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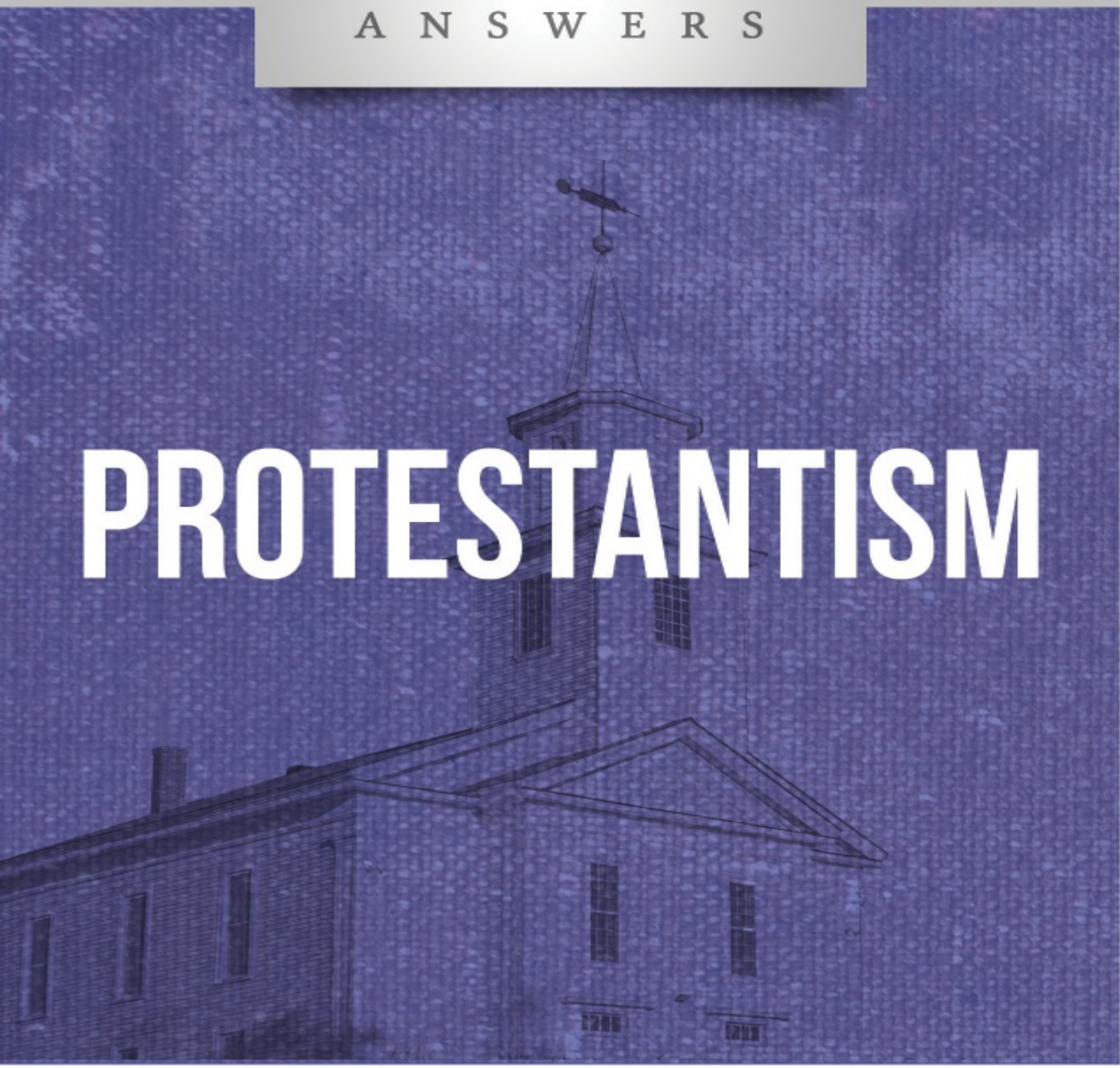

PROTESTANTISM

Catholic Answers

20 Answers
-
Protestantism

Jimmy Akin

***20 Answers:** Protestantism*
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Introduction

Five hundred years ago, the West was torn apart. The event known as the Protestant Reformation shattered European Christendom, and we have been living with the results ever since. Bitter wars between Protestants and Catholics began, individuals were martyred, and hostilities ran high.

In recent times, however, passions have cooled, dialogue has begun, and the two communities have come to regard each other with new respect.

Still, for many Catholics, Protestantism can be a bewildering phenomenon. Its intense theological diversity means that there is no single set of official Protestant beliefs and practices. Neither is there a single way to approach or relate to Protestants, who may be openly friendly to Catholics or actively hostile.

The issue can be particularly pressing in the United States. Although most Christians worldwide are Catholic, most American Christians are Protestant, and Catholics are a minority. This makes it essential for American Catholics to have knowledge of Protestantism and how to respond to it.

I was raised in the Protestant community, but I became Catholic as an adult. In this short book, I will serve as your guide to the history of Protestantism, its major teachings and branches, and how we as Catholics can respond to and dialogue with our Protestant brethren.

1. What is Protestantism?

Protestantism is a Christian movement that began in Europe in the early 1500s. It is customary to date the beginning of the Protestant movement to October 31, 1517, when the German monk Martin Luther issued a document known as the *Ninety-five Theses*.

According to a popular legend, he nailed this document to a church door in Wittenberg, Germany—a common way of making documents public at the time—though we do not have evidence that this actually happened.

The Ninety-five Theses were a set of propositions that Luther wished to

discuss in a local debate. They concerned the theology of indulgences, though he also discussed concepts such as confession, purgatory, and the authority of the pope.

The publication of the Ninety-five Theses led to a theological controversy. Luther and other early Protestants allied with certain European princes, and the controversy took on a political dimension that led to two centuries of warfare in a period known as the European Wars of Religion, with Catholics and Protestants battling each other.

The wars of religion ceased in the 1700s, but tensions remained high between Protestants and Catholics. In the twentieth century, relations between denominations warmed significantly, and today they are able to relate in a much more amicable way and largely regard each other as "separated brethren" but still brethren in Christ.

As Protestantism developed, it became theologically diverse, with different schools of theology springing up in different countries. Thus, after Lutheranism arose, additional schools such as Calvinism, Anglicanism, Methodism, and others came into existence. More recently, movements such as Pentecostalism and non-denominationalism have been added.

Despite this theological diversity, Protestants are united around two core principles expressed by the slogans *sola scriptura* (Latin, "by Scripture alone") and *sola fide* (Latin, "by faith alone"). The first conveys the idea that only the Bible should have final authority in determining our religious beliefs; other sources, such as Tradition or the Magisterium (the teaching authority of the Church) are not to have such a role. The second conveys the idea that we are justified—or put right with God—only by faith in Jesus Christ, not by good works. These slogans are interpreted in different ways by the different Protestant theological traditions (see answers 5 and 6). Strikingly, neither is mentioned in the Ninety-five Theses.

Today, about 800 million Christians are Protestant, and they represent about 37 percent of the global Christian population (in contrast with Catholics, who represent about 50 percent, and Orthodox, who represent about 12 percent).

2. What led to the rise of Protestantism?

Every age in history has a mix of saints and sinners, and the Middle Ages (c. 500–c. 1500) were no exception. The period is one of great accomplishments and triumphs, but it also contained great tragedies, including a worldliness and corruption that affected the Church.

In response, some individuals sought to break with this worldliness and reform unspiritual practices. Individuals who did this while staying within the bounds of Church teaching include St. Francis of Assisi (c. 1181–1226) and St. Catherine of Siena (1347–1380).

However, other reform-minded individuals went beyond criticism of the state of the Church in their day to also deny different aspects of its teachings. These included figures such as Peter Waldo (c. 1140–c. 1205), John Wycliffe (c. 1325–1384), and Jan Hus (c. 1369–1415). They served as precursors of the Protestant Reformation, and movements springing from them—the Waldensians and the Hussite churches—are part of the Protestant community in Europe today.

Another factor contributing to the Reformation was the Western Schism (1378–1417). This was an event following the election of Pope Urban VI, when one and eventually two antipopes were elected. Different regions in Europe sided with different papal claimants, and a period of great confusion resulted. The situation was finally resolved at the Council of Constance (1414–1418), which elected Pope Martin V, effectively ending the schism. However, significant damage had been done to the Church and its reputation. In his *Principles of Catholic Theology*, Joseph Ratzinger explains:

> For nearly half a century, the Church was split into two or three obediences that excommunicated one another, so that every Catholic lived under excommunication by one pope or another, and, in the last analysis, no one could say with certainty which of the contenders had right on his side. The Church no longer offered certainty of salvation; she had become questionable in her whole objective form—the true Church, the true pledge of salvation, had to be sought outside the institution. It is against this background of a profoundly shaken ecclesial consciousness that we are to understand that Luther, in the conflict between his search for salvation and the tradition of the Church, ultimately came to experience the Church, not as the guarantor, but as the adversary of salvation.[1]

Technology also contributed to the Reformation—specifically, the invention of the movable-type printing press by Johannes Gutenberg (c. 1400–1468). Since writing was invented around 3400 B.C., books had to be hand–copied by scribes, which meant an enormous investment of human time and energy. Consequently, books were fantastically expensive and could be owned only by the rich. For example, in the first century a single copy of the Gospel of Matthew would have cost the equivalent of more than $2,000. Prior to the invention of the printing press, only institutions, such as churches or monasteries, or very wealthy individuals could have afforded a complete Bible. That changed when Gutenberg produced the first printed Bible in 1455. The new movable–type system allowed Bibles to be printed for a fraction of the former cost, making them available to a much wider audience.

This played a role in the Reformation because, for the first time in history, a policy of *sola scriptura* became thinkable (see answers 6 and 7). Previously, although an individual lucky enough to possess a Bible might decide to rely on it alone for his religious views, there was no way for a broad movement to implement a policy by which each individual was expected to read the Bible for himself and decide what was true. It is thus no surprise that Protestantism didn't emerge until several decades after the invention of the printing press.

The immediate cause of the Reformation was a controversy over indulgences. These were a development of the Church's traditional practice of penance. Based on biblical principles, theologians recognized that even when God has forgiven a sin, he may still allow us to experience temporary negative consequences (*temporal punishments*) so that we learn our lesson and grow in holiness (Heb. 12:5–11).

However, if we take our lesson to heart and strive to please God, he may lessen the temporal punishments we would otherwise receive. Because of its role in the pastoral care of souls, the Church can intervene by the power of the keys God has given it (Matt. 16:19; 18:18) to lessen the temporary consequences remaining after a sin is forgiven. This is what an indulgence is (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC] 1471–1479).

To encourage people to grow in holiness, the Church provides indulgences in situations where people cooperate with God's grace by performing spiritual acts, such as saying prayers, reading the Bible, or going on a pilgrimage.

Before the Reformation, it also provided them for individuals who donated to charitable causes, such as church and hospital building funds. For example, indulgences were offered to people who made donations for the building of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

This led to confusion, and even today many people mistakenly understand the granting of indulgences for charitable donations as a purely commercial act—as "selling" them. Some advocates of indulgences also made excessive claims regarding them. For example, Johannes Tetzel is said to have claimed that indulgences were so effective that "as soon as coin in coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs." Luther objected to such claims and proposed debating indulgences in his Ninety-five Theses.

(Note: There are many misunderstandings and myths about indulgences; for a detailed discussion of them, see my book *The Drama of Salvation*.)

3. How did Protestantism spread?

Following Luther's publication of the Ninety-five Theses in 1517, his positions began to attract followers. In 1520, Pope Leo X issued the bull *Exsurge Domine* (Arise, O Lord), in which he warned against errors found in Luther's writings. Luther defied the bull and publicly burned his copy of it. Leo excommunicated Luther and other adherents of his positions in 1521, and the holy Roman emperor Charles V (1500–1556) issued an edict demanding his arrest.

The next year saw the first use of violence as part of the Reformation when the Lutheran knight Franz von Sickingen (1481–1523) and a group of confederates began the Knights' Revolt and attacked the German city of Trier with the aim of capturing it and overthrowing its Catholic archbishop. The revolt was put down, but it began the wars of religion, which would continue until the early 1700s.

With an imperial edict against him, Luther was in a legally precarious position, but he was given protection by Frederick III (1486–1525), the prince elector of Saxony. By networking, Luther won several other German princes to his side, and in 1526 a meeting known as the Diet of Speyer resulted in the suspension of the edict against Luther. However, it was restored in 1529 at a

subsequent Diet of Speyer, and at this time several German princes issued a "Letter of Protestation," which gave Protestantism its name.

By this point, several new Protestant movements had begun, including that of the Swiss Reformer Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531) and the Anabaptist movement launched by three men of Saxony known as the "Zwickau prophets." They influenced the radical preacher Thomas Muntzer, who in 1524 led an uprising against the nobility known as the German Peasants' War, which was opposed both by Catholic and Lutheran princes, with Luther writing a critique titled *Against the Murderous, Thieving Hordes of Peasants* (1525).

In the 1530s, King Henry VIII of England (1491–1547), who had been seeking an annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon but was unable to obtain one from the pope, had parliament declare the Church of England to be independent from Rome and name him as its head. The same decade, French Reformer John Calvin (1509–1564) published his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, launching the movement known as Calvinism.

A major development occurred in 1556 when the Peace of Augsburg sought to end violent conflict between Lutherans and Catholics by establishing the principle *cuius regio, eius religio* (Latin, "whose realm, of his religion"). This allowed local rulers to choose the religion of their territory. Lutheranism or Catholicism would then be mandatory, though dissenters were allowed to immigrate to other lands. Many did not feel they could do so, and so some outwardly conformed while remaining crypto-Catholics or crypto-Protestants.

The 1600s saw the birth of the Baptist movement (not to be confused with the earlier Anabaptists), which was founded by dissenters from the Church of England.

The discovery of the New World by Christopher Columbus in 1492 had opened new areas for European colonization, and in the 1600s the American colonies were founded, with many of the colonists being Protestant dissenters from the Church of England, though Reformed Christians from the Netherlands were also present. Protestantism thus began to spread in North America.

In the 1700s, brothers John and Charles Wesley launched the Methodist

movement, which spread in Britain and America.

After the Bill of Rights to the U.S. Constitution was ratified in 1791, the freedom of religion guaranteed by its First Amendment made the United States a laboratory for further religious experimentation, and many new movements emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, sometimes as a result of the major religious revivals known as the Great Awakenings.

The most popular new movement to emerge was Pentecostalism, which began to become popular following the 1906 Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, California. In the 1960s, Pentecostal ideas spread in other Christian denominations as part of the Charismatic Movement.

America also became a launching pad for missionary activity, and Protestant missionaries from the U.S. began spreading their views to many parts of the globe.

4. What was the Church's response?

The Catholic Church's response to the Reformation is commonly called the *Counter-Reformation*, though sometimes it is called the Catholic Reformation or Catholic Revival.

Some actually date its beginning to before the time of Martin Luther, pointing out that there were already faithful Catholic voices calling for reform in the Church. Indeed, an ecumenical council dealing with Church reform—the Fifth Lateran Council—had already been held in Rome, beginning in 1512 and concluding in 1517, just before Luther published the Ninety-five Theses.

From this viewpoint, Luther's efforts represent an attempt at reform that went disastrously wrong and shattered Western Christendom. By Luther's own admission, this was not his original intent. He did not wish to break away from the Church, just to achieve reformation within it. However, the Catholic efforts at reform are commonly portrayed as a response to the Protestant Reformation. Hence the term *Counter-Reformation*.

Because of human sinfulness, the Church is always in need of reform, and the need for it at this time was clear. This is illustrated by the fact that when the Council of Trent (1545–1563)—the major event of the Counter-Reformation—began to meet, one of its first decisions was to establish a goal

of releasing a decree dealing with Church reform for every doctrinal decree responding to Protestant ideas.

The council met in the northern Italian city of Trento, leading to its English name "the Council of Trent" and to the adjective *Tridentine* for the practices and expressions of faith associated with it.

The council was called by Pope Paul III (reigned 1534–1549), and it met periodically for almost two decades, finally concluding during the reign of Pope Pius IV (1559–1565). The fact that it was not convoked until nearly three decades after Luther began the Protestant Reformation has been seen as a sign that the popes of the era were slow to realize and respond to the situation that confronted them and that the history of Christendom would have been different were they quicker to respond.

When the council did meet, it released a series of documents that were decisive for the course of future affairs. Its doctrinal decrees concerned the Creed, the canon of Scripture, original sin, justification, the sacraments, the saints, and indulgences. Its reform decrees dealt with a requirement that bishops live in their diocese to provide better pastoral care to the faithful, with establishing seminaries to provide better training for priests, with procedures for disciplining clerics, with ways of improving the morals of the faithful, and with many other subjects. Of particular note, the council strove to end abuses connected with indulgences—the subject that initially sparked the Protestant movement.

The effectiveness of Trent for the Counter-Reformation period is illustrated by the fact that it took more than 300 years before the next ecumenical council—Vatican I—met in 1869–1870.

Following the council, Pope St. Pius V (reigned 1566–1572) continued its work of reform, publishing the *Roman Catechism* (a.k.a. the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*)—the first Church-wide catechism and the forerunner of the modern *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992). He published a new order of Mass that became the norm in most parts of the Western Church, and he published a revised edition of the Breviary (Divine Office).

In 1542, to safeguard the integrity of Catholic teaching, Paul III tasked six cardinals with heading the Sacred Roman and Universal Inquisition. It was subsequently reorganized a number of times, and today its successor body is

the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

In 1582, Pope Gregory XIII (reigned 1572–1585) introduced a reform of the calendar—i.e., the Gregorian Calendar—that is now the worldwide standard.

Many notable saints labored in this period, including Sts. Teresa of Avila (1515–1582), Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621), Charles Borromeo (1538–1584), John of the Cross (1542–1591), Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), Thomas More (1478–1535), Philip Neri (1515–1595), Francis de Sales (1567–1622), and Francis Xavier (1506–1552).

The period also saw the birth of many new religious orders, which took up the work of reform within the Church as well as missionary efforts to spread the Faith. These included the Capuchins, Discalced Carmelites, Oratorians, and Ursulines. Of special note are the Jesuits, who conducted extensive missionary efforts in North and South America and in China.

5. What is *sola fide*?

Sola fide is a Latin phrase that means "by faith alone." It is a slogan that represents one of the two most important ideas in Protestantism. The phrase is understood to mean that justification—by which sinners are forgiven and put in a right relationship with God—is accomplished by faith alone, without the performance of good works.

Advocated by Martin Luther, *sola fide* became a rallying cry in Protestant circles. It is often referred to as the "material principle" of the Reformation, meaning the doctrine that forms the primary substance of Protestant theology. Despite its near-universal use in Protestant circles, it is understood in significantly different ways.

For Lutherans—as well as many Anglicans and Methodists—baptism is understood to be a means by which God justifies Christians. They hold that baptism is not a "good work" that is excluded by the faith-alone principle. Instead, it is an act by which we ask for and receive God's grace. However, for other Protestants, such as those who belong to Baptist churches, baptism is understood as a purely symbolic ritual that does not convey the grace of justification. They argue that to rely on it for justification would make it a "good work" and violate the faith-alone principle.

Another issue on which Protestants are divided is the question of whether justification can be lost. According to many—including Lutherans, Methodists, Pentecostals, and many Anglicans—it is possible to lose one's justification through sin of one sort or another. Others, again including many in Baptist churches, argue that if justification could be lost through sin then it would be maintained through "good works" and not by faith alone.

In some Protestant circles, the concept of faith is understood in such a minimal sense that one would be justified merely by agreeing that Jesus is the Christ and that he died for our sins. Other Protestants would argue that justifying faith does not consist merely of intellectual assent. Instead, it must include trust in God for salvation, or the virtue of hope. In both understandings, it would be possible to be justified without a commitment to change one's behavior, but other Protestants argue that this wouldn't fulfill the biblical requirement of repentance, which requires a real turning away from sin.

In view of these different understandings, the formula "by faith alone" is a point of verbal agreement among Protestants, but it masks substantively different understandings of the doctrine of justification.

From a Catholic point of view, the formula "by faith alone" is problematic because the only time the phrase occurs in Scripture, it is rejected (James 2:24). However, it was used by some Catholic authors prior to the Reformation, and the Council of Trent rejected it only if understood in certain ways (*Decree on Justification*, can. 9).

The Church does not teach that one must do good works to enter a state of justification. Trent taught that "none of those things that precede justification, whether faith or works, merit the grace of justification" (chap. 8). Good works flow from the state of justification rather than being the means by which one enters it.

In his letter to the Galatians, St. Paul refers to "faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6), and Catholic theologians have said that if this is the way you understand faith then the formula "by faith alone" can be given an acceptable meaning. Pope Benedict XVI said:

Luther's phrase "*faith alone*" is true, if it is not opposed to faith in charity, in

> love. . . . So it is that in the letter to the Galatians, in which he primarily developed his teaching on justification, St. Paul speaks of faith that works through love (General Audience, Nov. 19, 2008).

In recent years, dialogue between Catholics and Protestants has helped overcome many historic divisions on justification. In 1999, the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation signed a *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* that announced "a consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification" and concluded that "the remaining differences in its explication are no longer the occasion for doctrinal condemnations" (n. 5).

In 2006, the World Methodist Council also subscribed to the *Joint Declaration*: in 2017 the World Communion of Reformed Churches did so as well. The Anglican Consultative Council has also passed a resolution that "welcomes and affirms the substance of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*" (Resolution 16.17).

While these statements express a significant consensus on justification, they represent the views of only some major Protestant communions. There are other Lutheran, Methodist, Reformed, and Anglican groups who do not agree.

6. What is *sola scriptura*?

Sola scriptura is a Latin phrase that means "by Scripture alone." It is a slogan that represents the second of the two most important ideas in Protestantism. The phrase is understood to mean that only Scripture is ultimately authoritative for Christian faith and practice.

The Catholic understanding is that Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium (i.e., the teaching authority of the Church) are all authoritative. However, since Tradition and the Magisterium did not support the ideas Luther was proposing, he was forced to reject their authority, leaving him with only an appeal to Scripture as authoritative.

The same issue faced other Protestants, who consequently adopted the *sola scriptura* principle. It is often referred to as the "formal principle" of the Reformation, meaning the principle that informs or shapes all of Protestant theology. Despite its near-universal use in Protestant circles, the phrase is

understood in significantly different ways.

One key difference concerns the role of tradition in theology. At one end of the spectrum, many Anglicans, Lutherans, Calvinists, and Methodists profess a healthy respect for tradition, including the writings of Church Fathers and the results of the early ecumenical councils that dealt with the doctrine of the Trinity and the Person of Christ. They see tradition as having an important role, even if it is not as authoritative as Scripture.

Other Protestants dismiss tradition and seek to minimize it. In some circles, ministers encourage people to effectively become their own theologians, evaluating every proposed doctrine for themselves and dismissing it if it can't be proved from Scripture.

Usually, advocates of this position will allow the use of theological terms not found in the Bible—e.g., *Trinity, original sin, free will, rapture*—as long as the concepts expressed by these terms are rooted in Scripture. However, some radical authors may seek to minimize tradition to the point of rejecting such terms.

Another point of difference concerns the range of issues to which *sola scriptura* should be applied. The classic formulation is that it should govern Christian faith and practice. The first part of that means that all doctrines must be provable by Scripture, and this is the way it is often applied, though not always. Sometimes Protestant authors make a more restricted claim, saying only that Scripture is sufficient for proving every doctrine necessary for salvation.

What about the range of practices? Scripture does not settle every moral question that can be posed, and some Protestant authors appeal to natural-law reasoning, noting that the moral law of God is written on men's hearts (Rom. 2:15), making it a form of extrabiblical revelation that is part of the "general revelation" that can be seen in the world (Rom. 1:20), as opposed to the "special revelation" found in Scripture. Others hold that appealing to general revelation would violate *sola scriptura*, and they dismiss natural-law reasoning.

Moral questions aren't the only ones involved in the realm of Christian practice. So are ritual practices. On this topic, some apply *sola scriptura* in a way that allows practices as long as they aren't forbidden in Scripture; but

others say that this violates *sola scriptura*, since everything must be proved—not just allowed—by Scripture. On this basis, a few Protestant churches forbid the use of musical instruments in worship services since the New Testament doesn't record Christians using them. Others have prohibited the singing of modern hymns in church, allowing only ones found in the Bible, such as the Psalms.

A final area concerns the role of ongoing revelation. Some Protestants argue that all revelation ended with the death of the last apostle. However, some groups have claimed to have received new, important revelations. For example, the Seventh-day Adventists claim to have received important revelations through a prophetess named Ellen Gould White (1827–1915). In the twentieth century, Pentecostals and Charismatics claimed a widespread rebirth of the gift of prophecy. Even non-Charismatic Protestants frequently say that God is teaching them or showing them certain things in their lives, indicating belief in some form of ongoing, extrabiblical guidance.

Like *sola fide*, *sola scriptura* is a phrase almost all Protestants use, but they understand it to mean different things. As a result, they frequently accuse each other of violating the principle, and it is difficult to resist the conclusion that groups often apply it inconsistently in a way that favors their own views.

We should add a note about which books of the Bible are counted as Scripture among Protestants. Because Martin Luther's theology conflicted with certain books traditionally recognized as canonical, he challenged the idea that they should be considered Scripture. For example, 2 Maccabees 12:38–45 endorses the practice of praying and making offerings for the dead so that they may be freed from the consequences of their sins. It thus provides evidence for the Church's teaching regarding purgatory and indulgences. Luther needed to find a way to deny 2 Maccabees canonical status.

His solution was to adopt the Old Testament canon used by European Jews in his day, which excluded certain books traditionally accepted by Christians (i.e., 1–2 Maccabees, Tobit, Judith, Baruch, Sirach, Wisdom, and parts of Daniel and Esther). He thus relegated these books to an appendix in his German Bible. In Protestant circles, these books are often called "the Apocrypha," though in Catholic circles they are referred to as the *deuterocanonical* books of the Old Testament.

Luther also thought certain New Testament books were in conflict with his understanding of the gospel. He famously referred to the book of James as "an epistle of straw" and said that "it has nothing of the nature of the gospel about it" (*Luther's Works* 35:362). He thus relegated certain New Testament books (Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation) to an appendix.

Later Protestants disagreed with Luther's assessment of the New Testament canon and consider all its books fully scriptural. However, they concurred with Luther's view of the Old Testament canon, and eventually many Protestant publishers ceased printing the deuterocanonical books in Bibles, even as an appendix.

7. How can Catholics respond to *sola scriptura*?

In apologetic discussions, it is common for Protestants to place the burden of proof on Catholics using *sola scriptura*. This occurs when they ask, "Where is that in the Bible?" It is legitimate for Catholics to shoulder the burden of proof if they are asking a Protestant to reevaluate his position. If you want someone to change his view, you need to either show him evidence that he will accept or argue that he needs to accept additional evidence. In apologetic discussions, this means either showing a Protestant evidence from Scripture or showing him the problems with *sola scriptura*.

However, sometimes Protestants seek to place the burden of proof on Catholics in an inappropriate way. This occurs when the question "Where is that in the Bible?" is used to imply that, if a Catholic can't produce Bible passages supporting a teaching or practice, he should abandon it. This is not the case. Catholics are entitled to appeal to more than just Scripture in supporting their positions. They may also appeal to Tradition and the teaching of the Magisterium, and thus they should not fall into the trap of thinking that they must support their views "by Scripture alone." The burden of proof belongs to whomever is asking another person to change his view, but each person is allowed to appeal to his own principles to justify what he holds.

A key problem with the principle of *sola scriptura* is that it does not support itself. This is important because if every doctrine needs to be proved by

Scripture alone, then *sola scriptura* will need to be proved in this way. This is a major difficulty for the *sola scriptura* view since there is no passage in the Bible that teaches it. Neither is there a set of passages that imply it. *Sola scriptura* thus appears to be a self-refuting doctrine that fails its own test.

Sometimes Protestants appeal to certain Scripture passages to prove *sola scriptura*. For example, they may appeal to various passages that warn against adding to or taking away from God's word (e.g., Deut. 4:2; Prov. 30:5–6; Rev. 22:18–19). However, these passages frequently are warnings against tampering with the text of specific biblical books, such as Deuteronomy and Revelation. They do not imply that the word of God is to be found just in these books or even just in Scripture as a whole. Therefore, they leave open the possibility that the word of God is found elsewhere, as in Tradition.

Protestants sometimes observe that Jesus rejected certain contemporary Jewish views as "traditions of men" that were nonauthoritative and that contradict Scripture (Matt. 15:3–9; Mark 7:7–13). However, Jesus did not say that all traditions are nonauthoritative or contradict Scripture.

The New Testament actually sees a positive role for Tradition. Thus, Paul praises the Corinthians because they maintained "the traditions even as I have delivered them to you" (1 Cor. 11:2). He similarly tells the Thessalonians to "hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter" (2 Thess. 2:15) and to "keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us" (2 Thess. 3:6).

What kind of verses would be needed to prove *sola scriptura*? It is clear that this principle was not in use during the biblical period. In the Old Testament era, it could not have been in use since Scripture was not complete. Furthermore, God sent many prophets who did not write books of the Bible but whose teaching was nonetheless authoritative (for example, Elijah—the most famous prophet of the period).

Following the events of Jesus' ministry, Christians were expected to accept the facts about his life and teachings as authoritative on the basis of oral Tradition—the preaching of the apostles—even before the Gospels and other books of the New Testament were written. This is why Paul emphasized the role of Tradition to his readers.

Sola scriptura would represent a major paradigm shift that could only go into effect after the closing of the New Testament canon. For Scripture to teach it, we would need passages that say things like, "We apostles have agreed among ourselves to write down everything that is authoritative for Christian faith and practice. Therefore, after we are gone, you are to consider anything we said that isn't in Scripture to be nonauthoritative." There are no such passages, and *sola scriptura* fails its own test.

Sola scriptura also depends on a knowledge of what counts as Scripture—in other words, on a knowledge of the precise limits of the biblical canon. However, Scripture does not contain an inspired list of the books that belong to it, and Christians have differed on the question of what should be included (see answer 6). If, as in the Catholic view, God guides the Magisterium of the Church in evaluating Scripture and Tradition, then the question of the canon is not urgent. But if *sola scriptura* were true, you would need to know the precise limits of the canon, because failing to include a single book that should be in the Bible would deprive theology of information God meant it to have, and accidentally including a single book that should not be in the Bible would inject false information into theology.

Yet, it took centuries for Christians to discern what belonged in the canon, and the Church was instrumental in witnessing to which books were inspired. For a Protestant to claim he knows precisely which books are scriptural, he would need to appeal either to a private revelation given to him, or to God guiding people centuries after the Apostolic Age into an exact knowledge of the canon. Neither of these sits well with *sola scriptura*.

Finally, as we saw in answer 2, *sola scriptura* could not be implemented in a general way without the invention of the printing press. In order to do theology "by Scripture alone," one must have a copy of the scriptures, and there was no way for the ordinary believer to have a Bible for the first 1,500 years of Christianity. Consequently, for three-quarters of Church history, *sola scriptura* could not have been God's plan. Yet it seems inconceivable God would allow his people to labor under a false understanding of the core principle of theology for so many centuries, suggesting that *sola scriptura* was never God's plan.

8. What do Protestants believe about the end times?

Protestants share the historic Christian expectation of the Second Coming of Christ, and the original Protestant Reformers did not differ significantly from the common understanding of what would happen in the period leading up to this.

Like most in Church history, the Reformers held that, following the Ascension, Christ began to reign in heaven and that this reign will continue until his Second Coming. At some point in the future, a period called "the Tribulation" will begin: the forces of evil will prosper, the Antichrist will be revealed, and the Church will be persecuted. Christ will then return from heaven to save his Church, the dead will be raised, the Final Judgment will take place, and the eternal order will be established.

In the Protestant community, this view is often called *amillennialism*, since it does not hold that there will be a "thousand year" period in which Christ reigns physically on earth. Instead, it sees the millennium spoken of in Revelation as occurring now, while Christ reigns from heaven (see Rev. 20:1–6). Catholics have not traditionally used the term amillennialism, but it describes the standard position taken in most of Church history.

After the Reformation began, additional views became popular. One known as *postmillennialism* holds that the millennium is a great Christian golden age that still lies in our future, though on this view Christ still reigns from heaven and will not return to earth except at the end of history. Though popular in some Protestant circles, postmillennialism's optimistic view of the future became less common in the turbulent twentieth century with the two World Wars and the threat of atomic war hanging over the globe.

Another view that became common in Protestant circles is *premillennialism*. It holds that Christ will return before the millennium spoken of in Revelation. The era of the Antichrist is still to come, and Christ will return to end it. However, premillennialists hold that following this there will be a long period of time in which Christ physically reigns from earth. Then, there will be a new unleashing of the forces of evil, and only after this will the general resurrection, the judging of the dead, and the establishment of the eternal order take place.

In the 1830s, a premillennial thinker named John Nelson Darby (1800–1882) began to teach a new idea. He held that, prior to the Tribulation, Jesus will return and catch away or "rapture" all who believe in him. They will then spend the Tribulation period in heaven before Christ definitively returns and inaugurates an earthly millennium. Since it holds that Christ will have a preliminary return before the Tribulation, this view is referred to as *pretribulational premillennialism*, and it became popular in Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Charismatic circles in the twentieth century, though more recently other views have begun to reassert themselves.

St. Paul does speak of an event where Christians will be caught up to meet Jesus in the air, but he identifies it as occurring at "the coming of the Lord" when the dead will be raised (1 Thess. 4:13–17). Consequently, it has historically been understood as taking place at the definitive Second Coming of Christ to judge the living and the dead, not at an otherwise unmentioned, prior coming. In this view, when Christ returns, his faithful will be caught up to be with him and then accompany him to the scene of the Final Judgment.

Despite its recent popularity, Darby's view was unknown for the first 1800 years of Church history. It was not and is not held by traditional Protestants—whether amillennialist, postmillennialist, or historic premillennialist. Neither is it held by the Catholic Church (see CCC 675–677).

9. What are the different kinds of Protestantism?

There are many varieties of Protestantism, and they display an enormous amount of theological diversity. For this reason, it is almost always a mistake to speak of "the" Protestant position on any subject. As we saw in answers 5 and 6, even the core distinctives on which Protestantism is based—*sola fide* and *sola scriptura*—are understood in markedly different ways. When we move to other doctrines, the diversity only increases.

There are literally thousands of independent Protestant denominations and many more independent congregations. Catholic apologists have pointed to these numbers as illustrations of the tendency of Protestant principles—especially *sola scriptura*—to cause fragmentation and doctrinal confusion.

This is a valid point. However, sometimes apologists cite misleading

numbers, claiming—for example, that there are something like 33,000 Protestant denominations. This number is given as the total number of *Christian* denominations in the *World Christian Encyclopedia,* but the methodology used to count them is flawed. It considers two groups to be separate denominations if they are in different countries, even if they are in communion with each other. Because the Catholic Church is found in many countries, the *Encyclopedia* counts Catholicism as being 242 separate denominations!

Even when denominations operate independently of each other, it doesn't mean that they disagree theologically. A Presbyterian denomination in America may be totally independent of a Presbyterian denomination in Uganda, but they may have the same doctrinal views.

About half of Protestants worldwide belong to one of six major traditions—Lutherans, Calvinists, Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, or Pentecostals—with the remainder belonging to smaller traditions, including non-denominational groups.

These major traditions historically have all been trinitarian in theology, and they broadly accept the results of the early ecumenical councils dealing with the Person of Christ. Use of the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed is common in many of them, though some clauses (e.g., those regarding belief in the communion of saints, baptism for the forgiveness of sins, and especially the Catholic Church) may be understood in different senses.

While the majority of groups stemming from the Reformation are trinitarian, there are movements that reject this teaching (e.g., Unitarianism, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Oneness Pentecostalism). These are outside the primary focus of this book, though they will be discussed briefly in answer 16.

Over time, a number of movements have emerged in Protestantism that cut across these traditions. By the twentieth century, many historic Protestant denominations had become more theologically liberal, though they still contained conservative congregations and individuals. In the 1920s, they came to be known as "mainline" Protestant churches, and they include representatives of all the major Protestant traditions except Pentecostalism.

Mainline denominations were criticized by more conservative ones, which

came to be called "fundamentalists" because they favored *The Fundamentals*—a twelve-volume set of books advocating conservative positions. Over time, the origin of the term was largely forgotten, and today *fundamentalist* is a term used to refer to very conservative Protestants (as well as members of other groups and even other religions, e.g., "fundamentalist Muslims"). The term also has taken on negative connotations. If someone is called a fundamentalist, it suggests that he is doctrinally rigid and hostile to other viewpoints. For this reason, the term should be used only for those few Christians who apply it to themselves. Otherwise, it becomes an insult that adds more heat than light.

Because of the negative connotations the term acquired, conservative Protestants needed a different and more positive term for themselves, and in the United States they began to call themselves "evangelicals." This can be confusing since the term *evangelical* has been used in other senses. In Europe, it is applied to mainline Protestant churches or, alternately, to anyone who strongly favors evangelism (i.e., preaching the gospel). However, in the United States *evangelical* generally indicates a conservative Protestant who distances himself from the rigidity associated with fundamentalism, though the term is fluid and not all who identify themselves as evangelical fit this profile.

10. What is Lutheranism?

Lutheranism is the major Protestant theological tradition begun by Martin Luther (1483–1546). It is the oldest of the major Protestant movements, having begun in 1517. According to the Pew Research Center, today about 10 percent of Protestants worldwide belong to churches that identify as Lutheran.

Martin Luther was born in Eisleben in what is now Germany. He joined the Augustinian order and was ordained a priest in 1507. In 1512 he became the chair of theology at the University of Wittenberg. Following the controversy on indulgences, Luther began to challenge other Catholic teachings, and in 1521 he was excommunicated by Pope Leo X. Luther's writings circulated internationally, inspiring new forms of Protestantism, and Lutheranism began to spread in parts of Germany and in Scandinavia.

Lutherans subscribe to the *Augsburg Confession*—a 1530 document written by Luther's colleague Philip Melanchthon to express Lutheran principles—and most Lutherans subscribe to the *Book of Concord*, a 1580 work containing the *Augsburg Confession* as well as other creeds and doctrinal statements.

The principle of justification by faith alone was close to Luther's heart. Possessing a deep sense of his own sinfulness, Luther went through an early period in which he feared for his salvation. Upon developing his theology of justification by faith alone, he experienced a sense of liberation and confidence in his salvation, and this teaching became a cornerstone of the Reformation.

Luther and his followers did not understand the formula "by faith alone" as excluding baptism as a requirement for salvation. His *Small Catechism*—still used by Lutherans today—contains the following question:

> What gifts or benefits does baptism bestow?
>
> Answer: It effects forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and grants eternal salvation to all who believe, as the word and promise of God declare.

Lutherans also maintain the historic Christian practice of infant baptism.

Although Luther's thought was strongly predestinarian (see his book *On the Bondage of the Will*), he believed it was possible to lose salvation through sin, or rather through one specific sin: apostasy, the complete loss of Christian faith. If faith alone was the means of salvation, losing faith was the one thing that would result in its loss.

Lutherans retain a liturgical form of worship modeled after the Catholic Mass. Because of this, they have a reputation for having a greater focus on liturgy than many other groups of Protestants.

At the center of the Lutheran worship service is the Eucharist, which is often referred to as "the sacrament of the altar," as well as by other terms. According to their understanding of the Real Presence, the body and blood of Christ are present "in, with, and under" the bread and wine. This view is sometimes called *consubstantiation* (in contrast to the Catholic belief in transubstantiation, according to which the bread and wine *become* the body

and blood of Christ), though many Lutheran theologians do not favor this term.

Some Lutherans recognize only baptism and the Eucharist as sacraments; others, however, include "confession and absolution" as a third sacrament. Lutherans also practice rites for confirmation, matrimony, holy orders, and the anointing of the sick, but they are not regarded as sacraments.

Lutherans believe in a "priesthood of all believers," and so Lutheran ministers are not held to be sacramentally distinct from laymen. Still, Lutherans hold that preaching and administering the sacraments are tasks appropriate to an ordained minister. The terms for ordained ministers vary from one Lutheran denomination to another; in some, the terms "bishop," "priest," and "deacon" are retained.

The largest Lutheran organization is the Lutheran World Federation, which includes 148 denominations and has a membership of more than seventy-five million. The Lutheran World Federation is a mainline Protestant body, but there are conservative groups that refer to themselves as "confessional" Lutheran churches. The most prominent is the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, which has about two million members. Confessional Lutherans typically retain the early Protestant teaching that the pope is the Antichrist.

11. What is Calvinism?

Calvinism is the major Protestant theological tradition begun by John Calvin (1509–1564). Churches that belong to this tradition are frequently referred to as "Presbyterian" or "Reformed." According to the Pew Research Center, about 7 percent of Protestants worldwide belong to churches that identify as Presbyterian or Reformed.

John Calvin was born in Noyon, France, in 1509 but became famous as a religious leader in Switzerland. After moving there, he lived in Basel, where his conversion to Protestantism appears to have occurred. In 1536, he published the first edition of a theological work known as the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which set forth his ideas and began to establish his reputation as a Reformer. Calvin later ministered at Geneva, where Protestantism was not popular and had been imposed in exchange for

military help from Bern. It was here that he became famous as a pastor.

Calvinism later spread in France and England, becoming especially influential in the Netherlands and Scotland. In addition to being the dominant form of theology in Presbyterian and Reformed churches, Calvinism also has been influential in other communities, including Anglicanism and Baptist churches.

While Calvin's thought was strongly predestinarian, after his death it became even more closely associated with the doctrine of predestination. In the early 1600s, the Dutch theologian Jacob Arminius (1560–1609) challenged some of Calvin's views on the topic, which caused a theological controversy in Calvinism.

This led to a meeting in the city of Dortrecht now known as the Synod of Dort (1618–1619). It reaffirmed traditional Calvinist positions on predestination, and in the English-speaking world these have been referred to as the "doctrines of grace" or the "five points of Calvinism." They are summarized with the acronym TULIP:

T for total depravity (the idea that man is completely unable to turn to God without a special form of grace that precedes conversion known as *prevenient grace*)

U for unconditional election (the idea that God chooses or "elects" to give prevenient grace to certain individuals and not to others simply based on his own choice)

L for limited atonement (the idea that Christ did not die for all men but only for the elect)

I for irresistible grace (the idea that prevenient grace cannot be resisted, so the elect will unfailingly come to salvation)

P for perseverance of the saints (the idea that the elect will unfailingly remain in a state of grace until death, meaning they cannot lose their salvation)

Not all who identify as Calvinists accept all five teachings. Many who identify as "four-point Calvinists" reject the teaching of limited atonement. In

addition, many Calvinist theologians think the way the TULIP formula is traditionally explained is somewhat misleading, and they have proposed alternative explanations.

The idea of perseverance of the saints was a theological novelty that does not predate Calvin. It was not shared by previous predestinarian thinkers such as Augustine, Aquinas, and Luther. It later became popular among some Protestants who do not identify as Calvinists and who also endorse the idea that it is impossible for people to lose their salvation. Though they do not always understand this teaching in the same way Calvinists do, they refer to the idea as *eternal security* or "once saved, always saved."

Calvinists hold that people are regenerated when God gives them the grace that leads to their conversion. In their view, grace precedes regeneration, which precedes faith. This differs from the traditional Christian view that grace leads to faith, which then leads to baptism, in which people are regenerated.

However, most Calvinists maintain the traditional Christian practice of infant baptism and hold that baptism can be a means of regeneration for those infants who are among God's elect.

Calvinists generally hold that Christ is spiritually present in the Eucharist but not bodily present. They emphasize that this spiritual presence means the Eucharist is more than a mere symbol or memorial because it is a means of grace.

Though they have rites for marriage and ordination, Calvinists do not regard these as sacraments. They generally reserve that term for baptism and the Eucharist only. They have a style of worship that is generally less liturgical than Lutheran and Anglican worship but more liturgical than Baptist and Pentecostal worship.

In the English-speaking world, a major doctrinal standard used by Presbyterian and Reformed churches is the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, which was produced in 1646 by the Westminster Assembly—an Anglican council heavily influenced by Calvinist thought.

Churches in the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition do not use the terms "bishop" and "priest" for their ministers. Instead, they have elders (Greek,

presbuteroi, "presbyters") and deacons. The elders or presbyters govern the church, and so they are said to have a *presbyterian* form of government.

12. What is Anglicanism?

Anglicanism is the major Protestant communion begun by the English king Henry VIII (1491–1547). It is referred to as "Anglican" because of its place of origin: England. In Latin, *Anglicus* means "of England." The Anglican Church is, therefore, the official, state-sponsored "Church of England." According to the Pew Research Center, today about 11 percent of Protestants worldwide belong to churches that identify as Anglican.

In 1521, Henry VIII published a *Defense of the Seven Sacraments* against Luther's claims, and Pope Leo X (reigned 1475–1521) awarded him the title *Fidei Defensor* (Latin, "Defender of the Faith").

However, when Henry was unable to conceive a male heir with his wife, Catherine of Aragon, he petitioned Pope Clement VII (1478–1534) for an annulment so that he could marry someone else and obtain a male heir. When an annulment was not forthcoming, Henry married his mistress Anne Boleyn and had the then-Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556), declare his original marriage null.

In 1535, Henry had the English Parliament declare the church in England to be independent of Rome and establish him as its head, thus creating the Anglican Communion. Henry closed English monasteries and martyred individuals who did not assent to these changes, but he did not introduce significant theological reforms, apparently intending the Church of England to remain Catholic except for its relationship with the pope.

Over time, Protestant theological ideas began to spread in Anglican circles, especially through the movement known as Puritanism, which sought to "purify" the church of Catholic teachings and practices. The Puritan movement was heavily influenced by Calvinism, and in 1646 the Westminster Assembly produced the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, which is still influential in Calvinist churches, though not in the Church of England.

An earlier work known as the *Thirty-nine Articles of Religion* became the major Anglican doctrinal standard. It was issued in 1571, during the reign of

Elizabeth I (1533–1603), and it steered a middle course between Catholic and Protestant ideas, at times using ambiguous language to allow individuals favoring both courses to subscribe to it.

The result is that the Anglican Communion does not have a distinctive theology like Lutheranism or Calvinism. It incorporates different theological traditions. Those who emphasize Catholic teachings and practices are frequently known as "high church" Anglicans, while those who deemphasize them are known as "low church" Anglicans. Those who identify as neither high nor low church—or who wish to avoid conflict between the two—are referred to as "broad church" Anglicans.

In the nineteenth century, a high church movement began at the University of Oxford, and it became known as the Oxford Movement. It sought to understand the Thirty-nine Articles in a Catholic manner, and one of its leaders was John Henry Newman (1801–1890), who later became Catholic. High church Anglicans often do not identify as Protestants, preferring to refer to themselves as "Anglo-Catholics."

Low church Anglicans commonly identify as Protestants and sometimes refer to themselves as "evangelical Anglicans." They may be Calvinist or Arminian in theology. Broad church Anglicans also identify as Protestants and increasingly refer to themselves as "liberal" Protestants.

Anglicans have had a liturgical form of worship that includes a modified version of the Catholic Mass. This was codified in a liturgical work known as the *Book of Common Prayer*, though in 2000 a book called *Common Worship* was published for those who wish to have a more modern style of liturgy. Some Anglican churches have discontinued liturgical worship in favor of more loosely structured services.

Because of the theological diversity in the Anglican tradition, a wide variety of views is held on the sacraments. The Thirty-nine Articles divide the sacraments into two groups. They identify baptism and the Eucharist as "sacraments ordained of Christ our Lord in the gospel," and they identify confirmation, penance, orders, matrimony, and extreme unction as rites "commonly called sacraments but not to be counted for sacraments of the gospel" (art. 25). All seven rites are practiced in the Anglican Communion.

Anglicans practice infant baptism, though the significance of baptism is

understood differently in the high, low, and broad church movements.

Many high church Anglicans emphasize the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and some use the term *transubstantiation*, though this does not fit easily with the Thirty-nine Articles, which reject the term (art. 28). Other Anglicans hold that Christ is received spiritually in the Eucharist, or they may affirm Christ's presence in the sacrament without defining the manner in which he is present.

High church Anglicans frequently understand all seven sacraments in Catholic terms, including the sacrament of holy orders. They thus claim apostolic succession for their bishops, though in 1896 Pope Leo XIII (1810–1903) ruled in the apostolic letter *Apostolicae Curae* (On the Nullity of Anglican Orders) that various historical factors stopped holy orders from being validly transmitted in the Anglican Communion.

Anglican ministers include bishops, priests, and deacons. The head of the Anglican Communion is the Archbishop of Canterbury.

13. What are Baptists?

Baptists are members of the major Protestant theological tradition begun by the English Reformer John Smyth (c. 1570–1612). According to the Pew Research Center, today about 9 percent of Protestants worldwide belong to churches that identify as Baptist.

They are called "Baptists" as a shortening of "Anabaptists" (Greek, *anabaptismoi*, "re-baptizers") because they reject the practice of infant baptism and thus rebaptize people who were initially baptized as babies. They refer to the position they hold as "believer's baptism"—that is, that the sacrament is only for those who have explicit personal faith in Christ and who have attained the age needed to make an individual profession of faith.

The idea of believer's baptism has appeared periodically in Christian history, and not all who advocate it identify as Baptists. For example, the followers of Menno Simmons (1496–1561)—the Mennonites—also rejected infant baptism and were also called Anabaptists. Similarly, today's Pentecostals and non-denominational Evangelicals have been influenced by Baptist theology and usually practice believer's baptism.

Some Baptists hold a theory known as *Baptist successionism*, according to which their movement has existed through history and was founded either by John the Baptist or Jesus. However, this view is rejected by all competent historians. Although there were occasional Anabaptist groups prior to the 1600s, today's Baptist movement was founded by John Smyth.

Smyth was born in England but migrated to the Netherlands. In 1609, he and a group of expatriate Englishmen formed the first Baptist church in Amsterdam, where Smyth rebaptized himself and several dozen others. This congregation lasted only a few years, but other congregations were begun. The movement spread back to England and then to other parts of the world.

The original Baptists were Calvinist and were divided into two groups, known as "particular" and "general" Baptists. The former held that Christ died only for the elect (i.e., they believed in a particular redemption) and thus accepted the Calvinist doctrine of limited atonement. The latter held that Christ died for all men (i.e., they believed in a general redemption) and thereby rejected limited atonement. General Baptists were also influenced more broadly by the thought of the Dutch theologian Jacob Arminius and did not necessarily accept other points of Calvinism (see answer 11). Those who hold a Calvinist theology today frequently refer to themselves as "Reformed Baptists."

During the revivals of the nineteenth century, many Baptists came to place less emphasis on the finer points of theology and more on the believer's personal experience.

Baptists generally acknowledge only two sacraments—baptism and the Eucharist, though the latter is not called by that name. Instead, it is referred to as "the Lord's Supper." Many Baptists also reject the term *sacrament*, preferring the term *ordinance*.

Baptists have marriage ceremonies, but they do not have rites for confirmation or confession, though some voluntarily practice the confession of sins to another person as a form of personal accountability. In some congregations, the sick may be anointed with oil and ministers may be ordained. However, none of these rites are regarded as sacraments.

The two sacraments (or ordinances) they do recognize are not understood as means of grace but simply as symbols. Baptism is understood to be a purely

symbolic washing, and the Lord's Supper is understood to be a simple memorial of Christ's passion in which he is present only symbolically.

Baptists differ from earlier groups of Protestants by rejecting any means of baptizing other than immersion. That is, when a person is baptized, he must be fully immersed in water. Pouring or sprinkling is not acceptable.

Baptists practice a non-liturgical form of worship that frequently involves a longer sermon coupled with hymns and prayers. The Lord's Supper is not typically celebrated on a weekly basis.

Baptist churches frequently belong to denominations or other alliances, but each congregation is independent and governs itself. They practice what is known as a *congregational* form of government.

14. What is Methodism?

Methodism is the major Protestant tradition begun by the English reformer John Wesley (1703–1791) and his brother Charles (1707–1788). They are called *Methodists* because of the reputation the Wesleys and their early followers had for being methodical in religious study and practice. According to the Pew Research Center, today about 3 percent of Protestants worldwide belong to churches that identify as Methodist.

John Wesley was born in Lincolnshire, England, and was ordained an Anglican priest in 1728. Although he and his brother spent a brief period ministering in the American colonies, his primary work was done in England, where he served as an itinerant preacher who traveled to different locations preaching spiritual revival and founding Methodist societies. Wesley participated in the revival movement known as the First Great Awakening (c. 1720–c. 1740) in Britain and America.

His Methodist societies were not well received by many in the Anglican establishment and began to operate independently of the Church of England. This led to Methodism becoming an independent movement.

A distinctive element in Wesley's theology is his teaching of "Christian perfection." This is seen as an elaboration of Jesus' teaching, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48, KJV). Wesleyan theology holds that it is possible for Christians, by God's grace, to

achieve a state of sanctification in which they are free from conscious personal sin.

According to some Methodists, this sanctification is a gradual process in which we grow in holiness. According to others, sanctification is an instantaneous event, paralleling the justification that occurs upon conversion. For this reason, it is sometimes referred to as a "second work of grace" or "second blessing." Additional terms, such as "entire sanctification" and "the baptism of the Holy Spirit" also are applied to this achieving of "perfect love" or "Christian holiness."

Methodism is Arminian in its theology. As part of his rejection of Calvinism, Wesley taught that it is possible to lose salvation by "backsliding" into sin—and to regain it through repentance.

An important statement of Methodist doctrine is a document known as the *Articles of Religion*, which is based on Anglicanism's Thirty-nine Articles, though Wesley shortened it and removed certain statements that he found problematic, including its more Calvinistic passages.

As in other Protestant communities, Methodism assigns a unique and preeminent role to Scripture, but it also assigns positive roles to tradition, experience, and reason. In recent years, these four sources have been termed the "Wesleyan quadrilateral."

Reflecting its Anglican origins, Methodism incorporates both Protestant and Catholic elements in its theology, and Wesley did not hesitate to point to Catholic figures as examples of Christian holiness, though this was controversial with many in his day.

Methodists recognize two sacraments: baptism and the Eucharist. However, the Articles of Religion acknowledge confirmation, penance, orders, matrimony, and extreme unction as "commonly called sacraments," but says they are "not to be counted for sacraments of the gospel."

Methodists hold that baptism conveys saving grace to the recipient, and they have maintained the historic Christian practice of infant baptism. Concerning the Eucharist, Wesley taught the Real Presence of Christ in the elements, but Methodists do not define the precise manner in which Christ is present.

Some Methodist churches retain bishop, elder, and deacon as different

grades of ordination, while others have only elders and deacons. Even in the latter churches, though, some clergy may be elected to serve as bishops, but this is not viewed as a distinct grade of ordination. Major Methodist denominations may be governed by a General Conference, though the nature of this conference varies.

The style of worship varies considerably in Methodism. Reflecting its Anglican origins, Methodists have retained liturgical worship in some services. However, they have many services that are more informal. A prominent element in the Methodist tradition are hymns written by Charles Wesley.

Wesleyan theology played an influential role outside of Methodists churches. There are Christians who refer to themselves as "Wesleyans" even if they do not belong to a specifically Methodist church. Others, based on Wesleyan teaching on Christian holiness, refer to themselves as part of the "Holiness movement." Wesleyanism was influential in later revival movements, such as the Second Great Awakening (c. 1790–c. 1840), the Third Great Awakening (c. 1855–c. 1930), and Pentecostalism.

15. What are Pentecostals and Charismatics?

Pentecostals and Charismatics are members of two major and related theological movements that began in the twentieth century. Both involve miraculous gifts provided by the Holy Spirit.

Pentecostals are so named because they hold that it is possible and desirable for Christians to experience the same kind of spiritual experiences that occurred on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Charismatics are so named because they emphasize the gifts (Greek, *charismata*) given by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12-14).

According to the Pew Research Center, today about 11 percent of Protestants worldwide belong to churches that identify as Pentecostal. The number of Charismatics is more difficult to measure because the Charismatic Movement is multidenominational, with many Charismatics also counting as members of other churches.

Pentecostalism began in America at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In 1900, Charles Fox Parham founded Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas. A former Methodist preacher, Parham believed that justification was the "first work of grace" and that entire sanctification was the second. He also envisioned "baptism with the Holy Spirit" as a third work of grace, and he began teaching that speaking in tongues was the distinctive sign of having experienced this third blessing.

In 1906, two of Parham's associates—Lucy Farrow and William Joseph Seymour—were sent to Los Angeles, California, where they began preaching this message on Azusa Street, launching what became known as the Azusa Street Revival (1906–c. 1915). This revival is often considered the birth of Pentecostalism.

The most distinctive element of Pentecostal theology is its emphasis on miraculous gifts given by the Holy Spirit. These include the power to heal, work miracles, and prophesy, and related gifts such as the "word of wisdom" and "word of knowledge"—both of which Pentecostals view as forms of private revelation.

In many places, additional spiritual manifestations have been claimed, including the phenomenon of being "slain in the Spirit" (being overpowered by the Holy Spirit so that one falls down in a religious ecstasy) and "holy laughter" (being inspired by God to laugh in ecstatic joy). The latter is also sometimes called the "Toronto Blessing," because it was associated with the Toronto Airport Vineyard Church.

The spiritual gift most associated with Pentecostalism is speaking in tongues or *glossolalia*. In the early years of the Pentecostal movement, this was understood as the Spirit-given ability to speak in an actual human or angelic language, though one did not know what one was saying unless someone present also had the gift of interpreting tongues. Subsequently, many Pentecostals have understood speaking in tongues as involving a "private prayer language" that does not correspond to an actual, historical language.

Most Pentecostals don't hold that Christians are obliged to speak in tongues or that it is necessary for salvation. However, it is held to be desirable, and it is often seen as the distinctive mark of having received baptism with the Holy Spirit so that all who receive this gift speak in tongues, at least upon the occasion when they receive it.

Prior to the rise of Pentecostalism, many Protestants—especially those in Calvinist and Baptist traditions—held that miraculous gifts of this nature had ceased with the end of the Apostolic Age, though God continued to give other spiritual gifts (e.g., ministering, teaching, exhorting, ruling, showing mercy; see Rom. 12:7–8). By contrast, Pentecostals believe that contemporary Christians should imitate the example of the apostles in the practice of miraculous gifts. They sometimes refer to themselves as "apostolic" Christians.

They also believe that by de-emphasizing the miraculous gifts, other Protestants had neglected an important aspect of the gospel. Consequently, they sometimes describe themselves as preaching the "full gospel."

Classical Pentecostal theology is Arminian, and Pentecostals generally hold it is possible to lose salvation through sin and to regain it afterward through repentance.

Pentecostals commonly recognized baptism and the Eucharist (referred to as "the Lord's Supper") as sacraments, though they often prefer the term *ordinances*. Some also consider the washing of feet as a third sacrament or ordinance (see John 13:3–16). All of these are understood as purely symbolic rites that do not convey grace. Baptism is typically by immersion only and is applied only to those old enough to make a profession of faith, not to infants or small children. Similarly, the Lord's Supper is not understood to involve the Real Presence of Christ.

In the mid-twentieth century, a movement began in Pentecostal churches that is sometimes referred to as the "prosperity gospel." According to this view, God wishes all Christians to be prosperous in terms of their finances and health. Failure to prosper is seen as a sign of sin, lack of faith, or failure to use the proper spiritual techniques. This view is also referred to as the "health and wealth gospel," "the word of faith" movement, and the "word-faith" movement.

Pentecostals have a nonliturgical style of worship that frequently involves fiery preaching, extensive singing of praise songs, and the manifestation of gifts like tongues and prophecy, as well as associated phenomena such as being slain in the Spirit.

Beginning in 1960, some in traditional Protestant churches—including

Lutheran, Anglican, Calvinist, Methodist, and Baptist groups—began to adopt beliefs and practices like those of Pentecostals. This cross-denominational movement is sometimes referred to as *neo-Pentecostalism* though the more common term for it is the Charismatic Movement. It emphasizes miraculous gifts like tongues, healings, and prophecy, as well as worship styles influenced by Pentecostalism.

In 1967, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal began at Duchesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

16. What is non-denominationalism?

Non-denominationalism is a movement that became popular in the twentieth century. It involves a rejection of the idea that Christians need to be united in denominations. Sometimes this rejection is made so forcefully that being united in a denomination is seen as a violation of God's will.

This subject is complicated by the fact there is no official definition of what a denomination is. Etymologically, the term *denomination* is from the Latin roots *de-* (completely) and *nomen* (name). Any union of Christians that can be named thus could be seen as a denomination.

The Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines a denomination as "a religious organization whose congregations are united in their adherence to its beliefs and practices." This definition could be applied on a number of levels, depending on the degree of union a body has. At one extreme, all of Protestantism is sometimes reckoned as a denomination (alongside Catholicism and Orthodoxy). Other times, a specific Protestant tradition will be considered a denomination (e.g., Anglicanism). Most often, however, the term is used for a group of congregations that are united in a common governmental structure (e.g., the Church of England) or that have formed an alliance even though individual congregations are self-governing (e.g., the Southern Baptist Convention).

A special question concerns whether the Catholic Church should be considered a denomination. The Magisterium does not appear to have a position on the issue, likely due to the fact that *denomination* is a term originating in non-Catholic circles. Some have argued that, as the original

Church, the Catholic Church should not be considered a denomination. This understanding implies that a denomination must be something that split off from an original body. However, the Catholic Church is a body that can be named, and there are pages on the Vatican website (www.vatican.va) that refer to Catholicism as a denomination.

However the term *denomination* is understood, the concept is rejected by those who identify as non-denominational. They see belonging to a denomination as either unnecessary or undesirable.

Some Protestants identify as non-denominational even though they belong to bodies that are often considered denominations. For example, some Baptists—citing the independence of individual congregations in their community—state that they are not members of a denomination. This claim is also made in other communities, such as the Church of Christ movement. Nevertheless, these groups are united in common beliefs and practices; they form associations for cooperation and mutual support; and they can be named. Refusing the term *denomination* on the ground that each congregation is autonomous is a semantic issue that says more about how the term is used in their community, and such bodies are usually considered denominations by others.

Most often, the term *non-denominational* is used for local congregations that are either fully independent—not belonging to any association—or that do not identify themselves by any common label (e.g. "Baptist," "Church of Christ"). Some may even make the term *non-denominational* prominent in their publicity.

Groundwork for the non-denominational movement was laid in the nineteenth century when many American towns were too small to support multiple churches of different denominations. Consequently, local Protestant Christians would form "community churches" that had ministers supplied by different denominations.

By the twentieth century, many had come to believe that Christians should not be separated by denominational barriers, which were seen as harming Christian unity. A consciously non-denominational viewpoint began to spread. This paralleled but was distinct from the ecumenical movement, which sought to bring Christians together regardless of their denominational

affiliation.

Although non-denominationalism was seen by many as a service to Christian unity, it was also criticized as harming it by leaving important matters of faith and practice to the whims of an individual local minister or congregation, thus increasing fragmentation and doctrinal diversity.

Rejecting traditional denominational labels, many in the non-denominational movement have sought to return to a more purely biblical terminology based on the principle of *sola scriptura*. They sometimes refer to themselves as "Bible churches" to advertise this.

In the early centuries, Christians usually could not afford special buildings consecrated for worship, and they often met in homes (see Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philem. 2). Many in the non-denominational movement have consciously imitated this pattern by establishing "house churches," where an individual begins a small congregation that meets in his own home.

However, some non-denominational churches have become very large and successful. Such churches are prominent as the Protestant "megachurches," which often have a large main congregation that meets in one location with satellite congregations meeting elsewhere in the area.

Because of their autonomous nature, there is no single set of beliefs or practices that characterize non-denominational churches. However, they frequently fall into one of two categories: Evangelical or Charismatic. The former often are broadly similar to Baptists, while the latter are broadly similar to Pentecostals. Both groups have teachings and worship services inspired by their denominational counterparts, but they operate in a more independent way, and an individual congregation may have its own eccentricities, sometimes blending elements from other traditions.

17. What offshoots of Protestantism are there?

In addition to the major traditions we have surveyed, there are many smaller Protestant groups. Some have departed so far from traditional Christian belief that they no longer count as Christian or as Protestant, though they may continue to identify as such. They are more properly termed quasi-Christian or quasi-Protestant groups.

The oldest is *Unitarianism*. Shortly after the Reformation began, some began to challenge the doctrine of the Trinity. They came to be known as *Unitarians* because of their insistence that God is only one (Latin, *unus*) divine Person, not three.

Historically, there have been several varieties of Unitarianism. Some have held a Christology similar to the ancient Arian heresy, according to which the Son was a created angelic being who became incarnate as Jesus. Another school, known as *Socinianism* after Faustus Socinus (1539–1604), held that the Son was not a pre-existent being. Instead, he came into existence upon his birth as Jesus, and he was perhaps later adopted as the son of God upon his baptism. There are other understandings as well.

Unitarians were later heavily influenced by rationalism and came to reject doctrines such as the fall of man, the atoning death of Christ, the existence of the devil, and eternal punishment in hell. As a result, alongside the development of Unitarianism came the appearance of Universalism, which held that all human beings are saved (i.e., salvation is universal).

In 1961, the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America merged to form the Unitarian Universalist Association, the largest Unitarian body today. Unitarianism is not as popular as it once was, and though it was historically influential, there are presently perhaps a million Unitarians worldwide.

The religious liberty guaranteed by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and the vitality of American culture gave the United States a prominent role in religious affairs. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the U.S. saw a number of major religious revivals, known as the great "Awakenings," and American churches began to conduct extensive missions in other lands, leading to the rise of Evangelical and Pentecostal groups around the world. However, the greater freedom to experiment religiously also led American Protestants to produce several offshoots that eventually denied key tenets of the Christian faith.

One of the largest is *Mormonism*, which was founded in the United States in 1830 by Joseph Smith (1805–1844). He claimed to be a prophet and to have discovered and been supernaturally enabled to translate a set of golden plates that contained what he referred to as the *Book of Mormon*. Subsequently, he

added other scriptures to the Mormon canon.

According to Smith, representatives of the ten northern tribes of Israel settled the Americas, and Jesus Christ later appeared to them, founding a parallel church in the New World.

Smith held that this church, like the one in the Old World, became corrupt, and that he was inspired by God to relaunch the Mormon community as the only true church. Smith's theology developed over time, and he eventually came to claim that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three different beings; that there are many gods throughout the universe; and that human beings are the same species as God, so that—in the words of later Mormon prophet Lorenzo Snow (1814–1901)—"As man now is, God once was; as God now is, man may be." In other words, human beings can become gods.

After Smith's death, several Mormon communions developed. The largest is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, based in Salt Lake City, Utah. It has about sixteen million members worldwide. Other Mormon groups include the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints—now called the Community of Christ—which has rejected Smith's polytheism and accepts the doctrine of the Trinity.

The *Jehovah's Witnesses* are another major offshoot. Though this name was introduced around 1931, the movement itself began in the 1870s when the preacher Charles Taze Russell (1852–1916) founded a group then known as the "Bible Students." In 1881, he founded Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society to oversee the movement's publications.

The beliefs and practices of Jehovah's Witnesses have developed considerably over time. Today, Jehovah's Witnesses are known for their insistence on the use of the divine name Jehovah. They believe that Jesus is not a divine Person but an angelic being also known as Michael. They hold that the Holy Spirit is not a Person, but rather God's "active force."

Jehovah's Witnesses are known for a number of distinctive practices, including pacifism, the rejection of blood transfusions, and a refusal to celebrate birthdays and holidays. They believe all other Christian churches are corrupt.

The group has a strong emphasis on eschatology, or the doctrine of the Last

Days. They believe Jesus began to rule invisibly in heaven in 1914 and that the battle of Armageddon and the Second Coming are imminent. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they made a number of predictions about when these would occur, though these proved false and required modifications to their teachings.

They believe that, following the Second Coming, Christ will reign on earth for a thousand years. They also believe that the human soul does not survive death, that exactly 144,000 "anointed" Jehovah's Witnesses will rule with God in heaven, that other saved persons will live in a paradise on earth, and that the damned will be annihilated and cease to exist rather than spend eternity in hell.

The group is overseen by the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses, which is based in New York. They report having around eight million "publishers" (members who distribute their literature) worldwide, and about twenty million attend their "Memorial," or annual commemoration of Christ's death.

In the early twentieth century, the rise of Pentecostalism led to a theological controversy. Around 1913, some in the emerging Pentecostal community rejected the doctrine of the Trinity in favor of the ancient heresy of modalism, according to which God is a single divine Person who manifests in three different "modes" as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Because this view emphasizes the oneness of God to the exclusion of the Trinity, it is often referred to as *Oneness Pentecostalism*. It is estimated that there are around twenty million Oneness Pentecostals worldwide.

Oneness Pentecostals claim that the name of the single divine Person is "Jesus" and that water baptism is to be administered only in his name (not in the trinitarian formula given in Matthew 28:19). They are therefore sometimes called "Jesus only" Pentecostals.

Oneness Pentecostals typically claim that that, in order to be saved, one must not only be baptized using the name of Jesus but also must be baptized with the Holy Spirit and speak in tongues.

18. What are Protestants' most common objections to Catholicism?

It's no surprise that many of the most common objections Protestants make to Catholicism concern its two key doctrines, *sola fide* and *sola scriptura*. These were deemed the most important issues by the Reformers, and they have historically been at the root of much of the protest against the Church.

Thus, Catholics are often accused of violating justification "by faith alone" by teaching "works salvation." They are accused of violating *sola scriptura* by introducing "unbiblical" teachings and adhering to "traditions of men." We have responded briefly to these charges in answers 5 and 7. However, many other objections are also made, and some are quite common.

Since Luther's original Ninety-five Theses listed objections to indulgences and purgatory, it's natural that these have been common. Protestants sometimes seem to think these doctrines have much more prominence in Catholic teaching than they actually do. Both are dealt with only briefly in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (see 1030–1032, 1471–1479).

We discussed indulgences in answer 2. Concerning purgatory, it is often objected that the doctrine is unbiblical and that it contradicts the sufficiency of Christ's work on the cross. From a Catholic perspective, the doctrine is not unbiblical as it is strongly supported by 2 Maccabees 12:38–45. In fact, it is so strongly supported that this book is not found in the Protestant biblical canon for this reason, meaning that Protestants will not accept it as biblical proof. This cannot be helped, but it still shows that the principles underlying purgatory were part of the Judeo-Christian tradition before the time of Christ. Fortunately, the doctrine also is strongly supported by 1 Corinthians 3:11–15, which is in the Protestant canon. The doctrine of purgatory does not contradict the sufficiency of Christ's work. It represents the application of Christ's work to us so that we are fully prepared to experience heaven.

Another common set of objections deals with Mary and the saints. It is argued that Mary did not remain a virgin and had other children, that she was not immaculately conceived, and that she was not assumed into heaven. It also is argued that we should not pray to her or the saints.

Belief in Mary's perpetual virginity is explicitly taught in writings that date from the second century (e.g., the *Protoevangelium of James*), and it is implied in New Testament passages that indicate Mary was not planning a normal marriage (Luke 1:34) and that she had no relatives other than Jesus to care for

her after the Crucifixion (John 19:26–27). The Immaculate Conception and Assumption are based primarily on Tradition, and so most of the evidence for them will not be accepted by Protestants, making it necessary to discuss the problems with *sola scriptura* instead (see answer 7).

The New Testament indicates that the saints and angels in heaven pray on our behalf (Rev. 5:8; 8:3–4), and it establishes the principle of asking others to pray for us (2 Cor. 1:11; Eph. 6:19; Col. 4:3; 1 Thess. 5:25; 2 Thess. 3:1). The Bible contains no prohibition on combining these two principles and asking the saints to pray for us, making this a matter of Christian liberty.

Many Protestants object to the sacrament of confession. However, this sacrament is strongly supported by John 20:21–23. Further, even though they don't recognize it as a sacrament, many Protestants today recognize that the confession of sins is explicitly endorsed in Scripture (James 5:16), and some have correspondingly adopted the practice as a form of personal accountability.

A final set of common objections concerns the Church's teaching authority, or Magisterium, and the role of the pope. It is argued, based on *sola scriptura*, that the Church does not have binding teaching authority and that the New Testament does not endorse the idea of the pope as the earthly head of the Church.

Concerning the Magisterium, it should be pointed out that Jesus appointed teachers in his Church (initially the apostles); he promised to remain with the Church and guide it until the end of the world (Matt. 28:20); and he promised that the Holy Spirit would guide the disciples "into all the truth" (John 16:13). Furthermore, St. Paul described the Church as "the pillar and bulwark of the truth" in the world (1 Tim. 3:15). In view of these facts, the question isn't whether the Church has a teaching authority, but how this teaching authority is to work—a matter that is further clarified by Tradition.

Regarding the pope, Jesus meant his Church to be an organized body, which is why he appointed the apostles to lead it and why the apostles appointed further leaders as the Church grew. Even when it was small enough for just the apostles to manage it, Jesus recognized that it needed a single leader, which is why he appointed St. Peter to this role (Matt. 16:17–19; cf. Luke 22:31–32; John 21:15–17). Although today many Protestant scholars

recognize that Jesus appointed Peter as leader, they have not commonly drawn the inference that, if the earthly Church needed a single leader even in the days of the apostles, it would need one even more as it grew, pointing to the role of the pope.

19. How have relations with Protestants changed?

For a start, we are no longer killing each other. The European wars of religion have ended, and religious liberty has been established to the extent that people are no longer being martyred in the Christian world for their religious beliefs.

Still, tensions between Protestants and Catholics remained high for several centuries. Even in the New World, here in America, there was intense anti-Catholicism. In the mid-nineteenth century, there was a major political party known as the Native American Party (a.k.a. the "Know Nothing Party") that believed Catholic immigrants were conducting an extensive conspiracy to subvert civil rights and religious liberty in the U.S. This led to anti-Catholic riots in the 1850s, and even once the violence subsided, hostility toward Catholics remained a prominent in American culture.

By the twentieth century, things were changing. Churches of all types—Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant—were seeking to improve relations. This led to the development of the ecumenical movement. In 1948, Protestant, Orthodox, and other Eastern non-Catholic churches formed the World Council of Churches to promote cooperation among Christians.

The environment in America improved enough by 1960 that John F. Kennedy was elected the first Catholic president.

The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) stressed the ways non-Catholic Christians are related to Christ's Church (*Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, 15). It also endorsed the practice of referring to Protestants as "separated brethren" (*Lumen Gentium* 67), as opposed to "heretics." It also published a decree on ecumenism that endorsed the ecumenical effort and clarified that those born in non-Catholic communities "and who grow up believing in Christ cannot be accused of the sin involved in the separation, and the Catholic Church embraces upon them as brothers,

with respect and affection. For men who believe in Christ and have been truly baptized are in communion with the Catholic Church even though this communion is imperfect" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, Decree on Ecumenism, 3).

In 1966, St. Paul VI made an ecumenical commission a permanent department at the Holy See. It had initially been founded in 1960 as a temporary body. Today, it is known as the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and it conducts extensive dialogues with representatives of other Christian traditions, including many in the Protestant world. These include all of the major traditions surveyed in this book as well as bodies like the World Council of Churches and the World Evangelical Alliance.

In 1995, St. John Paul II published a major encyclical—*Ut Unum Sint* (That They May Be One)—on the subject of Christian unity, and in the jubilee year 2000 he publicly asked God for forgiveness "for the divisions which have occurred among Christians, for the violence some have used in the service of the truth and for the distrustful and hostile attitudes sometimes taken toward the followers of other religions" (*Homily*, March 12, 2000).

A factor that played a role in the warming of relations among Christians was time itself. "Time heals all wounds," goes the adage, and the passage of four centuries since the Reformation allowed the passions of the initial period to cool enough that Catholics and Protestants could begin building bridges between their communities.

Another factor was the increasing secularization of society and the persecution Christians began to experience in parts of the world, especially at the hands of atheistic and totalitarian regimes. These often made believers of both communions their target, which led to greater cooperation between them.

A key event that led to a warming of relations in the United States was the infamous 1973 Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade*, which legalized abortion. This galvanized the American pro-life movement and prompted numerous Protestants and Catholics to get involved. They began talking to each other, and the practical experience of working together to save unborn babies led many Protestants to have a new respect for Catholics and to recognize them as fellow Christians.

By the early twenty-first century, relations between Protestants and

Catholics had improved to the point that the Lutheran World Federation invited the Catholic Church to issue a joint document, *From Conflict to Communion*, that reflected on ecumenical relations in preparation for the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation in 2017.

20. How can we dialogue with Protestants?

The last few decades have seen numerous formal dialogues convened between Protestants and Catholics.

Many have been conducted on the national level between representatives of Catholic bishops' conferences and their Protestant counterparts. In the United States, this effort is overseen by the Bishops Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (usccb.org). Individual dioceses also may have ecumenical offices.

The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (see answer 19) oversees the corresponding worldwide effort. One of the council's major documents is the *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms for Ecumenism* (1993), which regulates dialogue and cooperation.

The council also draws upon the results of local dialogues, and it periodically issues joint statements summarizing them. One of the most significant was the 1999 *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (see answer 5) that has been subscribed to by Catholics, Lutherans, Methodists, and Reformed Christians.

In addition to these formal dialogues, many informal exchanges also occur:

> On the local level there are countless opportunities for exchanges between Christians, ranging from informal conversations that occur in daily life to sessions for the common examination in a Christian perspective of issues of local life or of concern to particular professional groups (doctors, social workers, parents, educators) and to study groups for specifically ecumenical subjects. Dialogues may be carried on by groups of lay people, by groups of clergy, by groups of professional theologians or by various combinations of these (*Principles and Norms for Ecumenism*, 174).

In conducting informal dialogues with Protestants, we must seek to fulfill St.

Peter's exhortation to "always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence" (1 Pet. 3:15). The same sentiment is expressed by St. Paul in his statement that we must speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15).

Speaking the truth requires, in the first place, that we know the truth about our faith—that we are well informed about the teachings of the Catholic Church and that we accept them:

> Catholics who take part in [dialogue] will feel the need to be well informed about their faith and to deepen their living of it, and they will be careful to remain in communion of thought and desire with their Church (ibid.).

This includes accepting the Church's teachings about our Protestant counterparts: they may be separated from us in various ways, but they are still brethren in Christ, and they deserve respect on that account.

Furthermore, we must presume our partners in dialogue are in good faith. This does not mean we should ignore if they prove hostile, but it does mean that we need to show them what Benedict XVI called "that initial goodwill without which there can be no understanding."[2]

Respect for the truth also means seeking to sincerely understand the position of our counterparts. This will require effort. Given the theological diversity present in Protestantism, we must not assume in advance that we know what an individual Protestant believes. There is no such thing as "the" Protestant position on a given issue. Even *sola fide* and *sola scriptura* are understood in widely different ways (see answers 5 and 6).

Even if we know the overall tradition to which a Protestant belongs, we cannot assume we know what his position will be, for there is diversity within the traditions. A liberal Lutheran and a conservative Lutheran will not agree with each other on many issues. Not all Reformed Christians subscribe to each of the "five points of Calvinism." High-church and low-church Anglicans have different views. Each Protestant tradition contains great diversity.

Consequently, we must not make assumptions about what a given Protestant believes. Instead, we must ask honest and openminded questions and seek to understand the contours of an individual's beliefs before

attempting to engage them.

Once we have learned what an individual believes, respect for the truth requires us to look for both common ground and points of difference. We should not seek to maximize one at the expense of the other, and correctly discerning the matter will require us to translate between the language used in the Protestant community and the language used by Catholics.

The human tendency to get hung up on the way doctrines are expressed, when it is their substance that is important, is so strong that in the first century St. Paul told Timothy to command people "before the Lord to avoid disputing about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers" (2 Tim. 2:14).

One way it ruins them is by leading them to dialogue in an unloving manner. Thus, Paul also warned Timothy against men who have "a morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, base suspicions" (1 Tim. 6:4).

The requirement of speaking the truth in love means we must sharply check any craving for controversy on our part. We must display courtesy and good will toward our partners in dialogue at all times and so fulfill St. Peter's exhortation to speak to others "with gentleness and reverence."

Respect for the principle of love requires us always to bear in mind St. Paul's teaching: "Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. . . . So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:4–6, 13).

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[1] Ratzinger, Joseph. Principles of Catholic Theology. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987.

[2] Pope Benedict XVI. Jesus of Nazareth Volume 1. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007.

About the Author

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