Jewish law* does not justify us. As Galatians 2:16 says, works *of the law* do not justify us. Paul is speaking to practicing Jews, many of whom were at least influenced by the Pharisees, who were prone to thinking that practicing the law *made* them righteous--sacrificing, keeping the Sabbath, etc. In contrast to this, Paul emphasizes that it's our faith for which God grants us his

saving grace. Paul is not saying, as hardcore Calvinists have said, that our will has no role whatsoever to play in justification because such willings are works. Paul is pretty clearly talking about works in the context of the Jewish law.

This fits especially well with the key passages found in the third and fourth chapters of Romans. For instance, Romans 3:26 says, "For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed *by the law*." At this point, Paul has already established that he is talking about "deeds prescribed by the law" (verse 20). The celebrated fourth chapter is where Paul articulates that it wasn't through the law that Abraham and his descendants received God's promise, "...but through the righteousness of faith." Faith alone? Well, it doesn't say that. These passages clearly require that faith is required for justification, but they do not go so far as to say that works play no role in our justification. And notice—Paul himself talks about faith as an act of the will, and I will add that it seems that this is a robustly free will. For if it was not, then why was Abraham's faith credited to him as righteousness? He wouldn't have had any role in the matter for which God should credit him.

Furthermore, even when these passages sound as though they are espousing justification by faith alone, we have to read these in light of the New Testament passages that seem to suggest works are required. We have to find a way to make such passages consistent, otherwise Scripture will have contradictions in it, undermining its authority. I am suggesting a reading of these Pauline passages according to which we do not read "work" as having such a wide scope that it includes all acts of the will, as Protestants will sometimes suggest. No, "works" are acts prescribed by the Jewish law, and they do not merit God's forgiveness. This seems to be implicit in these chapters, given that Paul goes on in chapter five to add that, "...we boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us" (verses 3-6). Suffering is not something we always passively go through. Sometimes we actively choose it, knowing that it is good for our souls (self-sacrifice, for instance) because it *produces* character. It's not merely a byproduct of our faith, but an avenue for more grace. So I can affirm with Protestants that it is by grace alone that we are justified, but justification requires works. I disagree with the Reformed view because it puts tension between free will and God's love. Wesleyanism resolves this tension it tries to maintain this false distinction between faith and works.

3. Doctrines of Justification

I will now situate the issue of faith and works within the broader context of justification. We just saw that Wesleyanism can avoid Pelagianism, but I am going to argue that the idea of salvation by faith alone has led to mistaken views of the doctrine of justification, more generally, both for Reformed theology and Wesleyan-Arminian theology. Keeping the foundational commitments in mind, it is the doctrine of justification that is supposed to give us an account for how the human condition is to be corrected.

Protestants tend to construe justification as a matter of individual belief only. We are therefore justified by having faith, i.e., believing and accepting that Christ died for our sins, and

we are justified by this alone. Sanctification then gets snuck on board with this accepting of Christ, if you Reformed, in that Christ's righteousness is imputed to us through our faith; or, if you are Wesleyan, it gets tacked on as something separate, to be achieved after accepting Christ. Both are wrong.

There is an important overlap in what Protestants and Catholics say about justification regarding belief in and acceptance of Christ. Catholics can and do say that these are required for conversion, but these events do not carry the same significance as they do in Protestant circles. I think this is because for Catholicism, these events are just a couple significant events among many, which are all part of a long-term, complete conversion process in which you not only believe, but you understand this belief affects all your other beliefs. Complete acceptance too, involves what you do being conformed completely, and this involves the will *totally* accepting Christ as Lord of all, especially of itself. You are not completely converted from the way you started to how you ought to be until this is completely done. We are again face to face with the human condition and the question of what a complete solution looks like; I think Catholicism says it looks like full conversion.

For Protestants, justification has more to do with one's standing with God, where the question is something like, "Has Christ's salvific work become efficacious on my behalf?" If the answer is "yes", then I am justified and heaven bound. The moment this happens is the moment where one mentally accepts or believes a certain proposition about who Christ is and what he has done. The Catholic can agree that a person is heaven bound when Christ's salvific work becomes efficacious on one's behalf (they will sometimes call this point "initial justification"). But this is also a neutered sense of justification from the Catholic standpoint, since we should be seeking ultimate solutions. Moreover, it cannot be right to say that the moment Christ's work becomes efficacious for us is when we merely believe a proposition. Here are two quick counterexamples. First, surely those incapable of mentally assenting to a proposition, such as a person with cognitive disabilities, can be justified, which shows that belief isn't always necessary. Second, belief isn't even sufficient, for a person could believe that Christ died, resurrected, and is Lord, and simply decide he doesn't care. Augustine's libertine phase comes to mind as exemplary. One might reply by making a distinction between belief and acceptance—the person in question might believe but hasn't *really* accepted Christ. I am fine with this distinction, but then, what is 'acceptance'? It sounds as though it involves doing something on our part, and so we are back to this issue of faith involving works. I think the Catholic answer to when Christ's work becomes efficacious for an individual is when the gift of faith becomes active in an individual, with 'faith' being understood in the Catholic way already described.

If one favors the idea that works are involved in a full conception of faith, then if grace through faith justifies us, faith is going to be an ongoing, active process requiring daily obedience. Thus, justification itself is a process when properly construed. Let me expound on why this would be. Faith partially consists in works, and this isn't just one work, but continued obedience in different circumstances. These opportunities for obedience God uses as a conduit for increased faith and grace that forms our soul into increasing likeness with God, and if this

also sounds like sanctification to you, it is because it is. Sanctification is therefore not distinct from justification for the Catholic, as it is for Wesleyan-Arminians.

I think many Protestants find this unsettling, because they are so accustomed to thinking of justification as being a matter of belief and acceptance, and that is what determines whether you are assured of going to heaven, whether you have freedom from the law, and whether you have joy in Christ. This seems in tension with the idea that I cannot do anything to merit salvation. That being said, from whence comes the Catholic's assurance, their freedom and joy? I think if we have the idea of faith that I have articulated here, my assurance does not come from the fact that I believe something; the assurance I have is found in God's promise that if I have faith, then he will complete the work He has started in me. His promise is our source of freedom and joy; his promise is our assurance, not the law. Freedom and joy are matters of being in a state of grace and being in a state of grace requires faith (like Abraham!), and faith requires continual obedience (also like Abraham!). If we are obediently responding to God's grace, then we have faith that God will do his salvific work, since we cannot do it. Resting in God's promise to do this is where our assurance lies.

The doctrine of justification is meant to serve as the answer for how the human condition is rectified. If we come into this world in a state of original sin, we come into the world spiritually dead. Our will and dispositions suffer from concupiscence and carnality. We are selfish and we are not capable, much less inclined toward, perfect rightly oriented love—whether that is of God, of others, or of the created order more generally. A full doctrine of justification needs to culminate in a correction of all of these, otherwise, we haven't been saved from our condition. So, in short, we need forgiveness for the sinful acts we've committed, we need a spiritual birth, and then we need our wills and dispositions to be changed to rightly ordered ones. How will all this be accomplished?

I used to think the birth and forgiveness happened only once we hit the age of accountability, whatever that happened to be, and we accepted Christ as Lord and Savior (in the sense of mentally assenting to a proposition) and repented of our sins. I still think forgiveness is tied to repentance; I think all parties to this discussion will agree that the cross is central, so I'll take that for granted. Sometimes victims of wrongs will say things like "I forgive the criminal who murdered my child," whether the murderer has asked for forgiveness or not. I think this is noble of the person, but I don't think this is literal, full forgiveness. Complete forgiveness requires the wrongdoer to acknowledge the wrong and accept the forgiveness. Victims of wrongs, then, can be disposed in their heart to forgive, they can let go of their grievance, but there isn't restoration until the guilty party owns it and then accepts forgiveness. With respect to justification, since we repeatedly sin, we must repeatedly seek forgiveness when we are made aware of new sins. This corrects for the past acts for which we are guilty.

I no longer think, however, that acceptance of Christ, once I am of an age of accountability, is the point of my spiritual birth. If I say that my acceptance of Christ could accomplish that, then I would be saying that I am responsible for my own rebirth. This is a form of Pelagianism. "Maybe not," you say, "for, it is not the acceptance that saves you in Protestant

theology, properly understood. Acceptance is a precondition for God's saving grace. You're accepting doesn't impart the grace, though. God does that, and he doesn't have to give it, even if you do accept." Perhaps so, but then how does God impart the grace? Does He do it by fiat?

I now think the traditional and scriptural answer is not that God does this by fiat, but rather, through baptism. As the *Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church*, paragraph 1265 says, "Baptism not only purifies from all sins, but also makes the neophyte "a new creature" an adopted son of God, who has become a "partaker of the divine nature," member of Christ, and co-heir with him, and a temple of the Holy Spirit". Our spiritual birth needn't depend on our mental assent any more than our biological birth does; indeed, we do not think that it's a problem that we don't have a say in our biological births, so why should it be one with spiritual birth? Of course, there is nothing problematic for adults or teenagers who consent to baptism, and it doesn't mean that people who are not baptized by water cannot make it to heaven; this is the ordinary, traditional means of spiritual birth, however.³ It also doesn't guarantee the baptized of eternal life. This traditional position holds that the Holy Spirit works His grace in us through baptism, but the church community gets to be involved as a means for this grace.

When I consider a non-sacramental view of baptism, on the other hand, I wonder why adherents of the view are so insistent on maintaining baptism as an important practice, since they also believe that it is not a means of any grace, strictly speaking. It is a mere symbol. There is an explanatory gap between this view of what baptism does and the importance placed on baptism in Scripture as well as the biblical injunction to go and baptize all nations. Why is that so important, if, strictly speaking, the act of baptism doesn't do anything? Rather, I think the biblical precedent, if we look at the mosaic law for instance, is that God prescribes a practice that is both symbolic of a greater reality and simultaneously a causal force within that reality. For instance, on the Day of Atonement when the goat is sent out representing the sins of Israel, it represents the sins of Israel; but mere representation isn't all that is going on here. The goat becomes Israel's sins and they are literally atoned by the carrying out of the practice.

Baptism and forgiveness accomplish our spiritual birth and our rectification before God, but we are left with a need for correction of the problem of concupiscence. I think again that all parties to this discussion will say that we are called to lives of increasing holiness and transformation into Christ-likeness. There are many biblical injunctions about this—"Be ye holy as I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44). This becoming more Christlike is sanctification. I've argued that we should see sanctification and justification as essentially tied together, and that the Wesleyan-Armenian doctrine tends to wrongly separate them. Catholic and Reformed theology actually both tie them together, but their views on sanctification depart pretty radically from this initial agreement. I'm going to argue that the Reformed view deflates sanctification of the content required to truly correct for the problem of concupiscence.

3. There is also baptism by blood and baptism by desire, the former occurring when a believer is martyred before having the opportunity to be baptized, the latter occurring in cases where a believer dies, not having been martyred, but also not having had the opportunity to have been baptized by water.

Reformed theology typically holds that sanctification involves union with Christ—another agreeable statement to Catholics. Reformed theology holds that this union takes place when we claim Christ's sacrifice as our own. We are grafted on to Christ's sacrifice—metaphorical talk of which I am not sure of the literal meaning—and thus, Christ's holiness becomes our holiness, not in the sense that we become intrinsically holy, but in the sense that we are holy extrinsically through Christ's perfectness. Sanctification, then, is tied to our union with Christ; as we increasingly understand the depth of our fallenness as well as the comprehensiveness of Christ's sacrifice for this fallenness, we become more like Christ. This happens because we are identifying more and more with Him and his sacrifice, and as a byproduct, we become more like Christ. There is not, and should not be, a *striving* for holiness on our part though, for this would be to seek our own holiness. This isn't to say that we shouldn't strive against sin in our lives, but we could never achieve our own holiness—so we ought not strive for that. Notice that our justification occurs by our union with Christ's sacrifice and so does our sanctification—they are one and the same.

Maybe there is some room for distinction here. Justification is birth in Christ through faith in his sacrificial work alone, and sanctification is a process of gaining a deeper understanding of one's need for this union and identification with Christ. Either way, I think the Reformed view has problems.

First, suppose there is no room for distinction between justification and sanctification on this Reformed way of understanding the doctrines. Then it turns out that for all intents and purposes, once I've come to faith in Christ's sacrificial work, I am fully sanctified. If my Christlikeness really is simply my union with Christ, and my union with Christ is my claiming his sacrificial work for my sins, then I am sanctified once this has occurred. This would be the deflationist view that I was talking about, as it flattens the holiness of someone who is a new convert and puts it on a par with someone who has long been a disciple of Christ, but they aren't the same.

In contrast, I've come to think of union with Christ as being literal transformation of my will, my desires, and my thoughts, such that *my* will, desires, and thoughts become indistinguishable in kind from Christ's. This is not to reject the Reformed view of increasing identification with Christ's sacrifice as we more deeply understand its depth and our dependence on it—certainly, this should happen as the transformation I am talking about takes place; rather, it is to say that this transformation is essential to sanctification over and above the identification with Christ's sacrifice. The problem of concupiscence must be addressed. Mere identification with Christ's sacrifice is not enough, especially when we consider that identification, on a Reformed view, is a matter of faith alone, and faith seems to simply be something psychological—it can't be works! I'll simply assert that this psychological state, even though a gift from God, is not sufficient to bring about this transformation.

Reformers will object that I've fundamentally misunderstood both sanctification as well as the substitutionary nature of the atonement, but I don't think so. Rather, we just disagree; they see Christ's holiness as substitutionary for my lack of holiness, and I say that it's sufficient to

correct our problem! They make our holiness a matter of *another* thing's (namely, Christ's) holiness; we are extrinsically related to Christ's holiness. I say Christ's holiness must be infused *in* us, so that his holiness literally becomes an intrinsic characteristic of us. This is what genuine union is. If it was outside of me, then it would not be a part of me and I'd not be changed. No, it becomes mine, not in the sense that I achieve it; rather, his holiness, through grace, has rendered my internal state as it ought to be, full stop.

Surely we ought not deny the possibility of such thorough transformation, for that would be to limit God's power to do this, yet those in the Reformation tradition especially are inclined to talk this way. So I ask, given God's infinite power and goodness, and given the incredible breadth and depth of his sacrificial work, why can't he bring about the full transformation of which I speak? I submit that he can, though it is probably extremely rare for it to be accomplished on this side of eternity. But this rarity is due to the extent of our fallenness and His respect of our free will—we have to will that our wills and desires be changed.

I think that this transformation is possible is both the testimony of Scripture (though this is disputable, I know) as well as tradition. It is the historic practice of both the Western and Eastern churches, up until the Protestant Reformation, to recognize saints who have undergone the kind of transformation I'm talking about—often through martyrdom, which is thought to involve such faith and love that the believer is purified in the process. These same people were often class A reprobates—great candidates for Congress! So, to think this transformation is possible is not to fail to understand the depth of our sinfulness, but rather to see God's transformative grace as so comprehensive as to even correct such fallen creatures as us.

Now, as I suggested above, perhaps for Reformed theology there is no separation of justification and sanctification in that they both are about union with Christ, but there is distinction of the two in the sense that sanctification is the process of coming to more deeply understand one's dependence on Christ's sacrifice and thereby identify with it more strongly. But for Reformed theology, this union is accomplished by faith alone. We see again how these principles are interrelated, and I'll again assert the opposite of the Reformed view. What this means, regarding sanctification, is that sanctification *does* involve our striving for holiness. Since faith involves work, and faith is the way in which God has deemed fit to gift us grace, then we have to position ourselves to receive grace. We are not well positioned to receive grace if we are spiritual couch potatoes. Sanctification is not something that passively happens to us as we gain greater understanding of our identification with Christ's sacrifice. Furthermore, this idea that sanctification is coming to more deeply understand the necessity of our dependence on Christ's sacrifice boils sanctification down to simply gaining more knowledge (are geniuses and bookworms capable of more holiness because of their greater mental capacity? Surely not!) and neglects the other aspects of the human person.

There is another issue for either view. If God is holy, and as such, cannot be united with something that is unholy (for being united to something unholy would be contrary to his nature), then if I am not literally made holy intrinsically, then I never can be genuinely united to him. The Reformed view leads to no genuine union, since holiness for us is extrinsic. The Reformed

theologian is going to have to respond by saying that God can be united with something unholy (us), strictly speaking. Or, he might reply that this extrinsic holiness is good enough. But I say in response to this that this extrinsic holiness does not genuinely make me holy; to make me genuinely holy, there must be a change in the nature of my intrinsic characteristics, as those are the ones that make me *me*. Anything that stops short of the intrinsic change stops short of a complete solution.

Related to this notion that the Reformed view does not make genuine unification possible is the idea that, if sanctification is a process by which we increasingly identify with Christ's sacrifice, and we hold that genuine completion of this process is not possible in this life (as Reformed theology seems to universally hold), then how are we united with God in the afterlife? The process of transformation and purification is begun in this life, but how is it finished? It has to be, since, again, nothing holy can be united to God. Is death what sanctifies us? Does God just instantaneously complete the work begun in this life?

Catholic doctrine must face the same questions, since, even if a Catholic were to affirm that sanctification is possible in this life, I already said that this is rare; most of us are not so all-consumed by the Spirit that we are prepared to die a martyr's death, or live with such extreme faith that we become a Mother Teresa. Most Christians die in Christ, but still tainted with concupiscence. Strictly speaking, we are not holy, so how can we be united to Christ? Some Wesleyans teach that this transformation needs to be completed before our death (that was my upbringing); others will say that the uniting happens, but don't really have an answer as to how. Interestingly, Catholicism has a worked out doctrinal answer to this question. You can't be united in Christ in such a state; you must have your purification and transformation completed before the beatific vision is achieved and we are united to God in the afterlife. This is the purpose for which Catholicism believes in purgatory. There is a lot of imagery used to describe purgatory—fire, refinement—but when we strip away the imagery and look at its philosophical and theological roots, it is simply the state a soul enters for completion of the purification process. Here are a few things that work together to make some kind of affirmation of purgatory necessary. 1) Complete justification involves sanctification. 2) Correction of our fallen condition, and realization of our full purpose and meaning, requires justification. 3) Complete justification almost never happens in mortal life. 4) Christ-followers who have not been fully sanctified still are united to God. 5) Nothing unholy could be united to God. I think all of those things are true. But they can't be all true unless there is a process of purification that we undergo after death so that we then can be united with God.

I realize that Protestants will want Scriptural grounds for affirming purgatory, and there are some. But my purpose isn't to do scriptural exegesis. What's interesting from my perspective is that the doctrine of purgatory does philosophical and theological work in the overall Catholic worldview. Its ability to do that work is evidence in the doctrine's favor.

4. Arguments for Doctrinal Growth and Catholic Ecclesiology

Now, even if you bought everything I've said up to this point, it doesn't get you all the way to embracing Catholicism. Such a person would be left where I have basically been for most of the past decade—the theological and ecumenical no-man's land where one objects to the Marian Doctrines and the role of the pope, as well as apostolic succession more generally, while at the same time thinking that Catholicism is right in its answers of how to hold together and understand the big, “worldview” philosophical and theological commitments with which I began—that we have robust free will, that it is justification joined with sanctification that is the antidote for our sinfulness and sin nature, and that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent. Good luck finding a church!

Arriving at this point is epistemically significant. Imagine you'd lived for the past thirty years next to an annoying, even at times antagonistic neighbor who spouted all kinds of things you disagreed with—things that you were highly confident that he was wrong about. But gradually, point by point, to your dismay you came to believe that he was right about the most important things to which you objected. How confident should you feel about the things you still disagree about? Your confidence in your beliefs that are contrary to his should definitely go down. One reason for this is that he has turned out to be far more trustworthy about the most important things than you originally thought. If he's trustworthy about the foundational things, then he might be trustworthy about the less basic things. His trustworthiness regarding the foundational things is evidence for you that he will be trustworthy about other things, which means if you want to have a fully coherent worldview, you need to evaluate these points of disagreement in light of the lately discovered reliability of your neighbor. The important point here is that people who largely agree with what I've said so far stand in an analogous relationship to the Roman Catholic Church.

There are a couple ways we could proceed at this point. I am going to focus on some claims of Catholicism that tie together the doctrines of the Catholic Church. So, if these claims follow, I think we have very good reason to think the Catholic Church is right about the various particular doctrines that Protestants generally find objectionable, whether that be any of the Marian dogmas, claims about the pope, or ethical claims. I firstly claim that doctrines can and should grow; the growth of doctrines is often compared analogously to the growth of a tree. Secondly, I claim that we should have faith that the growth of these doctrines has been guided by the Holy Spirit.

Doctrinal systems are essentially worldviews. The purpose of a worldview is to explain the world and our place in it; that's going to involve articulating the natures of everything that exists and then categorizing these things. This task both involves metaphysics and science. For instance, when we offer a theory of what a cell is, we need to observe them. But describing the full nature of a thing is going to involve metaphysics too, since we should say what, if anything, its purpose is. Generally speaking, if things do have purposes, it's a natural next step to think that there are some “oughts”—moral truths—rooted in the metaphysics of the world. So, articulating a worldview is an all-encompassing task involving metaphysics, epistemology, science, and ethics.

Notice that a worldview works like a theory, where theories attempt to explain things and their relation to one another. Worldviews are grand theories of everything. These grand theories of everything are not the kind of thing that an individual could ever complete in this life. In fact, I doubt they ever could be completed by beings that lack omniscience. A genuinely complete theory of everything would involve the rider, "...and that's it. There is nothing else to add." But in order to be able to add that rider, we'd have to confirm that we had indeed reached the end of all investigation. How could we ever know that, though? This cuts against the idea that humans will ever be able to complete science, let alone a theory of everything.

On my view then, doctrinal systems are incomplete theories. We see this with Christianity. Try deriving a theory of everything just from the Old and New Testament. You won't get very far. Arguably, we see early credal formulations of the Christian worldview in places like Colossians chapter 1, but these are bare bones. What is our Christology? How does the atonement work? Beyond the Ten Commandments, what, if anything, are our ethical requirements? There isn't even a statement of the Trinity here! What we see happening in the first few centuries of the church is a working out of what the doctrines should be on these questions. So, doctrines can and should grow because they are incomplete theories, and incomplete theories are not satisfactorily informative.

A reasonable question from a Protestant at this point is whether an incomplete theory could be enough for salvation, the idea being that an incomplete theory with the right stuff is good enough to give us all the information we need on this side of eternity. This seems to be the idea expressed on the United Methodist Church's webpage "Our Christian Beliefs: The Bible": "We say that God speaks to us through the Bible and that it contains all things necessary for salvation."⁴ What are "all things necessary for salvation", and how do we arrive at those conditions? I've already said some things about the first; what matters for our current purposes is the second part.

Suppose all we had was the Bible; that is certainly one of the chief resources we have for arriving at these conditions. How would we figure out what it means? Meaning is a mental property—symbols do not have inherent meaning apart from minds. Rather, we give symbols meaning, so the *content* of the symbols is found in our minds. Natural languages are not private, so to find the meaning of natural language, we have to look to the community that uses the language. So, we could not determine what the Bible means apart from knowing the community of people who were responsible for the texts. This would link us up to the mental content of the authors and teachers of the texts, informing us of the meaning of the texts. What community could this be, other than Christ's church? Here then we bump up against a critical philosophical issue—what demarcates the community that is the church from those outside the church?

During my lifetime, Protestant biblical scholarship has been largely responsible for an emphasis on contextualizing the New Testament within second temple Judaism in order to properly understand the meaning of the words. This emphasis is right, and happily, Catholics

4. <https://www.umc.org/en/content/our-christian-roots-the-bible>

have incorporated this lesson. However, the church very quickly becomes a distinct sub-group within that broader second temple Judaic community. Thus, we have to narrow our scope further to that of the early church itself. This is because they began interpreting all of Scripture in light of the personal revelation of Christ. I think this serves as an early example of the Catholic view that doctrines grow, because the church in Acts is actually giving new, fuller meaning to the Old Testament Law and Prophets. This is not to say that the texts comes to mean something completely different and inconsistent with what it meant to Jewish communities pre-Christ. However, the mental content of pre-Christ Judaism did not consist of the reality of knowing Christ, and so the text did not yet have the full meaning it has in light of Christ. We see the apostles, especially Paul in epistles such as Romans, taking what they had come to know through contact with Christ himself, and adding that content to the meaning of the biblical text.

Thus, Paul does highly original theology in Romans when he explains the significance of Abraham and faith. Relatedly, it is this revisionism of Paul and Christianity more broadly that Judaism objects to. They say it is a misunderstanding of the Law and Prophets *because* it did the Scripture did not have the meaning that Paul brings to the text in the rabbinic tradition prior to Christianity. Assuming these Jewish rabbis are right about their own interpretive tradition, doctrinal development *must* be acceptable; otherwise, Paul's revision is illegitimate.

Some will object, saying that the apostles were making explicit meaning that was implicitly there all along. If this meaning was implicit all along, this implies that the Scripture had meaning in addition to any of the mental content of those in the pre-Christian interpretative community. But, how could this be, given that natural language gets its meaning, again, from our mental content? There are many things I do not think to be social constructs; language, however, seems like a paradigm example of something that is. It is an indicator of God's power and relationship to man that he can communicate revelation to us through this imperfect tool of our making.

But back to the question of how to demarcate the church, many Protestants will say that the church consists of all those who are Christians—loosely, Christ-followers. This is often expressed as a spiritual notion of 'church'; we are all bound together spiritually by the Holy Spirit. I'm going to express three problems that I have with this way of demarcating the church from the non-church. First, it is circular. Second, it seems unlikely that the relevant community would be all those who are Christians, given Paul's characterization of the church as a body. Third, there is a historical argument to the contrary.

To see the circularity issue, recall the quote from the United Methodist website--- Scripture contains "all things necessary for salvation." This seems like a view that is sympathetic with the Protestant notion of *sola Scriptura*, and in both cases, adherents would say that Scripture tells us what is necessary for salvation all by itself. I've argued that we must look to the community that gave us the texts to find the meaning. So, on the Protestant view, we must look to the Scripture itself to determine what is necessary for salvation. But then we need to look to the Christian church to guide us in our interpretation. How do we know who counts as the church? We must again look to the Scripture. Again, we need to look to the church to guide our

interpretation. Unfortunately, the view seems to result in Scripture's meaning always alluding us; we need Scripture alone to tell us what the church is, but we need the church to correctly interpret Scripture. We cannot determine what that group is without Scripture, but we cannot be confident of a correct interpretation without that group.

Many will want to reply by firmly insisting that something has gone wrong with my reasoning, because clearly we can get basic truths from Scripture, by itself, if we just read it carefully. For instance, many think that you could believe in the resurrection without accepting any formal institution as authoritative. After all, there has been quite a bit of very rigorous historical scholarship written, arguing that the resurrection of Christ is the most reasonable position on the preponderance of the evidence. But that assumes the Scripture bears witness to this, and we can only make that assumption if we know whether the Gospels are purporting to tell a true story. Suppose we do not know that though. Actually, suppose a copy of the Bible was dropped into a culture that had no contact with Christianity. Some members of that culture would likely come to believe in the resurrection. Others would think it was myth. How could they settle who was right by just using Scripture? It's looking like Scripture, by itself, won't tell us what is necessary for salvation.

My second criticism suggests that this Protestant view doesn't specify the right community to look to for an interpretation, even if the Church simply consists of all the Christ-followers, which is specified in some yet to be determined way. Consider that we are told that there are many parts in the church. Paul tells that the parts have to work together, performing the function for which they were intended. Some are for teaching, some are for prophesying, etc. We can reason from this that it isn't all of our jobs to teach valid interpretations of Scripture. So then, we must conclude that we ought not look to all the Christian community—not all the Christ-followers—to figure out the meaning of the Scripture.

Naturally, the next question is, "Which part of the body ought we to look, then?" Well, in the generations that followed the book of Acts, we see the development of a system of bishops being appointed in succession in major cities, whose communities had oral histories that suggested some of these Christian communities were started by the apostles themselves. These bishops were especially tasked with protecting the Gospel that they inherited. So, in the historical development of the church, it is these bishops who were especially tasked with making sure Scripture was rightly understood.

This historical development could be a complete historical accident—just a social construct like the American Constitution, which could have been set up any number of different ways. Or, this development could have been led by the Holy Spirit. Here, my idea comes from Francis Sullivan's book, *From Apostles to Bishops*, although the structure I give it is my own. Sullivan argues that the college of bishops was a complete development. We do not see anything like a contemporary bishop in the book of Acts. Nevertheless, on pain of consistency, we should accept that the development of the contemporary bishop was led by the Holy Spirit and is thus not a mere construct of man. Why? Well, the very same reasoning is at the foundation for the Protestant, Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox acceptance of the Nicene Creed. Why ought we

accept that formulation as the genuine expression of the faith? Many scholars have argued that there were corrupting influences, or historical accidents, that shaped the form that the creed eventually took. Had different bishops attended, or had Constantine had different political purposes, then the creed would have been different. The response by orthodox Christianity, at rock bottom, is that we think these early church leaders were guided by the Holy Spirit in formulating the Nicene Creed. This is consistent with what we'd expect from Scripture and the Christian belief that God acts through humankind. But why have faith that the Holy Spirit guided one development, but not the other one? Indeed, when we look at the human forces involved with the formulation of the creed and the political way in which it was formulated, the person who doubts that apostolic succession was a development guided by the Holy Spirit has the same reasons to doubt the formulation of the creed. There is no relevant difference in how the church came to have these features of which I am aware. So, absent some relevant difference, if we accept one we ought to accept the other. This is what I called the historical argument to the contrary of the idea that the church is this body loosely bound in the Holy Spirit by simply being a Christ-follower. Rather, it looks as though the church consists of Christ-followers who fall under the care of apostles and then eventually bishops who succeeded them.

Indeed, if there is no doctrinal development supervised by those who succeeded the apostles, I don't think we even have grounds for accepting the doctrine of the Trinity or a high Christology according to which Jesus is God, coequal with the Father. Consider that if the doctrine of the Trinity were expressed in Scripture, even if only implicitly, then we would expect to see the doctrine explicitly expressed much sooner than we do—several centuries after Acts. We don't, though. The same holds for the view that Christ is God, coequal to the Father. These considerations, coupled with the heated debates over the Trinity and Christ's nature, point against Protestant Biblical scholars, such as Richard Bauckham, who argue that the highest Christology is asserted in Scripture, namely, that Jesus is identical to God (*Jesus and the God of Israel*). The doctrine of the Trinity seems to follow from such a high Christology. Consider how strange it is, if these are doctrines stated explicitly or implicitly in the Scripture, to not have any of the apostles or those who followed shortly thereafter express these doctrines explicitly. These are the people who had first or secondhand knowledge of Jesus and his ministry. These are people who knew the language of the New Testament because it was a language they spoke. These are people who knew Second Temple Judaism and the broader culture much more intimately than we could.

To those who reply that there is plenty of Scriptural evidence for the Trinity, such that we do not depend on a formal interpretive community, consider the following hermeneutic framework. Suppose that I bring to the New Testament text the assumption that the Jewish Mosaic tradition firmly claims that there is but one God. Secondly, suppose I am committed to the classical conception of identity, according to which differences in things entail that those things are non-identical. These two assumptions are very strong support for anti-trinitarian readings of even the most trinitarian-sounding passages. This is exactly how unitarians who believe that Jesus is the Messiah, God's Son, but not the One God, read the text. Furthermore, this reading would seem to be supported when we look at John 17:1-3:

“After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

Jesus Christ is distinct from the Father. This passage tells us that *the Father* is the only true God—those are Jesus’ own words! It follows, assuming a classical understanding of identity, that, since Jesus is distinct from the Father, he is not the only true God.

My point is not to argue that this is the correct way to read the passage, but that non-Trinitarian readings of John, the supposedly most explicitly trinitarian sounding Gospel, seem plausible. This should at least give us pause as to whether the Scripture, *by itself*, expresses that God is a trinity. We are either going to have to look very hard at the Scripture and try to learn a lot more than the average person in church knows about biblical languages and anthropology, or we could instead conclude that the reason the Trinity seems so obviously expressed in Scripture is because we are reading through the text with our post-Nicene, post-Chalcedon assumptions already baked in the cake. But those assumptions aren’t in the text; they came to us through a formal interpretive community—the Church.⁵

The trinitarian discussion serves to underscore multiple points. I’m not raising it to argue against the Trinity; I mention the identity and interpretation issue to show how it implies that Scripture itself does not state much doctrine. Doctrines can grow. Doctrines should grow; for instance, what we can gather of Christ’s nature from Scripture, by itself, is scant, but this is obviously important. If they should grow, their growth will depend on people, since people form doctrines. Specifically, the task will fall to what I’ve been calling a formal interpretive community, which must expound on what Scripture says in a way that is faithful and consistent with its message. But humans are highly prone to corruption, which gives us reason to think the Holy Spirit steps in to guide the process. For if not, then we have a seeming tension between the need for doctrine to develop and the almost guaranteed result that the development is doomed to error. Given God’s goodness, we have strong reason to think He would keep Christianity from going so astray.

The doctrines of the early church are fairly minimal. Doctrinal formulations need to make substantial claims about the world to the extent that they are justifiable though. This isn’t a claim about logical necessity, but enquiring minds want to know, which gives us a pragmatic need. Furthermore, theories should be informative and explanatory. If a worldview is supposed to answer these foundational questions, and Christianity stopped with the credal formulations in Colossians, for instance, then it hasn’t really given a very informative worldview. He was the

5. I can imagine someone objecting that this reading of John 17 is completely inconsistent with the most plausible reading of John 1, which sounds so trinitarian. That may or may not be, but it still does not give us anything close to a doctrine of the Trinity, in and of itself. It only suggests that the two passages are, at first blush, seemingly inconsistent. If they are inconsistent, we can resolve it by giving a different reading of John 17 than the one above, in favor of trinitarianism. Or, we could resolve it by keeping the John 17 reading above and giving a different interpretation to John 1. But which should we do? Scripture doesn’t tell us by itself, so we have to look to outside factors.

“firstborn” of all creation, and “in him all things in heaven and on earth were created” (Colossians 1:15-16). Does that mean Christ was a created thing? Did He have a beginning? These questions quickly arise from these credal formulations. A doctrinal formulation that goes further and answers them is better *if it adds true things* than what we have if we just stop and don’t add anything.

Some Catholic apologists have argued against Protestantism on the grounds of an “all or nothing” argument, the idea being that you can’t pick and choose doctrines. If one holds to any “catholic” (I use “catholic” here in the small-C, *Mere Christianity* sense) doctrine, then on pain of consistency, one has to accept the Catholic Church as authoritative. Or, going the other direction, if you think the Catholic Church is not authoritative, then on pain of consistency, one has no grounds for all “catholic” doctrine. Perhaps Cardinal John Newman was the first to employ a version of this argument in his *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, which Jerry Walls and Kenneth J. Collins counter in their book *Roman, But not Catholic*.

All or nothing is probably too strong. For instance, one could reason to the conclusion that God exists by doing a bit of natural theology. But I think Newman was on the right track, though I prefer to put it differently:

1. For those of us who accept the Nicene Creed, or the doctrine of the Trinity, or the validity of the biblical canon, we must do so on the authority of the Catholic Church.
2. But, if one accepts the authority of the Catholic Church in those matters, then if one rejects later doctrinal developments, one needs a principled reason for rejecting the later developments that wouldn’t apply to these basic, mere Christianity doctrines.
3. There isn’t such a principled reason.
4. Therefore, we ought not reject the later doctrinal developments.

I take myself to have already argued for (1) back when I argued that Protestantism doesn’t have a good solution to what I called the demarcation problem, and then further argued that we had reason to believe that the Holy Spirit guided the development of the ecclesiastical structure of apostolic succession. (2) I take to be establishing a matter of good reasoning for those who reject the authority of the Catholic Church, which leaves (3) to defend.

Protestants are sure to oppose (3) and think they have good reason for doing so. Usually their reasons are either that there is corruption in the Catholic Church, or the belief that some developments are contrary to the testimony of Scripture. My response to the first is to say that it is surely the case that the Catholic Church has a degree of corruption. There are really terrible Catholics and there have been really terrible popes. The Catholic Church has mistreated lots of people. There will probably be more, though I hope not. But this is not a good reason to reject (3). It’s also true of the Church in the first few centuries of the Church, so if you doubt the doctrinal developments that came later because of corruption, you ought to doubt the earlier developments. More importantly, though, corruption is simply not a good reason to doubt (3), since there is already reason to think that the Holy Spirit guides the Church in its doctrinal development *specifically because* of mankind’s corruption. Part of the reason for believing that the Church is guided by the Holy Spirit is the background assumption that it is corrupt.

The claims that certain doctrinal developments are contrary to Scripture are the most serious concerns with (3), but I'm not going to get into specific Scriptural objections. Once we get into all these specific passages, we've departed from the mostly philosophical and theological concerns that motivated me to write this. I will say this though. If we have reason to think that doctrines develop, as I've argued, and we have reason to think this development is guided by the Holy Spirit, as I've argued, then we have *prima facie* reason to think that any particular Scriptural argument against a Catholic doctrine is wrong. Now, once a sophisticated and plausible interpretation to Scripture has been given that is inconsistent with a Catholic doctrine, there does need to be a plausible response as to why the interpretation is wrong, but the burden of proof lies with the objector to the doctrinal development. The burden is pretty high, too, since it involves giving evidence to indicate that the Holy Spirit did not guide the Church in formulating it.

If doctrines have to grow, and the Holy Spirit is likely to have guided that growth, then we have *prima facie* reason to think that the more controversial Catholic doctrines, such as the Marian dogmas and the often misunderstood doctrine of the infallibility of the pope, are true. Now, one should get into the specific cases for and against these doctrines to see if they stand up.

Those who favor Eastern Orthodoxy will object at this point. They'll say that neither my point about the need for doctrinal growth, nor my point about it needing to be guided by the Holy Spirit, favor Roman Catholicism over Eastern Orthodoxy. They are right, insofar as they too accept the growth of doctrine as articulated in the ecumenical councils, even thinking that there was a growth from apostles to bishops. They'll also accept that this was guided by the Holy Spirit. What they won't accept is that the later growth on Marian dogma and the Pope were guided by the Holy Spirit. I know there is a lot to say about the history and debate between these two wings of the church, but for me, I think this boils down to one issue. Again, are the reasons for thinking the that Holy Spirit didn't guide the later Catholic doctrinal development any different than reasons for thinking the Holy Spirit didn't guide the earlier, small-C catholic doctrinal development? I don't see any.

Eastern Orthodox won't agree. They'll say that the Orthodox bishops did not agree on the development of the papacy and Marian Dogmas, indicating that the growth of doctrine in the Western church was not in keeping with the tradition of the historic Church. It seems to me, however, that the Eastern Orthodox have arbitrarily stunted the growth of their doctrine. I'd say in every significant point of difference between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox have a more incomplete worldview, and therefore, less satisfying. Here are some examples of what I mean. Let's begin with the filioque, one of the chief differences between the Eastern and Western churches at the time of the Great Schism. Are there any good arguments that the Holy Spirit does not proceed from both the Father *and* the Son, as the Western church came to believe? I know the Orthodox would say that it was never part of the Creed as formulated at the council of Nicaea, and that's clearly true, but what is the case that the addition is wrong? It seems to me a sound addition, given certain Scripture and doctrine about Christ accepted by broadly catholic christianity, so it seems likely true and therefore a

more complete theory. Or, what about transubstantiation? Both the Eastern and Western churches believe in the real presence. The only difference is that the Western church specified a metaphysical theory for how the change takes place, and the Eastern church didn't. But suppose the Eastern Church did. There may be other metaphysical theories that will allow for a Real Presence understanding, but it's hard to think of a better one than transubstantiation. It therefore seems pretty likely that they'd come to about the same metaphysics.

How about the Marian Dogmas? Again, there is great similarity between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, much more so than either has with Protestantism on this issue. The Orthodox venerate Mary, they hold her as the Theotokos, they hold the doctrine of perpetual virginity, and they agree with the assumption of Mary. The major point of disagreement is over the immaculate conception, which developed in Catholic doctrine long after the Schism. The Immaculate Conception, though, is a doctrine that develops in the Roman church because it seems implied by their other beliefs about Mary and Christ—beliefs which the Orthodox also have. For example, if Christ is the new Adam, then it would seem that Mary would be the best candidate for the new Eve. But then, she would need to be protected from the stain of original sin. To not take this doctrinal development is to miss out on one of the most powerful arguments in favor of the Gospel—that it possesses this remarkable unity and cohesiveness in its symbolism, typology, and overall Gospel message; this unity is inexplicable apart from divine explanation, which then provides us evidence for the Divine being described by this Gospel.

Now, the explanation of why these doctrines do not grow in the East is probably largely because of their rejection of the growth of the West's view of the Papacy, the most significant point of disagreement between East and West. There is no head in the Eastern church, and therefore no one to push to a resolution of differences between disciplines, for instance (there is no settled discipline on divorce or contraception, as I understand it). Of course, that doesn't entail that they are wrong. But even here, the Orthodox have a peculiar stopping place in the development of their doctrine. In their ecclesiology, they accept the succession of bishops, so there is a hierarchy. If some hierarchy is God-breathed, then there is no principled problem with priests having certain ordained authority that the rest of us do not have, and there is no problem with certain priests having authority over other priests. So you would think if you have no problem with such authority, you wouldn't have a problem with the development of a Papacy to have ecclesial authority over the whole church. Or, if you have a problem with a Papacy, it would seem like those same concerns would apply to bishops, in which case, it seems like such a person should favor a more democratic ecclesiology, such as that found in Baptist denominations, or Lutheranism.

Those thoughts leads pretty naturally to an argument for the papacy. Let's look at the church as a big family. Families are hierarchical, so naturally, they have leaders. But there are times when these leaders are going to settle disputes that arise between family members. Now, you could settle these disputes democratically, but you are essentially incentivizing members to act selfishly while asking them to decide what is best for the family as a whole. This ups the likelihood of fraction and division. Or, you could extend the hierarchy out so that the leaders

have a leader, whose job it is to act to defend and preserve the family as a whole. That is essentially what the Papacy is.

The thought in favor of the Orthodox Church is that it is epistemically more modest. Since it develops its doctrines less, there is less that the individual believer must assent to, and there is less chance to be wrong. I've felt the attraction of epistemic modesty offered by Orthodoxy; I no longer think it tips the scales in favor of Orthodoxy though. Because they are so similar on so much, the places where Orthodoxy chooses not to dogmatically define doctrine further seem to already imply the Catholic doctrines. So, in actuality, the modesty doesn't really favor Orthodoxy; Orthodoxy is simply a more incomplete theory, and therefore, less explanatory of the nature of the church and the Gospel.

I'll conclude with by remarking on an observation I've made about Protestantism. When it comes to basic, foundational beliefs, the majority of Catholic views are the same as Protestant and Eastern Orthodox beliefs. I'm thinking in particular here of affirmation of the creeds, but I'd also include much of the doctrinal conclusions of the early ecumenical councils, such as that God is trinitarian and that Christ has two natures. I'm glad that Protestantism mostly retains belief in these things, but it's puzzling to me why. If you do not accept the validity of the ecclesial structure of the church, then why accept the conclusions of the deliberations by that ecclesial structure? I suppose that the answer typically would be that there is nothing special about the structure itself, but that they happened to correctly articulate what is already explicitly or implicitly in the Bible. I don't buy it; that is, I don't think the text, abstracted away from the tangible community that gave it meaning, even implicitly says some of this stuff. You need the text and the community, and then we are back to that demarcation question. This, by the way, is what I take to be a good way to express the Catholic position that the Scripture and Tradition (which is not an abstract thing, but comes from the living, tangible body of Christ in what has been written and what has been practiced), or the Church, are coequal. This leaves Protestantism without the foundation to build up what Protestants usually believe; it's as though they maintain these beliefs because Protestantism runs on the fumes of Catholicism. Maybe this helps explain why Protestantism increasingly struggles to maintain traditional Christian views about sex and the nature of manhood and womanhood.

I think it really is the case that this issue of church structure and authority is fundamental. When we consider the need for doctrine to grow in order to be satisfactory, and when we think about how this need necessitates the Holy Spirit guiding the process, I think we have pretty good reason to think the Catholic Church is what it claims to be.