

Drowning in the Tiber (Part 5)
Responding to Francis Beckwith's 2009 Book:
Return to Rome: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic.
-The Voice of Church History-

* * * * *

Transcript of a Sermon Preached at Christ Church of Clarkson
by
Tony A. Bartolucci on May 17, 2009

The Scripture reading this morning is taken from Galatians chapter five. Galatians five, beginning in verse 1:

It was for freedom that Christ set us free. Therefore, keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. Behold, I, Paul say to you, that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision that he is under obligation to keep the whole law. You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law. You have fallen from grace. For we, through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love. You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion did not come from Him Who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough. I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will adopt no other view. But the one who is disturbing you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is. But, I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished. Would that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves. For you were called to freedom, brethren, only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word in the statement: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another. But I say, Walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. For these are in opposition to one another so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing and things like these, of which I forewarned you, just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ

have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.¹

[Opening Prayer]

I'm going to begin by doing the impossible, addressing a topic that's impossible to cover in thirty hours, let alone one. But I want to look at the voice of church history. It's a huge and complicated topic, yet church history is one of the key factors as it relates to Protestants converting to Rome. In fact, it may be *the* key factor. It all depends, really, on how you read church history, or who you read in their commentary on church history.

I've got a friend who teaches at a seminary on the west coast. One of the classes he teaches is Church History. And in talking to him one day, his remark was that church history should keep anyone from wanting to become a Roman Catholic! So it's all on who you read and the perspective that you put on it, or the spin that you put on it. And time after time, as I've read the testimonies of those who have converted to Rome, largely on the basis of church history, it isn't long before they say something like, "The Roman Catholic Church has the weight of history behind it," or, "I read the writings of the Church Fathers and I'm convinced that they were Roman Catholic." The fact of the matter is most of these claims are based, not on a thorough study of the Church Fathers and church history, but on reading what someone else has written about the Church Fathers and church history. In fact, as to the Church Fathers, their writings are so extensive and varied that it would take years to even come close to gaining a mastery over them. As I understand it, many of the writings have not even yet been translated into English. And here comes Francis Beckwith, who, according to his own testimony, spent a few months studying early church history before his conversion to Rome.

In his book on page 81, he talks about a breakfast meeting with a convert to Roman Catholicism, a man by the name of J. Budziszewski. This individual encouraged him to explore the Church Fathers, as well as the Catechism of the Catholic Church. They met together for breakfast and that was his advice. Well, go read the Church Fathers and read the Catechism of the Catholic Church and that'll give you insight into what this individual believes, that the Catholic Church is the true church on earth.

So Beckwith says, in his book:

I remained unmoved, though curious, given my own beliefs about the Catholic creeds and the role they played in the Church's use and understanding of scripture. I eventually did take J.'s advice, though it took several months for me to do so.²

¹Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are taken from the New American Standard Bible (The Lockman Foundation, 1971).

²Francis J. Beckwith, *Return To Rome: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 81.

I want you to note that: *It took several months for me to do so.* Several months to even get around to studying the Church Fathers and the Roman Catholic Catechism. Now that meeting that he had with this individual was in October of 2006. It was on March of 2007 that he sought to rejoin the Roman Catholic Church. Now if he put it off for several months, I don't know where the time is that would be required to do all of the research. Unless he's got a typo somewhere, all I see left is maybe a month or two, not enough time to research something as immense as church history and the entire theology of Roman Catholicism.

And this is a huge, huge issue. We're not talking about someone changing one's views on the days of the creation account. For example, "Well, I did a study on the Hebrew word *yōm* over the past month or two. I read several books by various authors and now I really think the creation account is most certainly referring to six 24-hour periods of time." We're talking about an issue that greatly transcends that issue, as big as you may think that issue is. We're talking about an extensive look at church history, which would include the Eastern as well as the Western church. We're talking about looking at the evolution of Roman Catholicism from wherever it started in embryonic form to what it got to be what it is today. We're talking about a study of the Roman Catholic Church and what it teaches in regard to authority, what it teaches in regard to the doctrine of justification (that is, how I'm saved); it touches the very Gospel itself. And then a wholesale change in direction in studying these things, from professing a belief that one is saved by grace alone through faith alone to a completely different gospel altogether. And I don't know how anybody could do that in a matter of months. And, frankly, I don't think it's up for debate anyways. Later we'll look at Beckwith's free-will theism and why it sort of makes sense for him to look at religion as something that can simply be studied and chosen in keeping with one's own rationalism. He operates out of a philosophy of Thomism, a philosophy of rationalism.³ And if rationalism, apart from the Bible, leads you in this direction, you can freely choose to go in that direction. The bottom line, however, isn't that you choose your religion. That, my friends, as you know, and as you've heard me say many times, is not Christianity. Not true Christianity. It's not, "Well, gee, I went out on this grand study, and I studied Mormonism and I studied Islam, I studied Buddhism, I hung out with the Jehovah's Witnesses, I looked at Eastern Orthodoxy and I looked at Roman Catholic Church and I looked at what your church teaches, and I think I want to join that." If somebody came to me saying that, I would say, "You're looking for religion; you're not looking for regeneration."⁴ This isn't choosing your religion."

The bottom line, as we look at it from God's perspective, is that God has—if you're a believer in Jesus Christ—God has chosen you from before the foundation of the world to be an heir of eternal life. And the means He uses to do so is the one true Gospel of Grace. It's not religion; it's regeneration.

³That is not to denigrate reason. I am a Presuppositionalist who upholds the role of logic from a Platonic perspective.

⁴Not that one can "seek for regeneration," per se (cf. John 3:8; 1 Peter 1:3).

Now, I don't have to give you some 40-hour primer on church history.⁵ I only need to respond to some of the claims that Dr. Beckwith brings forth in his book. And one thing he does is he quotes the Church Fathers against themselves in a section on church history. And by that I mean, he gives some selected quotes and he claims, "Well, if you look at these quotes, you can understand these from the perspective of the Reformers and Evangelicals, but if you look at the same guys giving these quotes, well, these are Roman Catholic. And so we really need to understand that their Roman Catholicism is the umbrella over which you understand everything else they said." And in the end, his quotes really prove nothing. So he gives several quotes (and here's where the PowerPoint comes into play).

The first one is by St. Irenaeus of Lyons early on, died in 202 AD. And St. Irenaeus said:

Vain, too, is [the effort of] Marcion and his followers when they [seek to] exclude Abraham from the inheritance, to whom the Spirit through many men, and now by Paul, bears witness, that "he believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness."⁶

And then he gives another quote, number 2, from St. Cyril of Jerusalem, a little later into the 4th century:

For as a writing-reed or a dart has need of one to use it, so grace also has need of believing minds. . . . [I]t is God's to grant grace, but thine to receive and guard it. treasure it devoutly.⁷

And then he moves on to St. John Chrysostom, who died about 407 AD. John Chrysostom writes:

But this he calls God's righteousness, that from faith, because it comes entirely from the grace from above, and because men are justified in this case, not by labors, but by the gift of God.⁸

In order then that the greatness of the benefits bestowed may not raise you too high, observe how he brings you down: "by grace you have been saved," says he, "Through faith;" Then,

⁵For an excellent defense of the historicity of the evangelical faith see Kenneth J. Stewart, *In Search of Ancient Roots: The Christian Past and the Evangelical Identity Crisis* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017).

⁶*Against Heresies*. Taken from Beckwith's own citation, www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103408.htm.

⁷*Catechetical Lecture 1*. Taken from Beckwith's own citation, www.newadvent.org/fathers/310101.htm.

⁸*Homilies on Romans* taken from Beckwith's own citation, www.newadvent.org/fathers/210217.htm.

that, on the other hand, our free-will be not impaired, he adds also our part in the work, and yet again cancels it, and adds, 'And that not of ourselves.'"⁹

I looked it up to see what Chrysostom had to say on Ephesians 2. In other words, Beckwith gave a small portion there, and I just went and looked up—it's easy to do—the greater context to look at what Chrysostom had to say about that second chapter in Ephesians.

And he goes on to say (under that part of Ephesians, chapter 2):

"And that not of ourselves." Neither is faith, he means, "of ourselves." Because had He not come, had He not called us, how had we been able to believe? for "how," says he, "shall they believe, unless they hear?" (Rom. x. 14.) So then the work of faith itself is not our own.

"It is the gift," said he, "of God," it is "not of works." Was faith then, you will say, enough to save us? No; but God, says he, has required this, lest He should save us, barren and without work at all. His expression is, that faith saves, but it is because God so wills, that faith saves. Since, how, tell me, does faith save, without works? This itself is the gift of God.

...

In other words, the whole thing is God's gift.

Ver. 9. "That no man should glory." That he may excite in us proper feeling touching this gift of grace. "What then?" says a man, "Hath He Himself hindered our being justified by works?" By no means. But no one, he says, is justified by works, in order that the grace and loving-kindness of God may be shown. He did not reject us as having works, but as abandoned of works He has saved us by grace; so that no man henceforth may have whereof to boast. And then, lest when you hear that the whole work is accomplished not of works but by faith, you should become idle, observe how he continues,

Ver. 10. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them." Observe the words he uses. He here alludes to the regeneration, which is in reality a second creation. We have been brought from non-existence into being. As to what we were before, that is, the old man, we are dead. What we are now become, before, we were not. Truly then is this work a creation, yea, and more noble than the first; for from that one, we have our being; but from this last, we have, over and above, our well being.

So basically, if I'm understanding Chrysostom correctly, he sounds pretty orthodox here. He's talking about the fact that our salvation is all of grace; it's by faith, but not a barren faith; a genuine

⁹*Homilies on Ephesians*, taken from Beckwith's own citation, www.newadvent.org/fathers/230104.htm.

faith will flower in good deeds and that results out of a transformed life, our being new creations in Christ.

Fourthly, St. Augustine of Hippo writes:

[Grace] is bestowed on us, not because we have done good works, but that we may be able to do them—in other words, not because we have fulfilled the law, but in order that we may be able to fulfill the law.¹⁰

Now, had Beckwith gone on to read chapter 22 of Augustines' *Retractions* he would have found a much better quote, the fifth quote on our list:

Now, having duly considered and weighed all these circumstances and testimonies, we conclude that a man is not justified by the precepts of a holy life, but by faith in Jesus Christ, in a word, not by the law of works, but by the law of faith; not by the letter, but by the spirit; not by the merits of deeds, but by free grace.

The Roman Catholic Church makes much of merit; we're saved by grace, they would say, but God is gracious in allowing us to merit our salvation is what it comes down to, and that simply doesn't skew with this quote by Augustine.

But anyways, by a handful of quotes (and not even good ones) Beckwith claims that the words of the Church Fathers *could* be used to support a reformational understanding of church and of salvation.

But again, he goes on to say, *that's not all we have*. We have other writings as well from these same Fathers, and when we look at these other writings, we see that they are truly in line with the Roman Catholic Church.

More quotes by those same Fathers (this is quote number 6). St. Irenaeus:

This able wrestler, therefore, exhorts us to the struggle for immortality, that we may be crowned, and may deem the crown precious, namely, that which is acquired by our struggle, but which does not encircle us of its own accord. And the harder we strive, so much is it the more valuable; while so much the more valuable it is, so much the more should we esteem it. And indeed those things are not esteemed so highly which come spontaneously, as those which are reached by much anxious care.¹¹

¹⁰Augustine, *Retractions*. Taken from Beckwith's own citation, www.newadvent.org/fathers/1502.htm.

¹¹Taken from Beckwith's own citation, www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103437.htm.

If you followed along in that passage, you probably—if you know your theology at all— you probably said, "I don't really see anything wrong with that." And as I looked at it, I said, "I don't see how that supports Romanism, not if you understand the doctrine of perseverance of the saints." Yes, salvation is a free gift, but those whom God calls, those whom God saves, will persevere in the faith, will struggle along by virtue of God's preservation. And I don't see that inconsistent with this quote. Beckwith should have gone on to note what Irenaeus says towards the end of that quote. Again, I looked beyond to capture the context, quote number seven. So this isn't in his book, but it is attached to that quote that he does put in his book:

God thus determining all things beforehand for the bringing of man to perfection, for his edification, and for the revelation of His dispensations, that goodness may both be made apparent, and righteousness perfected, and that the Church may be fashioned after the image of His Son, and that man may finally be brought to maturity at some future time, becoming ripe through such privileges to see and comprehend God.

God thus determining all things beforehand.

We go to quote number eight, St. Cyril of Jerusalem. Here's Beckwith's second quote that he gives. Follow along with me:

For as a writing-reed or a dart has need of one to use it, so grace also has need of believing minds. ...

I think he's piggy-backing of the earlier quote, so that sounds familiar.

... you are receiving not a perishable but a spiritual shield. Henceforth you are planted in the invisible Paradise. Thou receivest a new name, which you had not before. Heretofore you were a Catechumen, but now you will be called a Believer. You are transplanted henceforth among the spiritual olive-trees, being grafted from the wild into the good olive-tree from sins into righteousness, from pollutions into purity. You are made partaker of the Holy Vine. Well then, if thou abide in the Vine, you grow as a fruitful branch; but if thou abide not, you will be consumed by the fire. Let us therefore bear fruit worthily. God forbid that in us should be done what befell that barren fig-tree, that Jesus come not even now and curse us for our barrenness. But may all be able to use that other saying, But I am like a fruitful olive-tree in the house of God: I have trusted in the mercy of God for ever—an olive-tree not to be perceived by sense, but by the mind, and full of light. As then it is His part to plant and to water, so it is thine to bear fruit: it is God's to grant grace, but thine to receive and guard it. Despise not the grace because it is freely given, but receive and treasure it devoutly.¹²

I think, if I remember right, as I looked up that quote, it was taken from a baptismal ceremony, a charge that was given to catechumens. By the time we get to this point in church history, the fourth

¹²Taken from Beckwith's own citation, www.newadvent.org/fathers/3101/1.htm.

century at least, you have those that wish to become Christians, they're catechized, they're instructed and then they're baptized after that period. And their baptism is very much looked like as akin to their salvation. I don't think—while some of the Early Church Fathers held to forms of baptismal regeneration—I don't think that's necessary. Baptism was such a huge event, it marked, again, that turning from sin to new life, so they would synonymously talk about their baptism as being consequent with their salvation. But, again, this was taken from St. Cyril's comments, again, I believe, from John, chapter 15. Obviously, that's the allusion there, and I don't see anything in there that I would have trouble with as a Calvinistic theologian looking at the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.

Beckwith goes on to quote John Chrysostom on praying for the dead. And we don't have that quote, but it's clear that whatever some in the early church practiced as far as praying for those who died,—and they did, some of them did—but it's clear it's not the same thing that the Roman Catholic Church has practiced since the middle ages. Let me again warn you, our text for life is not the Early Church Fathers. Our text are the Scriptures, and while we can look at those from history to enlighten us on the interpretation of much of Scripture and theology, we must never confuse what they have written or what they have said with Scripture and sound theology. So, you'll find some puzzling things in the writings of the Early Church Fathers. Chrysostom does appear, in spite of his earlier quote, to support the idea of praying for the dead. *He also applies that to all dead, even pagans, unbelievers, those who died without any faith, without any profession of Christianity!* So in that regard, he was a hypothetical universalist, as were many of the Early Church Fathers, such as Origen.

Chrysostom's view fits better with the Eastern Orthodox position which has no doctrine of purgatory but does pray for the dead because that's what their tradition upholds. But again, these guys are not the barometer of truth. Remember, even while the apostles were alive there was all sorts of false doctrine being sown, from denials of the resurrection, to works salvation, mysticism, and asceticism. You can look at some of the early churches that were running well in the first century, like Ephesus, and in a matter of years they went from running well to wallowing in false doctrine to—as we look at the church of Ephesus—having lost its first love. So while there's always been false doctrine, there's always been confusion, there's always been, as I said earlier, a remnant of those who uphold truth. And that remnant, my friends, is a golden thread that weaves its way from the first century to the sixteenth century Reformation when that golden thread touched off a revival like no other, and we'll look at that in a later lesson.

Another quote that Beckwith gives, the 9th quote by St. Augustine, who says:

We run, therefore, whenever we make advance; and our wholeness runs with us in our advance (just as a sore is said to run when the wound is in process of a sound and careful treatment), in order that we may be in every respect perfect, without any infirmity of sin whatever,—a result which God not only wishes, but even causes and helps us to accomplish. And this God's grace does, in co-operation with ourselves, through Jesus Christ our Lord, as well by commandments, sacraments, and examples, as by His Holy Spirit also; through whom there is hiddenly shed abroad in our hearts that love, 'which makes intercession for us

with groanings which cannot be uttered,' until wholeness and salvation be perfected in us, and God be manifested to us as He will be seen in His eternal truth.¹³

Again, nothing in that quote that leans toward Roman Catholicism, unless you read Roman Catholic theology into it, which is what Beckwith does. He sees Augustine talking about justification when, in fact, Augustine is talking about perseverance and sanctification. And that's part of the problem. If you look at the entire quote, this is quote ten, the entire quote from Augustine that Beckwith gives is from his treatise: *On Man's Perfection in Righteousness*, where Augustine writes to his "holy brethren and fellow-bishops" Eutropius and Paulus.

And he writes, under the heading "No Man is Assisted Unless He Does Himself Also Work. Our Course is a Constant Progress." That sounds like living the Christian life, doesn't it? Our course is a constant progress. It brings to mind the great book by Bunyon, *Pilgrim's Progress*.

And so Augustine says:

But what is the import of the last statement which he has made: "If any one say, 'May it possibly be that a man sin not even in word?' then the answer," says he, "which must be given is, 'Quite possible, if God so will; and God does so will, therefore it is possible.'" See how unwilling he was to say, "If God give His help, then it would be possible;" and yet the Psalmist thus addresses God: "Be Thou my helper, forsake me not;" where of course help is not sought for procuring bodily advantages and avoiding bodily evils, but for practising and fulfilling righteousness. Hence it is that we say: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Matthew 6:13 Now no man is assisted unless he also himself does something; assisted, however, he is, if he prays, if he believes, if he is "called according to God's purpose;" Romans 8:28 for "whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He also called; and whom He called, them He also justified; and whom He justified, them He also glorified" (Romans 8:29-30). We run, therefore, whenever we make advance; and our wholeness runs with us in our advance (just as a sore is said to run when the wound is in process of a sound and careful treatment), ...

So, we're back into part of the quote that Dr. Beckwith gives.

... in order that we may be in every respect perfect, without any infirmity of sin whatever,—a result which God not only wishes, but even causes and helps us to accomplish. And this God's grace does, in co-operation with ourselves, through Jesus Christ our Lord, as well by commandments, sacraments, and examples, as by His Holy Spirit also; through whom there is hiddenly shed abroad in our hearts that love, "which makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered," until wholeness and salvation be perfected in us, and God be manifested to us as He will be seen in His eternal truth.

¹³Taken from Beckwith's source, www.newadvent.org/fathers/1504.htm.

So Beckwith cites this handful of Early Church Fathers with the claim that this proves Roman Catholicism. And he says, in his book on page 90:

For a Catholic, these two sets of quotations from the Fathers ...

That is, those that sound Reformed and those, which, he thinks, sound Catholic, which, with the exception of Chrysostom's that he gives, don't.

... these two sets of quotations from the Fathers are perfectly consistent with each other, since an inconsistency only arises if one first embraces a Reformed view of imputed righteousness as well as its distinction between justification and sanctification.¹⁴

So, he's saying the problem is that Evangelicals look at these quotes and they see there distinction between justification and sanctification. That is, God declares us just when we're saved, but sanctification is a continuing process. And those two are separated though they're never apart from one another. In other words, where true justification is, sanctification follows, sanctification, our holiness in life. The problem is, it's backwards. Beckwith is reading into these quotes that I've just read, no distinction between justification—or rather a blurring of justification and sanctification. In other words, he's reading these passages that talk about sanctification, living the Christian life, and he's looking at those, such as Augustine gives, and he's saying, "Oh, this is talking about our journey, as he puts it, of justification. We're on a journey of always trying to be saved, co-operating with the Church, the journey of justification, the road of salvation." There's no "I'm in, once declared righteous" to Beckwith, to Roman Catholics; no, rather, it's this journey. The journey, my friends, is not in justification. The journey's in sanctification. And I think that's clear from what Augustine says in his quotation from Romans 8:29 and 30:

29 For whom He [God] foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; ...

It is God's predestinating work, and in that work in eternity, or that decree in eternity, He calls in time, verse 30:

30 and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

So clearly, Augustine is talking about justification. He's talking about sanctification, Christian living—*but he's not blending the two together*, which is what Beckwith wants to see.

¹⁴Francis J. Beckwith, *Return To Rome: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 90.

So he sums up his findings on church history by exclaiming, page 114. Listen to this, quote 11:

I found that the Church Fathers affirmed, very early on, the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, infant baptism, penance and confession, an ordained priesthood, and an episcopal ecclesiology and apostolic succession (as well as other 'Catholic' doctrines including prayers for the dead and purgatory).¹⁵

He says, "In my six or eight weeks of studying church history, I have found that the Early Church Fathers practiced these same Roman Catholic dogmas, this golden thread from the Apostle Peter, the first Pope handed off through time into the Middle Ages through the Council of Trent, today the one true Church with the Pope as the head over all of the faithful."

Is that true? Is it true that the early church in the first three or four centuries taught the same things as the Roman Catholic Church does today? I want to look at four of those key issues that he raises in that one quote. I want to look at the issue of the Eucharist. I want to look at the issue of the priesthood, and an episcopal ecclesiology. I want to look at the issue of purgatory, and then I want to look at the issue of apostolic succession (that we will save for next time).

1. The Eucharist. Did the church take Jesus' words in John six with absolute literal intent, not figuratively? If you have your Bibles, now you can use them. John, chapter six, beginning in verse 48. Let me give you a simple reading of the text.

John, chapter six, beginning in verse 48, Jesus speaking:

48 "I am the bread of life. 49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread also which I shall give for the life of the world is My flesh." 52 The Jews therefore began to argue with one another, saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" 53 Jesus therefore said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. 54 He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. 56 He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me. 58 This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate, and died, he who eats this bread shall live forever."

Here's the Roman Catholic interpretation of this passage. When Jesus said, I'm the Bread of life, the Bread, which comes down out of heaven so that one may eat of it and not die, the living Bread that came down out of heaven, and if anyone eats the Bread, he shall live forever. This is the

¹⁵Francis J. Beckwith, *Return To Rome: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 114.

doctrine of *transubstantiation*. It's a long word; I'm sure most of you are familiar with it; transubstantiation.

When the Roman Catholic priest—and only a priest in good standing ordained by the Roman Catholic Church, has the ability to do this—when the Roman Catholic priest consecrates the host, the bread, during the Mass, and you hear the little bells jingle, when he does that, a miracle happens. A real honest-to-goodness miracle, a mystical miracle. That little piece of bread, literally, not figuratively, literally turns into the body and blood and divinity of Christ. And the cup literally turns into the blood and divinity of Jesus Christ. So when that is consecrated, Christ comes down out of heaven and becomes that element. It is, again, literally the body and divinity of Jesus Christ, because He said, “Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you’ll have no life.” This is essential in Roman Catholic soteriology (soteriology means the doctrine of salvation). The Mass is the centerpiece. You are not to miss Mass, because you have to regularly ingest Jesus in order to be saved and only the Roman Catholic Church has the power to turn that little piece of bread into Jesus Christ. I mentioned it before. This is why towns in Europe would come under such terror when they were threatened with interdict. You’re not politically obeying what we say? We’re going to close down the church. Closing down the church was removing the only hope they had, the only means they had for salvation.

So when the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" a Roman Catholic would say, "They understood Jesus to be talking very literally. That's why they were outraged. They didn't think He was talking figuratively." However, that's not what Jesus was teaching. And that's not a good argument, reading something back into the text that wasn't there in the first place. This is a common error. You develop a doctrine down along the line, and then you go back to the Bible and try to find some verse or passage that supports this doctrine that I've developed out here. That's called *eisegesis*. We want to be *exegetes*; we want to draw the truth out of the text and develop our doctrine out of the text, not read something back into it. But this is something that all false religionists and cultists, something they're always done is to read something back into the Bible or back into history. The fact that the Jews thought He was speaking literally doesn't mean He was. The Jews were a little slow at times.

Even one of their brightest fell to the same mistake. You can go back to John, chapter three. A very well educated Jewish rabbi who Jesus calls "the teacher of the Jews" comes to Jesus at night and says to Him:

"Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

And what does Jesus say?

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Does Nicodemus get it? Here's their best and brightest. What does he say?

“How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?”

He didn’t understand what Jesus was saying. He was taking His words wooden literally, not figuratively, so Jesus tells him, "You know what Nicodemus, you’re not going to get it because you’re not born again. These things are spiritually appraised and that’s the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration:"

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’”

And then (I love this part):

"The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

In other words, "Nicodemus, you don’t get it, you’re thinking in earthly terms and I’m speaking in heavenly terms. The flesh cannot apprehend the spiritual. Unless you’re born again by the Spirit of God, you won’t know these things. And the Holy Spirit works sovereignly, you don’t know where It comes from, you don’t know where He’s going, you can’t regenerate yourself, the Holy Spirit does that as He chooses."

Jesus often spoke metaphorically. You see the same thing in John six. Jesus calls Himself the Bread of life. In John, chapter 10, verse 9 where He says,

“I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, ...”

Now, as it relates to the Lord’s Supper, some in the post-apostolic church held to a spiritual presence view that would look more like a Presbyterian view or perhaps a Lutheran one, but they didn’t hold to what is called today, and has been called since the Middle Ages, *transubstantiation*.

Go to quote 12, *The Didache*. The word “didache” means teaching. This is perhaps the earliest document in antiquity that we have outside of the canonical Scriptures. It was written between AD 70 and 140, and it was basically a commentary on Christian practice.

The Didache says:

And on the Lord's own day gather yourselves together and break bread and give thanks, first confessing your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure.¹⁶

¹⁶*Didache*, 14:1.

Sounds very Baptist to me. Nothing about the elements being miraculously transformed under the mystical power of a priest.

Go to the next quote, Eusebius, who said:

Having then received the memory of this sacrifice to celebrate upon the Table by means of the symbols of His body and His saving blood, according to the laws of the new covenant . . . Our Savior Jesus, the Christ of God, after the manner of Melchizedek still even now accomplishes by means of His ministers the rites of His priestly work among men. For as that priest of the Gentiles never seems to have used bodily sacrifices, but only wine and bread when He blessed Abraham, so our Savior and Lord Himself first, and then all the priests who in succession from Him are throughout all the nations, celebrating the spiritual priestly work in accordance with the laws of the Church, represent . . . with wine and bread the mysteries of His body and of saving blood.¹⁷

They *represent* with wine and bread. The wine and bread are not transubstantiated literally into His body and blood.

Theodoret of Cyrus commenting on Psalm 110:4:

Christ, sprung from Judah according to the flesh, now serves as priest, not himself offering anything but acting as head of the offerers: he calls the Church his body, and in it he as man serves as priest, and as God receives the offerings. The Church offers the symbols of his body and blood, sanctifying all the dough through the first fruits.¹⁸

Move forward in time to the fifth century and the 5th quote. Gelasius, Bishop of Rome, counted by Rome as one of the early Popes:

Surely the sacrament we take of the Lord's body and blood is a divine thing, on account of which, and by the same we are made partakers of the divine nature; and yet the substance of the bread and wine does not cease to be. And certainly the image and similitude of Christ's body and blood are celebrated in the action of the mysteries.¹⁹

¹⁷Cited in Lucius Waterman, *The Primitive Tradition of the Eucharistic Body and Blood* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1919). 97-98. "[They] represent in a mystery [ἀντιπροστυφῶνται] with wine and bread the mysteries of His body and saving blood."

¹⁸ FC, Vol. 102, Theodoret of Cyrus: Commentary on the Psalms 73-150, Psalm 110 (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), p. 212.

¹⁹See Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3 Vols., trans. George Musgrave Giger and ed. James T. Dennison (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., reprint, 1992), Vol. 3, p. 479 (XVIII.xxvi.xx).

The substance doesn't change. Again, that's not transubstantiation. In transubstantiation the substance does change literally into the body and divinity of Christ. Transubstantiation, as taught by Rome, did not exist, my friends, until the Middle Ages. Martin Luther, quote 16, in his *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, the great reformer wrote:

Therefore it is an absurd and unheard-of juggling with words, to understand "bread" to mean "the form, or accidents of bread," and "wine" to mean "the form, or accidents of wine."

In other words, he's talking about the slight of hand that the Roman Catholic Church began to use under the rubric of Aristotelian logic. They would say that, "Yes, you can take that bread and it's still going to have all the properties of bread; it'll taste like bread, it'll look like bread, it'll smell like bread, but reality it's the divinity of Christ." And that's all based on debunked Aristotelian logic.

And so, Luther says:

Why do they not also understand all other things to mean their forms, or accidents? Even if this might be done with all other things, it would yet not be right thus to emasculate the words of God and arbitrarily to empty them of their meaning. Moreover, the Church had the true faith for more than twelve hundred years, during which time the holy Fathers never once mentioned this transubstantiation—certainly, a monstrous word for a monstrous idea—until the pseudo-philosophy of Aristotle became rampant in the Church these last three hundred years.²⁰

Thank you, Thomas Aquinas! So, reading transubstantiation, as taught by Rome, back into the early church just does not work.

Next, what about the priesthood and an episcopal ecclesiology? In other words, you have this hierarchy, you have a single priest who is over a parish. And over him you have bishops who are over several parishes, and cardinals and up the line to a pope. Is the biblical structure of the church, or is it a plurality of elders?

We believe the biblical model, which we follow here, is that the church is led by a plurality of pastors, or elders, or to use the old term, presbyters. It means the same thing. We see that in Titus, chapter one, verse 5.

Paul tells Titus:

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you.

²⁰A Prelude by Martin Luther on *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, 2:26 & 2:27.

No doubt, the church did later depart from that biblical pattern and went into a political hierarchy of priests, bishops, cardinals, popes. But is this what we find early on as some sort of consensus position? No. The first-class church historian, J. N. D. Kelly—whom Beckwith likes to quote to his favor (and I wish I had time to address that, but I don't, at least not today)—Kelly writes about Jerome. Jerome, whose life spanned the fourth and fifth centuries, Jerome, the one who put together the Latin Vulgate—we call it Jerome's Latin Vulgate—Jerome is considered one of the Four Doctors of the Latin Church. Kelly writes that in the apostolic age the terms "bishop" and "presbyter" were synonymous, each church being governed by a committee of co-equal presbyters or elders.

Sounds like our church. The emergence of the episcopate proper, he argues (much to the embarrassment of Catholics down the centuries), was due, not to any ordinance of the Lord, but to ecclesiastical custom.²¹

In other words, it became convenient. And it largely became convenient because of political reasons.

So, quoting Jerome, one of the Four Doctors of the Church, he [Jerome] says:

Therefore, as we have shown, among the ancients presbyters were the same as bishops; ...

Elders and bishops, pastors, bishops, Jerome says, they were interchangeable terms.

...but by degrees, that the plants of dissension might be rooted up, all responsibility was transferred to one person. Therefore, as the presbyters know that it is by the custom of the Church that they are to be subject to him who is placed over them so let the bishops know that they are above presbyters rather by custom than by Divine appointment, and ought to rule the Church in common, following the example of Moses, who, when he alone had power to preside over the people Israel, chose seventy, with the assistance of whom he might judge the people.²²

In other words, Jerome is saying, "Yes, we see this today. We might see a bishop who's presiding over several elders, several presbyters, several pastors, in churches, but that's not by divine appointment." He says, "That's just the way things have become." So he says, "Keep that in mind, you bishops, and rule accordingly."

²¹J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), p. 147.

²²John Harrison, *Whose Are the Fathers?* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1867), p.488. See also Karl Von Hase, *Handbook to the Controversy with Rome*, trans. A. W. Streane, Vol. 1, 2nd ed. rev. (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1909), p. 164.

He goes on to say, quote 18:

A presbyter, therefore, is the same as a bishop, and before dissensions were introduced into religion by the instigation of the devil, and it was said among the peoples, 'I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, and I of Cephas,' Churches were governed by a common council of presbyters; afterwards, when everyone thought that those whom he had baptised were his own, and not Christ's, it was decreed in the whole world that one chosen out of the presbyters should be placed over the rest, and to whom all care of the Church should belong, that the seeds of schisms might be plucked up. ...

In other words, "We were having all these dissensions, so we decided to abandon the biblical pattern and pull some political strings and place one guy in charge over the rest."

... Whosoever thinks that there is no proof from Scripture, but that this is my opinion, that a presbyter and bishop are the same, and that one is a title of age, the other of office, let him read the words of the apostle to the Philippians, saying, "Paul and Timotheus, servants of Christ to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi with the bishops and deacons."²³

That's interesting, too, the ending, because what does Jerome say? If you have a doubt about this doctrine, where do you look? Ask the Pope? He's the one who's supposed to give you the interpretation, the official, infallible interpretation on matters of doctrine. Where does he turn them? *To Scripture!* So that dovetails into the section we're going to do on *sola scriptura*. (That's was just a little freebie.)

Francis Aloysius Sullivan is a Roman Catholic who teaches at Boston College. He wrote a book, *From Apostles to Bishops: The Development of the Episcopacy in the Early Church*, and here's what he wrote. First, let me give you the context. This individual who wrote this book is a Roman Catholic; he's tracing the development of the Roman Catholic hierarchy. He quotes Polycarp. Polycarp was a disciple of whom? John. Polycarp was very early. He learned under John the apostle, the beloved disciple. Polycarp wrote a letter to the Philippians which we have. In that letter, one of the things Polycarp says is this:

Wherefore it is right to abstain from all these things, submitting yourselves to the presbyters and deacons as to God and Christ.²⁴

Remember it was the letter to the Philippians that we have, the inspired letter that talks about elders and deacons, that Jerome mentioned in the earlier quote. That's in Philippians. Well, Polycarp knowing that letter, writing to the same church, is really saying much the same thing. Faithfully

²³Ibid.

²⁴ Polycarp, 5:3c.

submit yourselves to the leadership of the church, to the elders and deacons, and both words are plural, not elder and deacons, but elders and deacons in your church.

So here we have a Roman Catholic scholar who says:

Polycarp [The disciple of John] calls for obedience to the presbyters and the deacons as to God and Christ. One could hardly explain his not mentioning the bishop here if there were a bishop at Philippi at that time.²⁵

In other words, here we have a Roman Catholic scholar who wrote a book on his research, conceding that, if you go back early enough, you're going to find the churches were led by multiple pastors, not by a pastor or pastors with a bishop over them. And he cites this letter, which was written around AD 110 to 140 in that regard.

So Francis Aloysius Sullivan writes in summary (you've done good, you've stuck with me through all these quotes and we're getting about to the end) but listen to this summary:

One can hardly avoid drawing the conclusion that the church of Philippi, at the time Polycarp wrote this letter, was being led by a group of presbyters, assisted by deacons, but without any bishop over the whole community. If the absence of a bishop were merely temporary, as it was at that time in Antioch, one could surely expect Polycarp to make some reference to this situation. Hence, it seems reasonable to conclude that in the second decade of the second century, the structure of ministry at Philippi resembles that of Corinth two decades earlier. From this we can also conclude that the development of the episcopate took place sooner in the churches of Syria and Asian Minor than in churches of Europe. We do not know when the churches of Corinth and Rome began to be led by a bishop, but we have good reason to believe that this did not happen there any sooner than it did in Philippi.²⁶

Quite a concession.

Now, what about Purgatory? This is the last thing. Beckwith calls Christendom's praying for the dead *an extension of the doctrine of sanctification*. In other words, once you die, you continue trying to get it all figured out and all worked out in Purgatory. He calls it Purgatory, as the church does, and again, he's reading it back into history. He's reading a doctrine back into history.

A man by the name of Jacques Le Goff, in 1981 published a groundbreaking book entitled, *The Birth of Purgatory*. And he did an extensive study of the evolution of the doctrine from embryonic form

²⁵Francis Aloysius Sullivan, *From Apostles to Bishops: The Development of the Episcopacy in the Early Church*. 128.

²⁶Ibid., 130.

in the earlier centuries to what it became in the time of the Reformation. Part two of his book is entitled "The Twelfth Century: The Birth of Purgatory," and he notes:

I am convinced by my research and textual analysis that purgatory did not exist before 1170 at the earliest.²⁷

Like so many Roman Catholic doctrines, Purgatory is not found in the Bible. It is a doctrine that evolved and flowered very conveniently into mature form during the time of the selling of indulgences. And as the great historian D'Aubigne notes, "this made for two doctrines that exercised each other to the financial gain of the church."²⁸ Purgatory and indulgences meshed together. You terrify people with Purgatory, which in the Middle Ages was nearly indiscernible from hell, and you fleece their money, promising them a "loved ones a get-out-of-jail-free card." That's how it works.

Think about it. Bring yourself back to that time. Bring yourself back to the fifteenth century, or to the sixteenth century, and you've got a guy like Tetzl, who comes into town, high up, a Roman Catholic official, pomp and circumstance, carrying the Papal Arms, big procession, and he comes into town with a large money box and he starts preaching in impassioned tones about your loved ones that are literally frying in torment in Purgatory. And they even had pictures of flames and people suffering and screaming in anguish. And you think of your dear mom, whom you love dearly and you think, "My mom is suffering uncontrollably in Purgatory!" Would you not give anything, your right arm if need be, to spring your mom, your dad, your son out of Purgatory, out of that torment? Purgatory was very, very, convenient when it was used along with indulgences. It brought a lot of money to Rome. And that's, of course, the abuse that the reformer Martin Luther addressed in 1517.

So Beckwith says:

I found that the Church Fathers affirmed,...

There's this *consensus*, he says,

...very early on, the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, [that is, transubstantiation] infant baptism, penance and confession, an ordained priesthood, and an episcopal ecclesiology and apostolic succession (as well as other 'Catholic' doctrines including prayers for the dead and purgatory).²⁹

²⁷Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*. 1981, 135.

²⁸J.H. Merle D'Aubigne, *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1883), 15.

²⁹*Return to Rome*, 114.

Do your study. Not hardly! Keep in mind that the Roman Catholic Church claims to operate on the basis of patristic consensus. In other words, they claim that the doctrines they hold are consistent with the interpretations given by the Early Church Fathers. And yet, the very key doctrine upon which their whole religion stands has no such consensus. And that is Peter's confession in Matthew, chapter sixteen. Patristic consensus is a myth. That all of the fathers, east and west, all of the early church leaders from the second century on, were in total agreement on everything is a myth. Certainly in many of the essentials they were in agreement: the nature of God, the Trinity, the Person of Christ. But in other areas they were quite diverse, and in many cases, wrong.

It's a shame that Evangelicals don't do a better job of studying church history. Some churches think of church history as, "Oh, the founder of our church walked the beach in California in the sixties and was part of the hippie movement, that's the history of our church." No wonder some people are ripe for Roman Catholicism! They need to do a better job of studying church history. And in good solid reformational seminaries there are church historians—and they're not moved by these arguments—they're not hiding anything. I know a man (a pastor) who's spent the last thirteen years studying the Early Church Fathers. He's got quote after quote, reams of quotes categorized. He's convinced, and his research shows it, that trying to claim that the Roman Catholic Church is the true church on the basis of history is an error of first magnitude.

The great Baptist theologian John Gill, in his wonderful work, *The Cause of God in Truth*, has a large section in which he answers the oft-repeated claim that the doctrines of Calvinism are "novel", that they have no place in ancient history. And he gives dozens of quotes that refute that assertion. But before he does that (so he gives all these quotes from people who lived, church fathers and leaders there supporting the doctrine that we would cherish) but before he does that, he gives a warning. He brings us back to the Scriptures as our final authority, and this is our last quote:

That the writings of the best of men, of the most learning and piety, cannot be admitted by us as the rule and standard of our faith. These, with us, are only the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament: to these we appeal, and by these only can we be determined. If, therefore, the oracles of God are on our side; if we have the concurrent suffrage and the frequent and express declarations of the holy prophets, of Christ and his apostles, and are free, and far enough from the charge of novelty. ...

In other words, if we're holding historic truth grounded in the Scriptures, we can't be charged with being "novel."

... It is of no great moment with us, that such who lived nearest to the times of the apostles say, unless what they say; agrees with their words and doctrines. It would indeed be matter of concern to us, should no footsteps, no traces of the doctrines we contend for, appear in the works of the first Christian writers, and would oblige us to lament their early departure from the faith once delivered to the saints. And, indeed, it is easy to observe, and he must be a stranger to antiquity and church history, that does not know, how very early after the Apostles' days, corruptions, both in doctrine and practice, were brought into the Christian

church. For not to take notice of the heretics of those times, and the heresies broached by them, than which, never were more absurd notions, or more horrid and blasphemous doctrines maintained, which made Polycarp, a disciple of the apostle John, frequently say, "Good God, to what times hast thou reserved me!"³⁰

So we have the Scriptures as our foundation. We have a historic true faith, grounded in the teaching of the apostles and prophets and Christ and the Old Testament writers under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But we've also had all sorts of attacks against that faith. It was true in the Old Testament; it was true in the New Testament; it was true during the time of Polycarp. And yet we see, again, that remnant of those who stand fast in truth.

As Peter put it:

And so we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.³¹

[*Closing Prayer*]

³⁰John Gill, *The Cause of God in Truth*. 220.

³¹2 Peter 1:19.