Classic - Key Differences Between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism
with Michael J. Svigel, Darrell L. Bock, and J. Scott Horrell
Release Date: January 2017
Welcome to The table. We discuss issues of God and culture. I'm Darrell Bock, Executive Director for Cultural Engagement at the Hendricks Center. And I have two very good friends and distinguished guests today to discuss our topic which is "The Difference Between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism," and to look a little bit at the history of the development of the Church and how to think about that.

And on my left is Michael Svigel, who teaches in the Historical Theology Department. They keep changing the names on us. So, it used to be Systematics, but now you've involved to a historical level.

Michael Svigel: Theological Studies now, yeah.

Darrell Bock: So, it's really Theological Studies. See, I still don't get it right. And then Scott Horrell, who's been here on campus – how long have you been teaching here now?

Scott Horrell: Eighteen years now.

Darrell Bock: Eighteen years. Yeah, you're pushing two decades. That's pretty serious.

Scott Horrell: Serious for sure.

Darrell Bock: So, both professors in Theological Studies. And really, I think we're gonna have an enjoyable time discussing this. So, we'll just dive in.

As we think about the Church, probably the first question people might have is explain to me why we speak of Catholicism or Catholicity, if I can say it that way – if you read the old creeds, you'll see the phrase Catholicity, which is a word everybody uses every day. And then you've got Roman Catholicism, and you've Protestant – where did all that come from? What's the starting point for thinking about that?

Michael Svigel: That sounds like a history question.

Darrell Bock: It is; it's a history question.
Yeah, the term Catholic is first used in the early second century. Ignatius of Antioch uses it to describe the Church as a whole, as opposed to a local congregation. So, Catholic means "according to the whole." So, as you think of Christianity, East to West, North to South, all holding to the same basic Trinitarian confession of faith, he uses the term Catholic. And Christ Himself is the head of the Catholic Church in that sense.

Eventually, then, they start discussing the Catholic Church of Alexandria, the Catholic Church of Antioch, the Catholic Church of Rome, indicating that we're all part of this fraternity of bishops who are all preaching the same thing, teaching the same things. And that continues on for a couple centuries.

Eventually, you get the Roman Catholic Church, which ultimately is responsible, for the most part, planting the churches in the West, the Latin West. It becomes perceived as the mother church of the West. And the Eastern Church, also today called the Orthodox Church, had several of these cities with churches planted by apostles.

Interestingly, you had one church in the West, in Rome, planted by the apostles, responsible for most of the missions in the West, and that does something to you. They have his perceived prime authority in the Western Church, and you start to see East and West slowly drift. This is where you start to see this distinct Roman Catholic tradition versus the more diverse Eastern Catholic or Orthodox tradition developing.

So, in some senses, people think there are two groups, but there really are three, if you want to think of it that way. There's the Orthodox or the Eastern Church, the Roman Catholic, which was the predominantly the Western Church until the reformation. And then you had those Protestants, those protestors. They're a real problem.

Scott, where do the Protestants come in?
Scott Horrell

Oh, we come out of the 16th century. And we do build on a lot of the truths that the Church held until then. I think we have a fourth element, and those are called the Oriental Orthodox. And when we get to about 800, the Bishop Timothy or Metropolitan Patriarch Timothy over the Nestorian Church alone, had as many under his domain as Rome had under theirs. We forget about the East, which went all the way to Beijing, to Central China, to the Ganges River, to Nepal, Tibet, through Mongolia, all the way back to Babylon and further West from there.

So, there's all of this. But the Protestants – we began with Luther's nailing the theses to the Wittenberg door, by declaring, though there are forerunners from that – but by declaring we're returning to Scripture, and there are certain truths there that we feel the Roman Catholic Church has walked away from.

Darrell Bock

Okay. So, that produces one of the great divides in the history of the Church, the other one being the schism between East and West. Where does that fit in? I know we're jumping around on the calendar here on the chronology, but –

Michael Svigel

Yeah, you have the – as Dr. Horrell mentioned, you have the Nestorian break. And by the fifth century, that's accomplished. And then you have the break between East and West, when the patriarch of Constantinople and the bishop of Rome basically condemn each other, anathematize each other, that occurred in 1054. And it was over a Roman addition to the creed, which, according to orthodoxy, cannot be changed.

And so, to this day, those two branches – East and West – are divided, with no hope of reconciliation in sight yet at this point.

Darrell Bock

And the idea of Roman Catholicism, of course, is the point that Rome is seen as the – what? – the hub, city if you will, or "the first among equals" is the way that the pope, technically speaking, sits over Rome, but Rome is seen as the first among equals in the various cities and parishes that make up the Catholic Church. And that's why it's called Roman Catholicism. Is that basically correct?

Michael Svigel

That's correct, yes, mm-hmm.
Okay. So, that kind of gets the basics out on the table in terms of what we're dealing with. So, the idea of Catholicity is actually old and predates the Roman Catholic Church.

Sure.

Yeah.

And it's an attempt to affirm the essential unity that exists in belief in Christ and in the Trinitarian faith. And if we were to look for creeds that reflect this early – if I can say "pre-Roman Catholic Orthodoxy," where would we find those kinds of statements?

Yeah, sure. So, already in the second century, you have these summaries of the faith that are usually used at baptism or instruction of new believers. They vary in the language from place to place but are essentially saying the same thing.

When you get into the Arian controversy in the fourth century, you see the Council of Nicea. Many scholars think they basically took a baptismal confession and just added a few clarifying points, and everybody – all the bishops East and West agreed to this, and this represent this Catholic faith in a creed form.

You also see the Definition of Chalcedon in 451, another agreement on the person of Christ being two natures in one person. This is another creed that is – a confession that's shared East and West and by Protestants as well.

So, there's a lot, at the fundamental level, the definition of Catholicity, that Protestants, Catholics, Eastern Orthodox all share in common.

Now, where does the Apostles' – what's called the Apostles' Creed, where does it fit in this mix?

Yeah, that was probably based on a second century baptismal formula, used in Rome as a question and response form of baptism. "Do you believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth?"

"I do."
And then there would be an immersion or pouring.

*Darrell Bock*  
Sounds like a wedding.

*Michael Svigel*  
Yeah, exactly. "I do; I do; I do," to all the questions. And so, there's this three-fold confession, and those baptismal confessions is probably what contributes to the Apostles' Creed, which also is adopted by Western Protestants.

*Darrell Bock*  
Okay. Now, that kind of gives us an overview. Let's take a look at some of the distinctive that mark out the difference between – and we're really focused here on the difference between Roman Catholics and Protestants.

And I think probably a place to start is just how theology gets done, if I can say it that way. In other words, the role of Scripture versus the role of an entity that Protestants don't talk about, but the Catholics do: the magisterium. What's going on in that conversation, Scott?

*Scott Horrell*  
Sure, I'll pick that up. For Roman Catholicism, increasingly from especially Gregory the Great, I think around 600 on, there was a – there had been before, but a body of leaders that would say, "This is what the Scriptures actually say. And they're drawing also from the traditions of the faith at that point.

So, Roman Catholicism very clearly declares that Scripture, the written Word, and tradition, the spoken word, when dogmatized by the magisterium, made absolute doctrine, they walked together through history. And that magisterium and that great tradition grows with time as the council of those determining the doctrine say, "This is what the text means."

And when they do declare a certain theology as doctrine or dogma, that becomes binding and irrevocable. So, tradition and magisterium – or the tradition as defined by the magisterium – and Scripture are said to walk together through history.

*Darrell Bock*  
Okay, who makes up the magisterium?
Well, those, today, are a council of cardinals, basically, aren't they, Mike?

Mm-hmm, yeah, with the pope at the head. He's the essential center of that magisterium.

So, pope down, he declares, in fact, who makes a part of that, who constitutes that magisterium. And they are – with the Roman Catholic Church, you see this kind of evolution of doctrine through the centuries, which the protestants reacted against.

And so, the Protestant teaching of sola scriptura is said to be in contrast to that. And, of course, that's the idea that Scripture itself is the source of doctrine. And for Protestants, at least theoretically, there is not magisterium to function to make these kinds of judgments.

Yeah, barring the creeds. And it's not a council of a magisterium, no.

Yeah. So, that certainly is one major difference. And so, that actually impacts the way you do theology, because on the one hand, Protestants tend to engage with the Scripture, "This is what Scripture teaches; this is where doctrine comes from," whereas in the Roman Catholicism approach, you've got not only the Scripture but then you've got this large tradition that develops – although I must say, as an aside, that in some Protestant discussions of theology, when you read them – and I think, particularly here, oftentimes the reformed tradition, you've got this long history of creedal discussion that's taken place since the Protestant Reformation, in which you do get a lot of references to various kinds of confessions or catechism – catechesis or whatever – that looks like it functions very much like a magisterium might. Am I misreading that?

Yeah, and that has been some complaints, since the Reformation, of kind of a reaction within Protestantism against this new magisterium in the form of these confessions. The Westminster Confession has particularly come under attack in the 19th and 20th centuries by some evangelicals.
But if you ask a Westminster reformed theologian, none of them would say the Westminster Confession is infallible, is the Spirit speaking through the Westminster Divines. They would say, "We believe this is the – an accurate interpretation of Scripture," but they would never raise it up to the same level as –

*Scott Horrell* And there is a difference.

*Darrell Bock* Exactly right, yeah. And so, in fact, the Protestant Confessions are said to appeal to the Scripture for the content that they have, whereas in the context of Catholic doctrine, you get, I think, the recognition and really the admission that the way we do theology includes the magisterium as a part of a recognized process in which the Spirit is said to speak.

*Scott Horrell* The magisterium really becomes a controlling factor of interpreting the Scripture. So, when you say that Mary was born without sin, not even a sin nature, and finally ascended into Heaven, which is official Roman Catholic dogma, that's irrevocable. That is – that's doctrine of the Church that cannot be changed in Roman Catholicism.

*Darrell Bock* And one of the interesting things about that particular doctrine – that particular doctrine is that it actually was – I don't know, sanctioned – I don't know what the proper word is. But in the late 19th century, early 20th century –

*Scott Horrell* Oh, the ascension – bodily ascension was, I think, the last papal decree of absolute binding doctrine in 1950-1951.

*Darrell Bock* So, that late. Okay, then – and then the – what? – immaculate conception, I think –

*Scott Horrell* That goes back further – what? – the 14th century? 13th century. Mike?

*Michael Svigel* Yeah. And so, these are – this is a great example of doctrines that really have no basis in Scripture. There is no passage of Scripture you can go to that would even – this isn't really a matter of interpretation of Scripture; this is new –
Scott Horrell  
An extension of theology.

Michael Svigel  
– an extension of theology.

Scott Horrell  
Yeah.

Michael Svigel  
But the ideal [sic] is that just as the Spirit spoke infallibly through the apostles and prophets, and we have that in the Scriptures, the Spirit is continuing to grant apostolic authority to the Church through the magisterium. And so, when there is this ex cathedra from the Seat of Authority Proclamation, it is the same Holy Spirit speaking infallibly through the Church.

And so, both of these then become norming authorities that must be read together in the process of doing theology.

Darrell Bock  
So, I think it would be fair to say this is a pretty significant difference that we're talking about in terms of how to do theology.

Scott Horrell  
Absolutely.

Darrell Bock  
That the whole orientation of what counts for doing theology is pretty important, and whether you work exclusively with Scripture, where there's Scripture and tradition get put together in some way that then builds your theology, that's difference number one, if I can say it that way.

Michael Svigel  
Mm-hmm.

Scott Horrell  
Mm-hmm.
Let's turn our attention to another category that is probably the most obvious difference, if I can say it that way, people are immediately aware of, and that is the – that is the figure of the pope. Although we sometimes joke about a Protestant pope, I'm not sure we've ever had one. We certainly never had smoke coming out of a chimney to indicate who this figure is. But the pope has been an important part of the Roman Catholic Church for quite some time, although I think it would be fair to say you can't go all the way back to the beginning to find the pope, although I've walked into the church – I think it's Saint Paul in Rome, where it starts with Peter and goes through everybody coming all the way up – well, today it would be Francis. But when I was visiting there, it was Benedict.

But anyway, and so what's the history of the office of the pope? And I'm introducing this with an awareness. My son went to a Roman Catholic college. He went to Saint John's in New York. And in their religion class, they had a class on the Church, and they read a book by Hans Küng on the history and development of the papacy, in which Küng was complaining about the role of the pope in the Catholic Church as a Catholic.

It was actually fascinating reading. I read this book with him when he had the class. And so, most people aren't aware of any of that. So, tell us, where's the pope come from?

Sure. I'll take that, and then Dr. Horrell can chime in if he wants. It is an acknowledged fact by respectable and responsible Roman Catholic historians and scholars that the papacy is a development. The facts of history are on the Protestant side there.

The issue now though is is this a development that is divinely sanctioned, or is this something that is merely a convenience or a contrivance? So, really the days of Roman Catholics saying Peter was the first pope, and the papacy has been as it is all the way through are more or less over.

However, at the popular level, and in much of the – many of the members of the hierarchy, there's still this narrative that says Peter was the first pope and there's been this unbroken succession.
What you can see, very early on, at least by the second century, is in the Church in Rome, you have a plurality of your elders or presbyters. And a presiding elder is someone who's sort of the prime among equals in leadership, who eventually gets his own title of bishop and eventually, as time progresses, develops into this pope figure. Pope simply means father, papa, and that's where it develops.

But so you may have a primary leader in that particular local church in Rome, but this idea of that leader becoming the bishop first of all of the Latin-speaking West and then of all of the whole Church, East and West, is a gradual development through the centuries.

And you start to see that really emerge in a serious kind of way, or at least claims that work in that way – what? – in the fifth century or so? Are we talking about that late or earlier?

Generally – yeah, it's a gradual process, but generally Protestants are gonna look back and say Pope Gregory I, Gregory the Great, right around 600 is gonna be an emergence of somebody who really looks like a pope is going to look in the medieval period.

Okay. So – and the other interesting thing that's in the backdrop is we do have evidence, earlier in the Church, of localities kind of pushing against one another in terms of Church issues. The one that I'm aware of is Corinth interacting with Rome on certain issues, where Rome is trying to assert its authority over Corinth, and Corinth pushes back and says, "No, no, no, no, no, this is our area; you don't have the right to do this."

Sure. Yeah, and you have that classic example is Polycarp of Smyrna and the bishop of Rome over what time of the year or what week of the season do we celebrate Pascha or Easter. And that was a difference of tradition.

And the tendency of the Roman Church was to create unity through uniformity. And it seems like they just couldn't handle having people doing things differently than them, especially in their own jurisdiction. Whereas the East tended to be, "We're united on the essentials, but there's room for diversity of opinion and practice on lesser things."
And so, you see this constant conflict when one wants to do things one way, and everybody should be the same versus those who say, "Look, there's room for diversity here." And that's always been this historical conflict between East and West.

*Darrell Bock*  
So, the idea of the pope is kind of the second area of difference. Protestantism really doesn't have that. In one sense, at a practical level, you can see the difference. I mean there is this symbolic central figure who speaks – who's seen to speak for the Catholic Church in a way that's actually from a strictly marketing perspective, if I can say it that way, branding perspective. Pretty powerful.

And Protestants don't have anything like that. In fact, they have, in contrast, sometimes a chaos going on, which Catholics, in pushing against Protestants, will say, "See, we've got our – we're much more organized in some ways than you are."

*Michael Svigel*  
Yeah, "We have one pope, you have a million popes."

*Darrell Bock*  
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

*Michael Svigel*  
Everybody thinks that they're in charge.

*Scott Horrell*  
They are the pope, yes.

*Michael Svigel*  
Yeah, yeah.

*Darrell Bock*  
So, it's an interesting contrast. Well, let's talk about a third area and see if we can squeeze it in before the break.

*Scott Horrell*  
May I make one more point in there?

*Darrell Bock*  
Yeah, yeah, sure, absolutely.

*Scott Horrell*  
Papal infallibility, the idea that when the pope speaks ex cathedra, from the throne, declaring doctrine, that is a doctrine only from Vatican I 1870. So, it goes back a little over a 100 years.
Yes. I think it's – I think the fascinating thing about this discussion, just from observing it from a historical point of view, is to see – you know, this is theology in development in the Roman Catholic Church.

Absolutely.

And you can see it. And there are places – you know, this is the teaching of the Church, but it's the recent teaching of the Church.

Sure, mm-hmm.

You could see it build, much like a volcano builds, and eventually it erupts and becomes obvious. You can see the movement moving in a certain direction, but it actually doesn't become declared and official until some of these statements come out. And some of them are very, very light and often in reaction to things that are going on in larger Christendom that compel the Church to be responsive as some people would describe the Roman Catholic Church as a reactive entity in many ways. And I think you see that.

And, of course, the history of councils and conferences usually is reacting to something that's going on that needs a statement. That's not necessarily a negative thing; it's part of doing the discerning work of the Church. But it's there, and it's obvious, and it's a part of what is often happening.

So, I think this is a fascinating part of the Church that most people are very unaware of.

Yeah.

Well, so, we've talked about two major differences. We've talked about the magisterium, and we've talked about the role of the pope. A third area I was gonna try and squeeze in before the break, but there's no way we're gonna be able to get away with this, but a third area to talk about is the role – another very difference people are well aware of is the role of Mary, which is actually an extension of what I would consider to be Roman Catholic ecclesiology, how ecclesiology works in the Roman Catholic Church, and how that extends.
Scott Horrell

So, what I want to do on the other side of the break is to come back and talk about those elements. What – how does the Church see itself as a mediator, if I can say it that way, between the believer and God in contrast to the Protestant Church, and what role does a figure like Mary play, who's very, very prominent.

And it's not just Mary alone; it's the saints, etcetera. And what kind of role – that seems to me to be a third difference, and it's one that people are transparently aware of as they interact with the public perception of what Roman Catholicism is.

We're slowly but surely moving to what may be one of the more important differences, and that is the way in which the Church is placed in reference to both believer and God and also how the Church functions in the world in Roman Catholic thinking.

Scott, how does that work? How is that – what's the difference there between Roman Catholics and Protestants?

Scott Horrell

Well, the Catholic Church really does see itself as kind of this holding bin or repository of what we call saving grace. It is through the Church that people are saved. And so, the sacraments. But by vesture of Peter, being the first pope allegedly, and the apostolic succession, the Church is seen as that entity in the world that distributes God's saving grace to believers, and even more broadly than that, in one sense, since Vatican II.

So, it is only through the Church, and really the sacraments of the Church, that are primary in terms of one's salvation.

Darrell Bock

So, the symbolism that's often associated with this is the idea that the Church holds the keys to the kingdom, if I can say it that way.

Scott Horrell

Mm-hmm.

Darrell Bock

And so, basically, the sacraments are seen as those elements of the distribution of grace. Now, I can see a Protestant listening to this and going, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. I thought it comes through Christ. How did that happen?" And so, what – I mean one, how does a Catholic explain that, and then two, what exactly is going on here in terms of the way this is seen?
Michael Svigel

Yeah, so, that's exactly right. The Scripture – a Protestant – a good Protestant is gonna go straight to there's one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, and they'll say, "Well, how can you have the Church mediating salvation when Christ is the mediator?" It's a good point.

The response would be, "Well, the Church is the body of Christ, the extension of Christ and the incarnation into the world, and it mediates the body and blood of Christ through the sacrament of the Eucharist. And so, they're not seeing a difference. Christ, yes, is the Mediator, but He chooses to mediate through the Church.

Peter is the vicar or the stand-in for Christ. Christ Himself gave the keys, metaphorically, to Peter to open and shut the gate to Heaven. And this is this idea, as got mentioned, the Church has this infinite deposit of grace purchased by Christ through His death. And it then dispenses it, as it sees fit, through the various sacraments.

And some people, some saints like Mary, or some of the other saints that you can see pictures or statues of, are, through their merits, by grace, have an overflowing abundance of grace. And so, Mary, in the song, "Hail, Mary, full of grace," we know in the Scripture that means she is especially favored, a recipient of God's grace.

Darrell Bock

She's being greeted as a recipient –

Michael Svigel

Greeted, exactly. They will take that plena gratia as she's so full of grace she's overflowing with it and has extra grace for those who come to her.

Scott Horrell

And other saints as well.

Michael Svigel

And other saints as well. So, she's overflowing with grace.

Darrell Bock

So, that's where the Mary part of this, which people are most probably aware of, as an extension of what this is teaching, comes in. She's seen as someone to whom we can appeal, yet another picture of a physical mediator.
You know, in the old way that mass was done, and it's still done in some forms of Roman Catholicism, this was pictured by the fact that parishioners would take one element of the Lord's Table, but then the priest would end up taking the other element and now offer it to the parishioner, as a way of picturing this mediation. Is that correct?

Michael Svigel

Sure, yeah, yeah. So, the priest himself was standing in, represented the congregation in the reception. Only the priest, for many, many centuries, would receive the wine part of the Eucharist. And the theology of that was, "Well, if Christ is physically – His humanity and divinity is fully really present in the bread and the wine, just taking one, you're getting the fullness of Christ. You don't necessarily need the second one. So, there's that theology drive and that practice.

Scott Horrell

There's a reality to this, what we call sacramentalism, that might surprise many who are evangelicals listening, and that is that it's the very element itself, as Mike has well said, whether the bread or the wine, or the baptism prior to that. That's the first sacrament, really. But it is by vesture of the Church doing it, irrespective of whether the priest himself is walking with God or, for that matter, though it should be done in faith, but the sacrament has saving value in itself. And that's really powerful.

Darrell Bock

And so, the sacrament, in a Roman Catholic view, is a direct – it gives direct access to grace in a way that in Protestantism does not take place.

Scott Horrell

That's right.

Michael Svigel

Correct.

Darrell Bock

It's more – symbolic may be too soft a word, 'cause that only represents some Protestant tradition. But in Protestant belief, the idea of faith or something like that actualizes the grace, if I can say it that way, or generates the benefit, and then the rite pictures that exchange, as opposed to being directly involved.

There's an interesting element here. We probably should go through this as we think through, say, what we call the Lord's Supper. The different ways in which that's seen – you know, there's – what? – transubstantiation, consubstantiation, the memorial view, that kind of thing.
Let's quickly go through the different ways that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is seen, both within Roman Catholicism on the one hand, and then the various forms of Protestant expression on the other. 'Cause that gets at this, I think, in many ways.

*Michael Svigel*  
Yeah, in the Roman Catholic Church, the official dogma from about the middle of the medieval period on has been transubstantiation. That is – and there's a lot of philosophy and Aristotelianism going on here.

But in essence, when you are taking – ingesting the bread or the bread and the wine, you are ingesting, in its invisible essence, the real, physical body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus Christ. And that immortalized reality of Christ's resurrection-glorified body is going to infuse in you; it's going to transform you in some way and enable you to live the Christian life in some sense and impart to you life.

In the Protestant tradition, we don't have a transubstantiation doctrine. The closest you would get would be Martin Luther's consubstantiation, which says you're actually eating the bread and the wine, but with that, attached to that by God's grace, you are receiving also this –

*Darrell Bock*  
Yeah, I call it the over, under, around, and through view.

*Michael Svigel*  
Exactly.

*Michael Svigel*  
Through and with. It's a little tricky. But for the most part, the Protestant doctrine of the Lord's Supper is going to range from a – this is a symbol of a reality, a means of devotion to a – we are receiving this from – as if from Christ's hands, and it is imparting to us some spiritual blessing. And Christ is present as the Host of the meal, not in the wafer.

*Darrell Bock*  
So, the range is, we've got a strictly memorial view, where we're basically recalling and memorializing and honoring what it is that God has done –

*Michael Svigel*  
Picturing, yeah.
Darrell Bock – picturing what God has done for us, all the way over to there's something spiritual happening here, but it's not in the elements itself.

Scott Horrell You mean among evangelicals.

Darrell Bock Yeah, among evangelicals, right, yeah.

Michael Svigel With the exception of the Lutheran, which does say there's something physical going on there, but it's more of a mystery.

Darrell Bock Okay. So, again, this is another significant difference. It used to always baffle me – I think would be the word – why it is that Catholics felt the responsibility to have a daily mass. But if you think about what it is that's taking place in the mass, because the mass if built around this – is really built around the table – when you think about what's going on in the mass and this idea that grace somehow gets communicated to you through this rite, the idea of, if I can use a picture, plugging in every day to get more grace, if I can say it that way, makes more sense when you think through what the theology is saying.

I mean it makes sense to draw on grace that's available to you in this way. I'm not saying that's right or it's biblical, but I'm simply saying it's consistent.

Scott Horrell Yeah, it makes sense, doesn't it? Yeah.

Darrell Bock It's a consistent kind of way of thinking about how grace can work. But it's very contrastive to the Protestant picture which says that once you experience the grace of God, you are a member of this community. You know? And there's something – there's something permanent about what Christ has done. What Christ has done is once and for all, in a way that the repeating of the mass and the distribution of grace seems to work against. Is that a –
The Table Podcast

Scott Horrell: Well, I would say there's a flipside to this in Catholicism as well. I lived in Brazil for many years. Many are simply baptized into the Church, that first sacrament. Maybe a few will take a first Eucharist, the Lord's Supper. And apart from that, they don't care. That has – those two acts of the sacraments and their lives they – the Catholic Church would affirm is sufficient already for their eternal salvation – Even though they may not believe much else, that's the safeguard that keeps them there.

Darrell Bock: So, they've checked the box.

Scott Horrell: They've checked the box, and faith should be a part of it, every Roman Catholic would say, but isn't always a part of it. It's – they're just getting through the door.

Darrell Bock: Hmm, interesting. So, I'm just gonna review here. So, we've talked about magisterium and how theology gets done. We've talked about the pope. We've talked about this role that the Church has kind of a mediator standing between the believer and God, again in contrast to Protestantism, in which there's the priesthood of all believers.

There's direct access to God – direct access to God through Christ for a believer in Protestantism in a way that is pictured and expressed theologically that is distinct from the way the Roman Catholic Church is doing. And so, this difference in how ecclesiology is seen is a pretty important significant difference between the two traditions. Fair?

Michael Svigel: Mm-hmm.

Scott Horrell: Yeah, absolutely.

Darrell Bock: And then, of course, we've got the role of the sacraments in the way in which grace is said to be communicated in a Roman Catholic context; it's different from the way it's handled in Protestantism.

Let's talk about a couple of other things that make for differences, some of which are famous – or infamous, depending on how you look at them. And I want to – I want to come to the idea of indulgences, because indulgences really triggered, in many ways – it's one of the things that triggered the Protestant Reformation.
So, let's talk about how indulgences function in the Roman Catholic Church and what the reaction was that actually was one of the catalysts for the Protestant Reformation. And I don't know who wants to take that one, but who wants to talk about –

*Scott Horrell*  
Well, indulgences, of course, grew from, in part, the doctrine of purgatory. And so –

*Darrell Bock*  
Oh, good. That was another one I wanted to talk about.

*Scott Horrell*  
Oh, all right. Well, I don't want to jump the gun.

*Darrell Bock*  
No, we got a twofer; this is great.

*Scott Horrell*  
All right. Well, purgatory's really not in the Scriptures. Some will try to base it in – what? – 2 Corinthians 3 – or 1 Corinthians 3, where the foundation remains but everything else is burned off. But the idea of purgatory grew with time, as even some Catholics who are critics of their own Catholic faith would say, "It sure looked good for filling the coffers to build the churches with."

Indulgences are your acts or payments to escape the punishment of every unworthy believer for entering Heaven. Wasn’t – it didn't apply to nonbelievers, at least initially, in the history of the Church. Rather, it was Christians – Catholic Christians – who must yet suffer because their lives were not worthy to go into Heaven.

So, indulgences and the business of indulgences grew immensely to build the Roman Catholic Empire in many ways.

*Darrell Bock*  
So, it comes alongside purgatory. Another Catholic distinctive is the idea of confession, which is –

*Scott Horrell*  
Yes.

*Darrell Bock*  
– a part of this edifice of what we're talking about. "How do I respond to sin after I've come to Christ," is almost the way we're thinking about these. And these are all related.

*Scott Horrell*  
Good point.
And so, there's this whole system of dealing with sin in the Roman Catholic Church that's very distinct from the way Protestants tend to deal with it. So, go ahead; I interrupted you. Go ahead and develop what happened with indulgences and what the reaction was.

Well, it became so stark, by the time of the Reformation – and here Mike's the expert. But as Luther and others looked at Scripture and said, "Wait a minute. Justification is by faith; it is a free gift of God by merit of what Christ has fully accomplished." He would argue that the Catholic Church, by these indulgences, is really saying that the work of Christ on the cross is insufficient for our full salvation. Believers yet have to pay in suffering in purgatory before they are allowed into Heaven.

There's a great moment in Martin Luther's life as we're moving toward –

I was hoping you were gonna mention this.

I don't know if I got the same story, but he was visiting Rome, and one of the things that you would do – it was almost like an indulgence obstacle course. You could go through various things and do some things to get time out of purgatory.

And one of the famous ones – even to this day, I visited it myself, did not climb it, but the sacred steps that Jesus apparently climbed.

Yeah, we're in the same place.

And Martin Luther climbed it in order to buy one of his relatives out of purgatory, get some time there. And he gets to the top of the thing –

You crawl on your knees.

Yeah, exactly. And there's prescribed prayers that you say each time you – for each step.
The Table Podcast

*Darrell Bock* You go there today, the steps have almost indentions in them –

*Michael Svigel* They do. Over the centuries –

*Darrell Bock* – all the knees over all the centuries, yes.

*Michael Svigel* And I took the side steps, 'cause I was a Protestant.

*Scott Horrell* I took the escalator.

*Darrell Bock* I was a good Protestant; I didn't hit my knees at all. Okay?

*Michael Svigel* Exactly. So, Luther got up to the very top, and he got his little paper of indulgence. And he looks down the stairs and sees all these people climbing, and he has this thought in his head, "How do we know any of this is true? How do we know this is true?"

And it became, "Well, what is our authority for doctrine? What is our authority for this kind of thing?" And he – well, where do you go? Well, he goes to the Bible, and there's no basis for this in Scripture. So, this whole business of indulgences was one of the things that pushed Luther to rethink the whole concept of salvation.

You know, in the Roman Catholic Church, this is fair to say the salvation is more of a process; it's a lifelong process. You're involved in the process through participation in the Church and the sacraments. You can kinda get off the train, and that's not good; you'll end up in purgatory. But if you keep on, there is some sense of security, whereas in the Protestant tradition, there is the sense of you are justified – a one-time experience of salvation, and then an outworking of spiritual growth.

So, there is a – more of a momentary conversion and salvation that is played out to vindication.

*Darrell Bock* The decisive moment – you know, I mean salvation's a process in Scripture, but how it plays out is very, very different. It's not – it's not something – in the Roman Catholic Church, you almost have the sense of having to maintain it.

*Scott Horrell* Absolutely.
But in Protestantism, it's there; you have it; you're sealed with the Spirit until the consummation.

You cultivate it.

Exactly. You – there's still a process, and you cultivate it, and you grow in it and all those kinds of things.

We colleague it sanctification.

But your status is guaranteed –

Correct.

– from the very beginning. And so, that part of it is an important part of the conversation.

You know, those steps are interesting. They're located, if I remember correctly, I think they're located near the church that is the seat for the Romans –

Yeah, St. John's.

St. John's Lateran –

Yeah, that's right.

– which is the primary church in Rome for the city of Rome. It's not the Vatican.

Right.

And it is a stunning location to visit, just because of the history that's associated with it and that kind of thing.

Well, this issue of purgatory and indulgences and these things that feed into the magisterium, if I can say it that way, raises another issue that comes alongside that's another difference, and that is the books that count for being a part of Scripture. Okay?
One of the things that happened with purgatory, at least that I'm aware of, and working in the New Testament studies, 'cause we work with intertestamental – what we call intertestamental literature, or second temple literature, the Jewish material that's written between the testaments, is that in Roman Catholicism, those books, which are known as the Apocrypha to many protestants are called – are sometimes called the deuterocanonicals, the second level of the canon, if you want to think of it that way.

And so, these books do have some teaching and doctrines that the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scripture didn't have and that the Catholics did draw upon to make some of the theological moves that they did, purgatory being perhaps one of the more outstanding examples.

And so, you have this additional layer of Scripture. And I often get asked the question, "What are those other extra books? What's going on there?" And so, how does that fit into the scheme of things, and when did those books come to be recognized as part of the Catholic Bible, which I think is an interesting part of this story as well.

Yeah, that's a great question. As you know, these books were floating around in the intertestamental period for the most part. They were part of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Not part of the Hebrew text that the Jews were using. So, this, already in the early Church, there was some debate or question about how much should we use these things?

It was universally acknowledged that these are helpful books.

Absolutely.

Yeah.

They're inspirational, I like to say, not inspired.

Yeah, yeah, mm-hmm.
And in fact, Martin Luther had them translated, and he provided introductions for them and valued them as being good Christian literature, but not canonical, not as a basis for theology.

And it's interesting. Yeah, there are a few passages that you – if you already hold the doctrine of purgatory, you could go to those passages and gain more support.

See, there's something there.

But you could never really build the doctrine of purgatory from those few passages any more than you could from the rich man and Lazarus or 1 Corinthians 3. It's more of a doctrine in search of a text.

So, I would say even if those doctrine – those books were in the Protestant Bible, we would not be Roman Catholic. Right? So, they're not the key to becoming Roman Catholic. Those things were added officially, though, as they did float around in the background for a while through the centuries. They were added officially only after the Reformation as part of the Counter-Reformation, the Council of Trent in the 1540s.

So, yet another example of how the development of theology, as it operates in the Catholic Church, has incorporated things to round out the basis for what's being claimed.

Well, we've really walked through a whole series of distinctions between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. I'm gonna ask you a horrible question, with a couple of minutes left, and that is if you were to summarize kind of what you think the key difference between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, and you could put it in a paragraph or so, what would that be? I'll let you each get a crack at that question.
Michael Svigel: Yeah, I would say the key difference is, Roman Catholicism is always Christianity plus. And so, it's grace plus something else, faith plus works. It's the work of Christ plus the intercession of Mary and the saints. The canonical books plus he Apocrypha. It's seems like there's additions – the problem is not that they're denying the Trinity and the deity and the humanity of Christ in the center of Orthodoxy. It's just that they are dogmatically adding layers to that, that become very distracting from the purity of the Gospel.

Darrell Bock: Interesting. Scott?

Scott Horrell: Yeah, I would say it is the source of authority finally. Is it the Bible itself that then is the judge of all tradition, or is it vice versa? That's number one. Number two is that source of authority, coming down through – coming down through Peter, or really through Mary, who is now the queen of Heaven, as this ascended one – that's a good example of doctrine that has built on itself without any real –

Darrell Bock: To the point where the addition almost takes the –

Scott Horrell: Absolutely.

Michael Svigel: Highest place, yeah.

Darrell Bock: – the top role and layer that it didn't previously ever have.

Scott Horrell: She's the co-mediatrix. She's the co-redeemer with Christ, the new Eve as Christ is the last Adam. And so, yeah, both that parallel tract, which really – especially outside of North America and Europe – really dominates Catholicism as I've seen it in different parts of the world.

So, Mary becomes a chief mediator, almost supplanting the place of Christ, though a good Catholic would say, "No, but it's through Mary Christ works.

Darrell Bock: Ooh, we're running out of time. You know, one of the things that you've raised here at the end that people do need to be aware of is that Catholicism does have a little bit of a different character, depending on where you are in the world in terms of what gets emphasized.
And so, to think of Catholicism as kind of this huge monolithic thing, it actually is a conglomeration of a variety of expressions.

*Scott Horrell* Yeah.

*Michael Svigel* Yep.

*Darrell Bock* But what they share is this additional element that reflects the development of theology in the way its theological means are structured. And you've got a book there called The Catechism of the Catholic Church that does a good job of letting Catholics speak for themselves.

Well, this 46 minutes has flown by, and I want to thank you all for taking the time to come in and talk with us about the difference between Roman Catholics and Protestants. It's a fascinating discussion, and I'm sure we'll have you back to talk more about these kinds of theological issues.

We thank you for being a part of The Table –

*Scott Horrell* Yes.

*Darrell Bock* – and hope you'll be back again with us soon.