

## (Double- Minded Part Two)

We have found that all attempts by the Christian Research Institute to exclude Roman Catholicism from being categorized as a cult or a non-Christian religion have failed to convince us. CRI fails because of two primary errors. The first is the *apriori* (before the fact) assumption that Roman Catholicism is a wing of Christianity. The second is CRI's superficial and misleading understanding of the fatal differences between the gospel of Rome and the gospel of Christianity.

We now turn our attention to the very heart of the matter. In our first article we concluded that CRI is capable of pointing out some differences between Roman Catholicism and Christianity. However incapable of seeing that these differences are incurable and so lethal to the gospel of Christianity that Rome deserves to be marked as a cult or non-Christian religion.

In part five of their series on Roman Catholicism CRI begins with a summary statement.

“The Protestant Reformers recovered the biblical view of forensic justification, that a person is legally declared righteous by God on the basis of faith alone. In so doing, their principle of “salvation by faith alone” gave a more biblical specificity to the common Augustinian view of “salvation by grace alone” held by Catholics and Protestants alike. For although Rome has always held the essential belief in salvation by grace, its view of justification – made dogma by the Council of Trent – obscures the pure grace of God, if not at times negating it in practice.”

This summary statement is followed up by an introductory sentence which launches CRI into a 10 page article on justification. Here is the introductory sentence.

“Roman Catholics and evangelicals share a common core of beliefs about salvation.”

We notice that CRI uses the same kinds of accommodating words in this article as their previous article. Protestant reformers are said to have given “a more *biblical specificity* to the common Augustinian view of ‘salvation by grace alone’ held by Catholics and Protestants alike.” CRI explains that “Rome has always held the essential belief in *salvation by grace...*” However Rome’s view of justification “*obscures the pure grace* of God, if not *at times* negating the gospel.” These soft sell assertions are then summed up by CRI insisting that Roman Catholics and evangelicals “share *a common core belief about salvation.*” (Emphasis ours)

Let us be perfectly clear. The biblical gospel of “grace alone” has nothing to do with the so – called grace procured through religious rituals. Roman Catholic grace is not the glorious grace of God. If left undefined, this catch phrase “salvation by grace alone” becomes a wax nose that can

be misshapen to forge deceptive, ambiguous, confusing, and disingenuous expressions of unity! CRI is guilty of doing this very thing. Furthermore, salvation by faith alone is not a mere “biblical specificity” as though it were some kind of add on to a gospel already shared by Protestants and Catholics. Salvation by faith alone in Christ alone is the only gospel that guarantees the integrity of what the Bible means by “grace alone.” The Roman Catholic ruinous and fatal mis-understanding of grace serves only to obliterate the true gospel of the grace of Jesus Christ. CRI compromises the gospel and grants Rome entry into the Christian community by claiming that Rome has always held the “essential” belief in salvation by grace. But CRI fails miserably to tell us that Rome does not hold to an *essential belief in biblical grace*! Rome’s grace is held hostage by Rome’s notorious and anti-Christ system of grace begetting sacraments and rituals which is governed by a priestly caste formed to dispense grace. This is not “salvation by grace” but rather grace held hostage by the Roman Catholic religion.

The duplicity continues with CRI as they almost begrudgingly admit that Rome’s view of justification “obscures the pure grace of God.” There are two things wrong with this kind of admission. The first is that it leaves the impression that there is a grace of God that saves even though it obscures. Rome has this kind of grace. CRI gives the impression that there is a “more pure” kind of grace that somehow has eluded Rome but is not fatal to Rome. The second is this idea of obscuring. To obscure is to muddy and muddle. It is to shroud or veil. CRI is deliberate in using this kind of language and it is deceptive. Rome does not “obscure” the grace of God. Rome re-defines the grace of God by distorting both the meaning of grace and the way God’s grace is bestowed. By the time Rome is finished with the concept of grace it has no relation whatsoever to the real grace of God found in the gospel.

Lastly, in so far as CRI’s introduction to justification is concerned, we would have you notice that despite CRI’s protest to the contrary Roman Catholicism does not share a common “core belief about salvation.” It is not even close. Rome denies justification by faith alone, forensic justification, and Christ’s righteousness as the only ground of justification. Rome repudiates eternal security while affirming infant baptismal regeneration, incremental justification, increase and decrease of justification, meritorious justification, and a loss of salvation. Add in their Purgatory and we have just begun to name a few of the diametrically opposite core beliefs that evangelicals find heretical in Rome.

One would think that a cursory reading of Roman Catholic theology and doctrine which trumpets her way to gain heaven would convince anyone that Roman Catholicism is simply not Christian. However CRI is not of this breed. For mystical reasons that defy biblical exegesis, common sense, historical analysis, and observance of ongoing Roman Catholic practices CRI presses on always warding off and forestalling the obvious. CRI is bound and determined to convince us that Roman Catholic dogma and practice (no matter how contrary to evangelical and biblical

Christianity) is really just a bit different. We turn now to CRI's list of "common soteriological roots." By this list CRI announces that any differences we have with Rome must be viewed through the lens of some sort of common root system. We shall enumerate their list and comment.

**CRI #1** "A soteriological survey of both the leading Roman Catholic theologians and Protestant Reformers reveals a number of commonalities. First, both believe salvation is affected through historic, divine intervention"

**Comment:** By this CRI wants us to keep in mind that Catholics and Protestants believe that some sort of salvation is by God's action in the person and history of Jesus Christ. It would be nice to think that Protestants agree with Roman Catholics on something significant concerning the planning, reasoning, nature, and accomplishment of God's action in history through Jesus Christ. However, after agreeing only that Jesus Christ really is God's Son incarnate it all breaks down from there. In short there is no commonality whatsoever on the nature and execution of God's plan of salvation. Divine intervention by God in Christ? "yes." Any agreement on what this divine intervention means? "not a hope."

**CRI #2** "Both evangelicals and Catholics believe salvation is moral and spiritual. Salvation is related to a deliverance from sin and its consequences.

**Comment:** Could someone possibly be broader than this? CRI might as well have said that, "evangelicals and Catholics believe in some sort of moral and spiritual salvation." Or, "evangelicals and Catholics believe that 2 plus 2 equals 4 and that there are stars in the sky." How about, "Roman Catholic men and evangelical men both put their pants on one leg at a time?" To say that Catholics and evangelicals believe in a moral and spiritual salvation and this proves common soteriological roots is literally grasping at straws and missing!

**CRI #3** "Salvation is eschatological for both Catholics and evangelicals."

**Comment:** By this CRI means that both Catholics and evangelicals await the fullness of salvation at some point in the future. How does this illustrate common soteriological roots? It only shows that two different religions are awaiting their totally opposite views of salvation to ultimately unfold at some time in the future.

**CRI #4** "The grace of God is absolutely necessary for salvation. And, initial justification is based on grace alone, apart from all works."

**Comment:** As we have already treated this misuse of the term "grace" above so we shall be brief here. When Rome speaks of the grace of God it means that which comes through man-made religious rituals. Regardless if it is "grace" bestowed in her infant baptism or in her

sacramentalism Rome butchers the biblical concept of grace. Rome professes a grace called down by a priestly class and infused into the recipient to improve character that he/she might qualify for heaven. Christians believe the grace of God is God's undeserved favor that brings both spiritual life and secures eternal life for all those in Christ secured by faith alone.

In #4 of their alleged common root system we notice again that CRI is trumpeting Rome's claim of "grace alone" in her infant baptismal grace. Does CRI want us to think that Rome's infant justification through her baptism is likened to Christian justification by grace alone through faith alone? Does CRI want us to fantasize that Rome's claim of infant justification through her infant baptism is somehow like Christian justification because Rome claims her first sacrament is by grace alone apart from works? We think that this is precisely what CRI desires. Obviously the awful truth for Rome and CRI is that there is no such thing as an 'initial justification', via infant baptism, followed by an ongoing incremental justification in Christian soteriology. So how can the Christian concept of grace and Rome's concept of grace which cancel out each other be illustrative of a common soteriological root? One begins to ask what motive might drive this distorted and deformed thinking of CRI.

### **CRI and the Roman Catholic Council of Trent**

We shift our attention now to CRI's presentation of the Roman Catholic water shed doctrines on justification articulated at the Council of Trent.

Session VI of the Council of Trent devotes 16 Chapters and 33 Canons to the question of justification. The Roman Catholic community speaks loudly and clearly about the justification of the ungodly. We find CRI's treatment of the dramatic statements on justification decreed by the Council of Trent to be complicated, drawn-out, longwinded, and erratic.

Here is CRI's first paragraph with the corresponding footnote that is supposed to present the teaching of the Council of Trent on justification.

“On January 9, 1547, the Council participants agreed on a final formula for justification: First, although several Council members recognized an extrinsic element in justification (thereby approaching the Reformers on this point), the consensus view was that “the opinion that a sinner may be justified solely as a matter of reputation or imputation...is rejected.” And so, “justification is thus defined in terms of a man becoming, and not merely being reputed as, righteous...” (Emphases added).” 24

Footnote to the above: “24 Ibid. 72. The words “solely” and “merely” in these quotes indicate that Trent did not reject forensic justification as such.”

We find this kind of muddying to be terribly mis-leading and a smokescreen that allows CRI to hide away the true teachings of the Council of Trent. Why not be direct and straightforward? Rome certainly is clear-cut and uncomplicated. CRI mixes concepts and definitions in a tossed salad that would fatigue even the most experienced pastor/teacher let alone the common man who wishes to know what the Roman Catholic religion really believes. With a bad mix of quotations and bad conclusions CRI forces us to wade through CRI written rhetoric to finally arrive at where we began in our first article. CRI does everything humanly possible, behind the mask of fairness, to diminish and shrug off the real import of what Rome really teaches.

Is it true that “Trent did not reject forensic justification as such” claimed by CRI in the footnote above? Let’s try to set the record straight.

Contrary to CRI Rome is 100% against forensic justification at all levels at all times. Forensic justification is the correct understanding that God declares the ungodly justified or acquitted from their just punishment on the basis that Jesus Christ died a substitutionary atonement for their sins. The righteousness of Christ is imputed through faith alone in a legal sense to sinners. The divine is that the ungodly are now justified before God and do not pay the penalty of sin they deserve. Hence the rally of the Reformation was “justification by faith alone.” Rome rejects this concept of justification. We can all read exactly what Rome believes without having to find our way through a maze of smoke contributed by CRI.

CANON IX.-“If any one saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified; in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification, and that it is not in any way necessary, that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will; let him be anathema.”

CANON XI.-“If any one saith, that men are justified, either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ, or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, and is inherent in them; or even that the grace, whereby we are justified, is only the favour of God; let him be anathema.”

CANON XXIV.-“If any one saith, that the justice received is not preserved and also increased before God through good works; but that the said works are merely the fruits and signs of Justification obtained, but not a cause of the increase thereof; let him be anathema.”

CRI seems intent on matching Rome’s sacramental infant baptismal regeneration/ justification with Christian forensic justification. CRI then explains that Rome understands justification in two senses. The initial sense is “by grace alone” in Rome’s infant justification. This somehow corresponds to Christian grace alone/faith alone justification. But CRI is quick to elucidate that in Rome there is a second sense of justification corresponding to Christian sanctification.

“... Trent understands justification in two senses (the second corresponding to the Reformed doctrine of sanctification); good works are required in the second sense as a condition for ultimate justification. Therefore, it is possible and necessary (in this second sense) to keep the law of God.”

Christians reject Rome’s initial infant baptismal justification. The New Testament knows nothing of justification based upon infant baptism. CRI should have dismissed this heresy immediately. But CRI lets it linger because they wish to link it to Christian justification by grace alone through faith alone since Rome omits “works” from their initial infant justification. Shame on CRI. When we once see that there is in fact only one justification and it is grounded upon the righteousness of Christ imputed to poor lost sinners through faith alone we can clear the air on Rome’s second sense of justification. This so called second sense justification is pure myth and nonsense. Again CRI should have shut this down as heresy from the start. But instead they give credence to such a fiction by actually comparing Rome’s second sense justification to Christian sanctification. But wait, CRI gets in deeper by not only failing to expose the heresy of Rome’s second sense justification but by likening it to Christian sanctification! Rome’s fictitious second sense requires good works as a condition for ultimate justification. Evidently CRI thinks Christian sanctification requires good works for ultimate sanctification. Rome’s fictitious second sense makes it possible and necessary to keep the law of God. Evidently CRI thinks that Christian sanctification entails the possibility and necessity of keeping of God’s law. CRI is wrong at every turn!

We need to close with one more illustration of CRI’s masterful diversions and decoys. Notice how “favorable” Rome looks to the mis-guided eye in CRI’s summary given below:

“Trent states that our initial justification must be seen as a “gift.” Thus, it comes as a surprise to many Protestants that Roman Catholics believe that “if anyone shall say that man can be justified before God by his own works which are done...without divine grace through Christ Jesus: let him be anathema.” Further, “none of those things which precede justification, whether faith or works, merits the grace of justification. For if it is by grace, it is no more by works; otherwise, as the apostle says, grace is no more grace.”

The Bible does not teach an initial justification wrought by infant baptism. Hence there is no such thing as a “gift” of “initial” justification as taught by Rome. It simply is not the truth. It is Roman Catholic heresy. CRI then stupidly swallows the Roman Catholic bait. Without any stipulation that ‘initial’ justification references the radical heresy of infant baptismal justification/regeneration, CRI comments that it comes as a surprise to Protestants that Catholics believe no man can be justified by his own works without divine grace! CRI overlooks that divine grace is called down by a priest in infant baptism. CRI omits that the infant is passive and

hence no works can be included. CRI only slips in that this is Rome's "initial justification." CRI continues the mockery by adding a quote from the Council of Trent that nothing preceding justification, whether faith or works, merits the grace of justification. CRI ignores that these words are reserved for Rome's first sense of "initial" infant baptismal justification. Here is what CRI should have said to be honest and up-front.

"Trent states that Rome's initial justification found in her first sacrament of infant baptismal justification/regeneration/salvation must be seen as a gift."

CRI should have then remarked how clever Rome is in trying to include such a charade as the equivalent of the true grace alone justification, without works or merit cherished by all Christians. CRI instead continues the absurdity!

What does Rome really believe about justification? What is the nature of justification that really qualifies Rome's devotees for heaven? How does one gain eternal life in Rome? Trent is explicit and unambiguous. Here is Trent with CRI muddying the waters.

"And, for this cause, life eternal is to be proposed to those **working well unto the end**, and hoping in God, both as a grace mercifully promised to the sons of God through Jesus Christ, **and as a reward** which is according to the promise of God Himself, to be faithfully rendered to their good works and merits" (Trent Chapter XVI). (Emphasis ours)

"...we must believe that nothing further is wanting to the justified, to prevent their being accounted to have, **by those very works which** have been done in God, fully satisfied the **divine law** according to the state of this life, and **to have truly merited eternal life**, to be obtained also in its (due) time, if so be, however, that they depart in grace:" (Trent Chapter XVI). (Emphasis ours)