



HERE WE STAND

POSITION STATEMENT #1: COOPERATION WITH THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH TODAY?

The Roman Catholic Church in history.

In this five hundredth anniversary of the start of the Protestant Reformation in 1517, *From His Fullness Ministries* reflects on God's great work in recovering the gospel of his grace and in emboldening the reformers to call the professing church of Christ back to Holy Scripture.

We affirm with them the attributes of the church, namely her oneness (in Christ), her holiness (separation from the world), her apostolicity (teaching of apostolic doctrine), and her universality (one church in all of history and the world). We also reject with them the use of these attributes as badges of self-congratulation, for such attributes remind us of the task given to the church of seeking unity, holiness, closer reflection of apostolic doctrine, and the spread of the church through the world by the proclamation of the gospel. Accordingly, we value the work of the reformers in identifying marks to distinguish the true or purer congregations (now also denominations) from the false or the impure: at a minimum—

- The pure preaching of the Word.
- The rightful administration of the (two) sacraments (baptism and the Lord's Supper).
- The appropriate exercise of biblical discipline.

Such marks, demonstrable from Scripture, lead us, on the one hand, to reject extrabiblical church tradition as a source of authority in the life of the Christian and of the church. Specifically, the Roman Catholic Church, challenging the authority of Scripture, has sustained the papacy, the priesthood, a numerically and substantially distorted view of the sacraments, and an isolated view of vocation (monasteries, convents, celibacy).

Such marks lead us to affirm with the reformers on the other hand that the good news of Jesus Christ comes to us by God's grace alone (without human merit), through faith alone (without the contribution of our works for salvation), in Christ alone (without any other mediation, either of Mary, the saints, or anyone else), and is received as unto God's glory alone.

The Roman Catholic Church today.

While the Roman Catholic Church finds its visible unity in the office of the papacy (claiming for the Pope the titles of the Godhead—Holy Father, Head of the Church, and Vicar of Christ on Earth), we acknowledge that within her structures today there are different strains of Catholicism, some of which are more open to biblical reform than others, and that there are genuine Christians who know God through Christ alone, despite the teaching received in Roman Catholicism. We also acknowledge in the current climate, wherein Enlightenment rationalism has spawned present day secularism, that true (Bible-believing) Protestants share, formally, with the Roman Catholic Church belief in the inspiration of Scripture, the Trinity, the virgin conception, the person of Christ, and jointly uphold Judeo-Christian values such as the divine institution of marriage (the ideal of one man, one woman, for life), and the sanctity of life (in opposition to abortion and euthanasia). Moreover, we roundly reject as horrendous and dishonoring to God, the prosecution or persecution of Roman Catholics, and affirm the principle of Sebastian Castellio at the time of the Reformation, that "To kill a man is not to defend a doctrine, it is but to kill a man."

The Roman Catholic Church tomorrow?

Nevertheless, while standing with Roman Catholics in society for shared Judeo-Christian values, we cannot affirm either the ending of outreach to Roman Catholics nor the proposing of joint worship and evangelism with Roman Catholics. Our divine call to love our neighbor must comply with the saving truth divinely revealed to us in love. Instead, then, of indiscriminately labelling Roman Catholics as brothers and sisters in Christ, which creates a tension with, or even an outright contradiction of the biblical *solus* of the Reformation, we advocate a love through Christ which:



- First, appeals to Roman Catholics to receive through faith alone the free gift of salvation. This has been procured exclusively by Christ's finished work (John 19:30).
- Second, encourages Roman Catholics through Bible study to leave the Roman Catholic Church, at least until such a time as the Roman Church, on biblical grounds, dismantles the papacy and the sacerdotal system, and affirms the entirely sovereign and gracious nature of the gospel.
- Third, requires of us to so live in gratitude for the free gift of salvation that Roman Catholics learn from our lives that while we are not saved by works (to any degree), we are saved unto good works by divine grace (Ephesians 2:8-10). This divine grace not only justifies (and adopts) but also sanctifies. To put the matter in Reformation terms, we are justified through faith alone, but not through a faith which is alone. Rather, we receive God's free grace in Christ in humble recognition of what it cost him, and in glad surrender of our lives to God through Christ and by the Spirit.

Since we do not anticipate a revival in the Roman Catholic, for while sovereign the Spirit does not typically honor the undermining of the sole authority of his Word, the supreme authority of Christ as Head of the Church, or the all-sufficiency of the Savior's work, we do pray for a mighty revival in Protestantism so that our lavishing of love on Roman Catholics in Word and deed may result in the salvation of many, and in either the biblical reform of Roman Catholicism or the exit of the converted to purer churches committed to reform according to God's Word.

That said, we should not be read to say—by Roman Catholics, Protestants, or anyone else—that all that is needed for salvation and for cooperation in the spread of the gospel is a mental affirmation of the *solas* of the Reformation. The faith in Christ of which we speak is not solely intellectual or propositional (knowledge of the gospel), but spiritual—the conviction of our need of it as sinners, and of a collapsing on Christ for the perfection of his righteous life and the pardon arising from his atoning death. All so believing, and only those so believing, are promised in Christ

a full and free salvation, and are thereby qualified and encouraged to jointly proclaim to the world the good news of God's grace to sinners. It is found in Christ alone.

Agreed by the Board of Directors, November 14, 2017