
Upon This Slipper Rock - Countering Roman Catholic Claims to Authority

Author: Eric Svendsen

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Introduction

Introduction to "epistemology." A simple example from a childhood song:

Jesus loves me, this I *know*

Epistemology asks the question, "how do you know this?"

The answer is,

For the *Bible* tells me so.

The Roman Catholic apologist (RCA) comes along and says, "Aha - how do you really know the Bible says that? Some Protestants believe that Jesus loves everyone and some believe that he only loves the elect. How do you know who is right? We Catholics have an infallible interpreter to tell us the true meaning of the Bible."

And so now we have,

Jesus loves me, this I know

For the *Roman Catholic Magisterium* tells me so.

The typical RC approach to argue against evangelicals is to use the "how do you know" line of reasoning. This is to show the person that he needs an infallible interpreter to have any certainty about truth. Yet, the RC is himself guilty of epistemological fallacies of the most fundamental nature.

This will be demonstrated in the rest of the book . . .

I. Roman Blitzkrieg (19)

The story of Mark who accidentally finds himself in a RC chat room and confronted by a RCA who tells him that sola scriptura (SS) has resulted in 25,000 different denominations that are at odds with each other.

II. Fair Comparisons? (22)

A. 25,000 Denominations

Are there 25k denominations? When a RC tells a Protestant that he either accept Rome or take a shot at 1-25k options he does not know that he is on the horns of a dilemma.

1. Scott Hahn refers to the "anarchy of Protestantism"

B. Does the RC church stand up to its own scrutiny?

1. Rome has its own differences of opinion on various issues

Including inspiration; Predestination; the validity of the new mass; the creation account. There is no "official" position on many doctrines within Rome and there is much debate.

Most RC apologists believe in the full inspiration of Scripture; while most RC scholars believe only the section dealing with salvation are inspired. Both camps base their views on the Vatican II doc, "Dei Verbum," which reads:

"Since therefore all that the inspired authors or sacred writers affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confined to the Sacred Scriptures." [24]

The two camps interpret this one statement differently! RC apologists must engage in the very thing they condemn Protestants for - engaging in private interpretation!

"In other words, there is just as much diversity of opinion among Roman Catholics regarding the meaning of Roman Catholic teaching as there is among Protestants regarding the meaning of the Bible." [24]

C. What is the standard of measure?

1. Rome has official documents, such as the Catechism of the Catholic Church

a. All RC must believe in this document to be in communion with Rome

b. Yet there are various interpretations of this document, along with the myriads of other authoritative documents that Rome has claimed t/o her history

2. Those who believe in Sola Scriptura have ONE authoritative document: The Bible

" . . . the Roman Catholic is quick to point out that the Bible is insufficient since there are so many interpretations of it. Yet there are just as many interpretations of the Roman Catholic's own rule of faith as there are of the Bible. The false comparison in which the Roman Catholic engages in such an argument is that he is comparing his rule of faith (viz., the 'official' teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, usually found in the CCC) to the various interpretations of the Evangelical rule of faith, rather than to the Evangelical rule of faith itself, (viz., the Bible)." [25]

Evangelicals have only one rule of faith, the Bible (which of course must be interpreted). But the RC rules of faith must also be interpreted and there are various opinions regarding them within Rome itself.

III. A Romecoming (27)

A. A parody of "Juan Scott" and "Gary Maverick"

IV. A Roman Catholic Challenge (32)

A. Question to Catholics on their ministry website:

"Tell us how you came to decide that Rome was the 'true' church without engaging in the very private judgment that you have already dismissed as illegitimate?"

The issue behind the question is that RC apologists claim that we cannot be certain of our interpretation of Scripture or choice in church affiliation because our judgement is fallible. We need an infallible interpreter (Rome).

But if one decides on Rome they do so using the very same private infallible judgment!

1. One apologist answered that Rome only condemns those private judgments that contradict the official teaching of Rome

However, this is arguing in a circle. It assumes a truism that it later seeks to prove.

B. The fact is we are expected to use our own judgment (cf. Gal. 1:8-9; Acts 17:9)

In fact, Paul's words in Galatians make no sense in the RC scheme where we simply acquiesce to the pope regardless of what the Scriptures say. Isn't this exactly what Paul warned us not to do in Galatians 1?

V. A Layman's Handbook for Roman Catholic Apologetics (37)

A. Here is an outline of the basic argumentation of the RC apologist:

1. The RC church is infallible
2. All of the writings of the church fathers that support RC theology should be used to support RC theology. They make up part of the ordinary RC magisterium
3. All the writings of the early fathers that don't support Rome fall under the following:
 - a. They are fallible
 - b. They are heretical
 - c. They are misunderstood/misinterpreted by Protestants
4. No official RC teaching has ever changed
5. If an official RC teaching cannot be substantiated by the early church, that teaching was nevertheless held from the beginning anyway and simultaneously developed over time
6. Catholics who disagree with official church teaching are in a state of disobedience or apostasy (official teaching being defined by the conservative minority of the church)
7. Disagreements among RC.s on how to interpret official teaching doesn't mean that the dogmas have changed; and always assume that the interpretation of the conservative minority is the correct one
8. Not all popes were infallible, only when they spoke concerning official teaching or ex cathedra, so when popes are quoted as contradicting official teaching they were speaking as "private theologians" and not officially
9. Reiterate #1 as many times as possible

B. What would happen if we were to apply the above "spin" to Evangelicalism? For example:

1. The Westminster Confession is infallible
2. All the church fathers that appear to support the WCF should be used to do so, and may be considered part of the ordinary evangelical magisterium
3. All the writings of the early fathers that seem to contradict the WCF fall under the following:
 - a. They are fallible
 - b. They are heretical
 - c. They are misunderstood/misinterpreted by RC.s
4. No official Evang. teaching has ever changed and all Evang. doctrines have been held w/o question by the true remnant t/o the centuries
5. If an official Evang. teaching cannot be substantiated by the early church, that teaching was nevertheless held from the beginning anyway and simultaneously developed over time
6. Protestants who disagree with the WCF are in a state of disobedience or apostasy
7. Disagreements among modern evangelicals as to the meaning of these teachings doesn't mean that the teachings have ever changed; always assume that the interpretation of the conservatives is the correct one

8. Not all the reformers teachings were infallible. Some of Luther's and Calvin's writings were given as "private theologians." So any teaching of a reformer that contradicts current Evangelical doctrine was made when that reformer was speaking as a "private theologian" and not officially as a reformer
 9. Reiterate #1 as many times as possible
- C. What about the obvious errors of "Mother Church" (anti-Semitism, selling of indulgences, popes and councils contradicting one another, the Crusades and Inquisition, etc)?
1. It becomes a matter of "putting the past behind us" or contending that every error of the RCC was unofficial:

". . . it's generally a matter of anything obviously erroneous being 'unofficial.' So we must wait to see whether the RCC is correct on an issue before deciding whether the RCC is acting 'officially.' The RCC is acting officially only when it's correct. And since the RCC has always been correct every time it's acted officially, we should be impressed with this amazing record of infallibility." [42]

VI. A Second Roman Catholic Challenge (43)

A. The question:

"Demonstrate that those religious systems that follow Scripture plus an 'Infallible Interpreter' are more unified in their beliefs than those religious systems that follow sola Scriptura."

1. The intent was to demonstrate the falsity of RCA accusation that SS has resulted in 25k denominations

2. The actual response of one RCA (typical):

"The beliefs of such systems (i.e., infallible interpreters) are generally more easily determined. (for instance read the Catechism of the Catholic Church). [in comparison] there is no single Protestant Catechism. Also the Catholic Church has only a few major unhealed schisms, whereas there are tens of thousands of other churches based on 'sola Scriptura' which continue to fragment daily." [43]

To compare the RC Catechism to a non-existent single Protestant catechism misses the point and compares apples to oranges.

3. The more accurate comparison would be this:

Compare those entities that believe in the Bible plus an infallible interpreter (system 1) with those that believe in SS (system 2). A fairer comparison would be to compare one group that believes in system 1 such as the RCC with one that believes in system 2 such as the Reformed Baptist Church. One would find more doctrinal unity in the latter than the former.

a. Also, the "tens of thousands of churches" that subscribe to SS are far more unified than the thousands that subscribe to the Bible and an infallible interpreter (II)

The argument as such compares a rule of faith (namely, SS) to a denomination (namely Rome). This is a false comparison.

Those groups that truly hold to SS are clearly more unified than those that hold to the Bible and an infallible interpreter. The latter groups are nowhere near each other in their beliefs, even on major issues such as the nature and person of God, the Godhead/Trinity, and salvation. Just compare Mormons, JW's and RC's. Not to mention Eastern Orthodoxy and the Coptic Church.

Clearly the Bible plus an II results in complete chaos. It gives too much power to fallen men to dictate truth. Plus an infallible interpreter becomes a standard unto itself.

VII. Show me the Way to Go Rome (47)

- A. The story of a conversation between "Debbie" and "Nancy" with Debbie's attempt to convert her friend to Rome
 - 1. Nancy nails Debbie with the question, "How do you know for certain that Rome is that infallible interpreter?" And, "What are the chances that you picked the right infallible interpreter and that the tens of thousands of others have chosen the wrong one?"

VIII. A Third Roman Catholic Challenge (52)

- A. The final question posed to RCA on the author's website:

"Without engaging in private judgment and interpretation, demonstrate how you can be certain that you chose the 'true' church from among all the other so-called 'true' churches that say you cannot rightly understand the Bible and church history without their help, such as the Eastern Orthodox church, the Watchtower Society, Mormonism, and every other cult that exists."

- 1. This question does not apply to those religious systems that hold to SS - the author claims that he can walk into any Evangelical church that holds to SS and find the true Gospel
- 2. Those that answered engaged in circular reasoning - it is not logical to start with Rome's understanding of these things and then judge all others by looking through Rome colored glasses

- B. The question of RC epistemology

"RCA typically argue that we must submit our fallible opinions to an infallible RCC. But not one of them explains how he knows that Rome is indeed infallible w/o relying on his own fallible opinion that Rome is infallible." [53]

- C. The fact is the final arbiter for everyone is and must be private judgment and reliance on one's own fallible reasoning

Of course, we must take into consideration the laws of logic that God has established and the commitment to sound interpretive principles, esp. as it relates to the Bible. Also the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit apart from which all is foolishness.

- D. When RC's insist on arguing for an II they have engaged in a fallacy at three levels:

- 1. He has fallibly decided that there should be an II

2. He has fallibly misread Scripture and history to conclude that Rome is that II
3. He has done so while rejecting the tens of thousands of other competing II's.

E. It comes down to the Gospel and the illumination of the HS

1. None of the elect will be deceived by serious error (Matt. 24:24; 1 John 2:20-27)
2. The elect of God will always believe the essential tenets of the faith - those that pertain to the Gospel
 - a. Amazingly Evangelicals do have a strong consensus on these things - and many more issues
 - (1) RCA err when the point to non-essential differences among us such as mode of baptism and views on the Lord's Supper
 - (2) The fact that we don't consign one another to hell for these differences demonstrates that we see them as non-essential and that we can fellowship with one another in unity

IX. How Many Denominations? (58)

A. The accusations by RCA have grown from 20k to 25k to 33k

1. But where do they get their figures? None of them seem to know - they just cite one another

B. The source: David A. Barrett's *World Christian Encyclopedia*

1. Barrett writes in 1982 and cites 20,780 denominations in 1980 and projects a number of 22,190 by 1985

a. But RCA don't tell us that most of these are non-Protestant!

2. Barrett identifies 7 major ecclesiastical blocs under which these 20+ denominations fall:

a. RC - 223 denominations

b. Protestant - 8196

c. Orthodox - 580

d. Non-White Indigenous - 10956

e. Anglican - 240

f. Marginal Protestant, including Mormons, JW's, other cults and New Age groups - 1490

g. Catholic (non-Roman) - 504

3. But what about Barrett's citation 8k Protestant denominations?

This number is misleading as Barrett defines a denomination as any group that has a slightly different emphasis than another (such as music style).

- a. Barrett defines denomination as any ecclesial body that retains an autonomous or semi-autonomous jurisdiction

This inflates Protestant numbers due to Barrett's citing any independent church as a different denomination, even though these churches may share identical views and practices.

4. What about Barrett's citing of 223 RC denominations?

He cites 194 Latin-rite groups in 1970 by which he numbers separate jurisdictions or diocese.

5. But Barrett does compile a list that is more akin to what we might call a denomination

a. Non-Roman Catholic - 4 traditions

(1) Catholic Apostolic, Reformed Catholic, Old Catholic, Conservative Catholic

b. Marginal Protestants - 6 traditions

c. Anglican - 6 traditions

d. Non-White Indigenous (traces of Christianity coupled with local superstition) - 20 traditions, including a branch each of Reformed Catholic & Conservative Catholic

e. Orthodoxy - 19 traditions

f. Protestant - 21 traditions

g. Roman Catholic - 16 traditions

(1) Including: Latin-rite local; Latin-rite Catholic, Latin/Eastern-rite local; Latin/Eastern-rite catholic; Syro-Malabarese; Ukrainian; Romanian; Maronite; Melkite; Chaldean; Ruthenian; Hungarian; plural Oriental rites; Syro-Malankarese; Slovak; and Coptic

6. Barrett also compares RC to Evangelicalism (the true category for those who hold to SS) and defines an Evangelical as someone characterized by:

1. A personal conversion experience

2. A reliance upon the Bible as the sole basis for faith and living

3. An emphasis on evangelism

4. A conservative theology

When Barrett discusses these Evangelicals, he provides no sub-categories. Yet on the same page when he addresses RC's he breaks them down into 4 major groups: 1) Catholic Pentecostals; 2) Christo-Pagans (Latin RC's who combine folk-Catholicism with paganism; 3) Evangelical Catholics; 4) Spiritus Catholics (those active in organized high or low spiritism).

One could even break the list down further to include moderates; conservatives; traditionalists; and Sedevacantists.

Conclusion: Rome's Infallible Interpreter and the Land of Misfit Toys (65)

* An overview of how to deal with the questions of a RCA.

Appendix A: Real Life Encounters (69)

* Responses to typical RCA attacks against SS.

Appendix B: The Roman Catholic Teaching on Private Interpretation (74)

* Citations from:

Vatican I (Session II, 3; Session III, 5);

The Council of Trent (Session IV: Decree Concerning the Edition, and Use, of the Sacred Books);

Vatican II (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation [Dei Verbum], II, 10; Ibid., III, 12 [Sacred Scripture, Its Inspiration and Divine Interpretation]; Ibid. VI, 23 [Sacred Scripture in the Life in the Church])

Interestingly, one of the citations from Vatican II gives an example of a "contrary principle" in which they condemn the practice of what they fairly accurately describe - a historical-grammatical hermeneutic.