

(Double Minded Part One)

Christian Research Institute (CRI) has an extensive web site. We find this promise from CRI on their home page:

“The Christian Research Institute exists to provide Christians worldwide with carefully researched information and well-reasoned answers that encourage them in their faith and equip them to intelligently represent it to people influenced by ideas and teachings that assault or undermine orthodox, biblical Christianity.”

Given this promise, we are interested in how CRI might handle the question of Roman Catholicism. CRI does indeed address the issue of Roman Catholicism. It does so in a five part series entitled *WHAT THINK YE OF ROME (WTYOR)*.

After reading this five part series one would have to conclude that CRI thinks very highly of Rome. While not agreeing with all Roman Catholic beliefs and practices, CRI sheds the best possible light on Rome. At times CRI scolds evangelicals, who vehemently disagree with their assessment of Rome, with a great zeal. We wonder why the same zeal was not applied to arrive at the right conclusions about Rome given the fatal deficiencies of Rome. But alas CRI gives Roman Catholicism the benefit of the doubt again and again. But before getting into specifics of the CRI’s appraisal of Rome let us step back and take a broad view of the qualifying language enlisted by CRI to describe Rome in general.

CRI explains that:

“Catholicism possesses a foundational orthodoxy reflected in its affirmation of the crucial doctrines expressed in the ancient creeds.” (WTYOR Part Two)

Having said this from the start CRI will consistently soften their criticism of Roman doctrine. Notice the phraseology used in CRI’s initial evaluation of Rome. CRI says that “Protestants detect serious problems.” CRI claims that Rome affirms teachings “that are extraneous and inconsistent with its orthodox (Christian) foundation.” “These doctrinal errors are of such a serious nature that aspects of orthodoxy are undermined.” In summary CRI concludes, “These divergent views, however, do not warrant classifying Catholicism as a non-Christian religion or cult.” (Emphasis ours)

We observe at the outset that the entire analysis of Roman Catholicism is framed by CRI in the context of an intramural discussion. According to CRI there are “*Catholic Christian*” scholars who have things to say about justification, religious authority, Mary, Pluralism, forgiveness of sins, and salvation. But then there are “*Protestant Christian*” scholars who also have something to say about these things. In other words this is nothing more than an in-house interesting

conversation between two branches of Christianity. According to CRI no matter how severe these distinctions may be Rome must never be classified as a non-Christian religion. For CRI Roman Catholicism is a different sort of Christian religion. For CRI Rome may in many respects be a peculiar Christian religion. But it is by no means a cult or a non-Christian religion. Or so CRI avows.

We begin our investigation into CRI's evaluation of Rome by noticing that CRI presents us with a ten point criteria for what constitutes a real cult. Using these criteria Roman Catholicism is said to be disqualified from being labeled a cult. CRI bends over backwards to give us an elaborate standard that justifies the use of the word "cult" for a religious organization. But the criteria used by CRI are far too simplistic and terribly mis-leading. For instance if we say that a religion is Christian and not a cult simply because it believes in salvation by "grace" we could be making a terrible mistake. If "salvation by grace" means doing things to get grace, or buying grace, or punishing our bodies to get grace then it is actually possible to give a pass to a radically anti-Christ religion thus promoting a real cultic heresy. Without defining the nature of grace and the means to secure grace we have done nothing to truly investigate the claims of any religious organization. We believe CRI has failed to define biblical grace and the biblical means by which grace is secured! To prove our point we have lifted from the CRI web site their criteria for cults and compared them with what we know to be true of Roman Catholicism. Here are the results of our finding based upon some examples:

CRI: "Cults, generally speaking, are small splinter groups with a fairly recent origin. Most American-based cults, for example, have to a greater or lesser degree splintered off from other Christian groups, and emerged in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries. Catholicism, on the other hand, is the largest body within Christendom, having almost a two-thousand-year history (it has historical continuity with apostolic, first century Christianity), and is the ecclesiastical tree from which Protestantism originally splintered."

RESPONSE: CRI puts the cart before the horse by claiming that Catholicism is the largest body *within* Christianity. By this one statement CRI is committed to defending the Roman religion rather than analyzing whether Rome is in fact Christian. Secondly the very heart of Roman Catholic theology and practice has zero historical continuity with first century Christianity other than recognition of some historical realities about Jesus Christ. Thirdly an "ecclesiastical tree" is hardly the same as orthodoxy. If the Reformers were right (and all Christians believe they were right) then they were leaving a cult or a non-Christian religion, take your pick. Fourthly when the argument is framed as a battle between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism the real issues of genuine Christianity are minimized and marginalized as a difference of species rather than what they really are – a difference of kind. Fifthly each category of Romish teaching must begin with the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and move

forward to later Roman Catholic Councils. Christians believe that Rome disqualified herself as a Christian religion by affirming heresy at Trent. This mid-sixteenth century council is ample proof that Rome is either a cult or a non-Christian religion. Subsequent councils and papal decrees only add more Romish cultic practices and beliefs which serve to further establish this truth.

Here are some more examples of CRI accommodation to Rome.

CRI: “Cults are usually formed, molded, and controlled by a single individual or small group. The Catholic church, by contrast, has been molded by an incalculable number of people throughout its long history. Catholicism is governed by creeds, councils, and the ongoing magisterium.”

Response: There is no cult leader in the world afforded more control than the Pope at Rome. He is said to be infallible when he speaks from the chair of Peter on matters of faith and morals. Furthermore, based upon this reasoning, the Mormon religion qualifies as Christian since Mormonism “has been molded by an incalculable number of people throughout its long history.”

CRI: “An appropriate description of a cult is “a religious group originating as a heretical sect and maintaining fervent commitment to heresy.”

RESPONSE: Rome has been fervently committed to heresy since the council of Trent and has added even more with the advent of Vatican I and Vatican II. This is 474 years of “maintaining a fervent commitment to heresy.”

CRI: “Cults (when defined as heretical sects) are classified as such because of their outright denial or rejection of essential Christian doctrine. Historically, this has principally been a denial of the nature of God (the Trinity), the nature of the incarnate Christ (divine–human), and of the absolute necessity of divine grace in salvation (the Pelagian controversy). While Protestants have accused Catholicism of having an illegitimate authority and of confusing the gospel (two serious charges to be examined later), Catholicism does affirm the Trinity, the two natures of Christ, and that salvation is ultimately a gift of God’s grace (a rejection of Pelagianism).”

RESPONSE: Here in a nut shell CRI brings us to the heart of the matter. Evidently the essence of belief within Christianity is defined by CRI as the nature of the Trinity, the nature of the incarnate Christ, and of the necessity of divine grace in salvation. This may be likened to a three legged stool. But if one leg is missing the entire stool falls over and is worthless. While we would agree that Rome declares a belief in the nature of the incarnate Christ. We also believe that Rome undermines and emasculates the essence of the incarnation of Christ with her doctrine of transubstantiation and the bloodless sacrifice of her false “christ” on her altar. While we agree

that Rome declares a belief in the nature of the Trinity. We also believe Rome demeans and denigrates the entire doctrine of the Holy Spirit through her sacrament of confirmation and her ongoing heresy of asserting that her Pope is the Vicar of Christ instead of the Holy Spirit.

It is however the third leg of the stool where subtle deceitfulness trumps reality! In the first place to deny Pelagianism is not to affirm the gospel of salvation by grace through faith alone. Secondly Rome does not define grace in the same way as Christianity. For Rome grace comes through her sacraments starting with infant baptism. Through her doctrine of *ex opere operato* (the thing done brings about the thing signified) Rome teaches that the performance of a religious ritual brings down the grace of God to the individual involved in the ritual. For Rome grace is an infusion designed to clean up and restore a person to holiness in order to qualify that person for entry into Heaven albeit the Romish Purgatory is the hope of most. For Rome grace is dispensed by an earthly priesthood committed to the Romish sacraments. If we were to say that so and so religion was Christian because it affirmed “salvation by grace” only to find out that “grace” was gained and merited by crawling through a lifetime of religious rituals what would be thought of it? For CRI to boldly state, “Catholicism does affirm the Trinity, the two natures of Christ, and that salvation is ultimately a gift of God’s grace” brings into question the legitimacy of trusting CRI. Clearly Rome believes in salvation by grace earned through faithful attendance at the altar of her heretical sacraments. This is not the grace of God known to Christians. Furthermore Christians know of no Christ who transubstantiates Himself into a wafer of bread and represents His one and only sacrifice on a bloodless Roman Catholic altar!

CRI: “Cults frequently have a low view of the Bible, replacing or supplementing it with their own so-called “sacred writings.” In fact, cults often argue that the Bible has been, to some extent, corrupted and therefore their writings are needed to restore the truth. While Catholicism’s acceptance of non-canonical writings (the Apocrypha) and placing of apostolic tradition on par with Scripture are fundamental problems to the Protestant, Catholics nevertheless retain a high view of the Bible (inspired and infallible) and see it as their central source of revelation.”

RESPONSE: This assertion by CRI is almost too fantastic to believe. But when one is committed to protecting a cult rather than exposing a cult this is what we get. In reality, there could be no lower view of the Bible than in Rome. Rome reserves the right to be the only capable interpreter of the Bible on earth. Rome adds non-canonical books to the Bible and builds doctrine from them. Rome adds something they call Holy Tradition right alongside the Bible and puts her tradition on an equal footing with the Bible. This is done despite the fact that no one in Rome can adequately define Holy Tradition. Yet time and time again it is called upon to trump the Bible. Rome adds to the Bible every time a full council meets and makes a declaration (witness the sinlessness of Mary and her Assumption in Heaven). Finally Rome declares that her Pope speaks for Christ and therefore his word is Scripture when spoken on

matters of faith and morals from the chair of Peter. Not one Roman Catholic theologian knows exactly how many times the Pope has spoken *ex cathedra*. There is no infallible list of infallible proclamations. In spite of all this CRI has the audacity to say that Catholics “retain a high view of the Bible.” Only those who wish to oblige Rome fail to see how astonishingly wrong their assessment of Rome really is.

CRI does everything in its power to minimize and trivialize the vast differences between Roman Catholicism and historic Christianity. CRI fails to tell us that Roman Catholic practice has little or no contact with the Bible. The Scriptures were the only word of God for the early church and they remain the only Word of God for all Christians today. CRI fails to tell us that the early church knew nothing of a huge monolithic block governed essentially by one man acting as the Vicar of Christ on earth head quartered in Rome. Leading up to and concluding with the so-called infallible decrees of the Council of Trent there is no doubt that Rome is an anti-Christ, non-Christian religion, and remains so to this day. Her doctrines “typed and filed” in 1542 have only gotten worse and more cultish over time.

Let us take one more look at the deception of CRI in dealing with Rome. We notice when it comes to the cultish pattern of rigid control CRI views Rome’s practices as “unhealthy in times past” but moderated today due to Rome’s “broad diversity.” Here is the logic of CRI that once again, according to CRI, dismiss all fears of Rome actually practicing cultish control.

CRI: “Cults typically exercise rigid control over their members and demand unquestioning submission, with disobedience punished by shunning and/or excommunication. While Catholicism has exercised a triumphalism and an unhealthy control over its members in times past, this is far less true today, especially since the Second Vatican Council. Contemporary Catholicism’s broad diversity as illustrated in Part one of this series certainly proves this point.”

RESPONSE: Despite the fact that for hundreds of years Rome brashly asserted that outside the Roman Catholic Church there is no salvation CRI does not think Rome has been guilty of shunning or excommunication. However, excommunication might be the middle name of Rome. Rome is responsible for the heresy of Purgatory, indulgences, confession to a priest, and earthly penances administered by the Romish priests. On top of that is the requirement to attend Mass and to follow the rigid requirements Rome’s sacramental system. Instead of pointing out Roman control over her adherents from the cradle to the grave, CRI placates Rome by calling her practices “triumphalism”. This is simply bizarre. However it gets worse. CRI wishes to dispel cultish Roman control over her people by citing the advancements made in Rome since Vatican II. The trouble with all this is that Roman Catholicism after Vatican II has added a deadly pluralism in her quest for diversity. While still retaining control of her followers, Rome has completely undercut the gospel of Jesus Christ by declaring that non-Christian religions have a

pathway to Heaven. So whether it is the cradle to grave domination over her devotees, or a broad latitudinal approach to non-Christian religions, Rome continues to manipulate her adherents and finds progressive ways to manipulate the gospel as well.