

## 13. Clowning Around Part 2 (Modernized Protestantism)

“Christianity is the most perverted system that ever shone on man” wrote Thomas Jefferson in 1801.(18) Rather, it BECAME the most perverted. Though lauding Christ’s moral teachings, he rejected Christ’s deity. Jefferson also had perverted ideas himself, such as mutilating people as punishment.(19) Others, while embracing Christ’s godhood, attempted to counteract Catholic abuses and totalitarian power, initiating Protestantism. This formerly wonderful idea has deadly cancer in the form of corrupt elements. **I expose these problems so we can correct them and return Protestantism to its original effectiveness.**

Protestants are Christian believers who forgo Catholicism in favor of what they feel is pure Christianity. Yet instead of applying love to legitimate issues, hostility prevailed. In unmitigated zeal, competing reformers impetuously divorced themselves from centuries of sacred beliefs. Although all major religions which existed for centuries have ripped apart, Protestantism exploded into confetti.

Even extreme, unorthodox groups sprouted from Protestantism. All these groups, along with mainstream churches, claim that the Church became progressively corrupt, finally becoming Roman Catholicism. Most Protestants believe that they have kept the original faith or properly reform Catholicism. Others claim that mainline Protestantism didn’t go far enough while they restore the original. Those in “restoration” groups are often unaware that over two dozen unique and contradictory groups also claim to restore true Christianity.

### Various Problems

Besides being motivated by anger and indignation towards Catholics instead of love, no organized Protestant group existed before 1500, just dissenters. Many have no lineage to the Apostles, or their founders broke away or were excommunicated. Therefore, Protestant authority is questionable. Some people capitalize on this, such as fake healers who use Protestantism to escape Church investigation of their claim to power.

Belief in scripture’s supreme authority, with Church authority often negated, created hundreds of different and contradictory religious bodies and scripture interpretations, each group claiming complete accuracy. The mistranslated Bible has been used to club people or is manipulated as a helpless puppet. (See 17.Telephoning God?) And most groups encourage military service and action, while the Church of the first three centuries was distinctly anti-war and anti-military. See 23.Peace and Love?

Paraphrasing Matthew 13:47-48: Heaven’s Kingdom is like a submerged fisherman’s net, gathering every kind of sea creature. When it became full, the net was drawn ashore and opened. The grade A were gathered into vessels; the bad were disposed of. Quoting my former Protestant minister’s comments on this passage: “You can’t rely on most congregants to help you in your Christian walk. There are good fish, but also bad fish, dead fish, leeches, rocks, mud, seaweed, old rubber boots, and rusty nails.” When I was a wrestling fan, wrestling manager “Brother Love” caught my attention. He was a mock Christian televangelist with so much rouge, his face was bright red. With a faux southern accent he bellowed into the camera: “I love yeeeeewwwww! Based on behavior unbecoming of a true family, most believers are just as phony.

### “Converting People”

Some attempt to “convert people” by talking to them for fifteen minutes, fast-forwarding Christ’s Gospel, and quickly reciting a sinner’s prayer. This is based on New Testament examples, but then, Christianity was new; most people never heard of it. Besides, scripture accounts are abbreviated; evangelists probably spent the entire evening with their prospects. Actually, we cannot convert or save anybody.

As Buddhists have said “Change comes from within.” The Christian’s role is \*influencing\* others, who may consequently choose to change or convert themselves, whereby God saves them based on their decision.

One offensive tactic was fooling restaurant servers with religious tracts that looked like ten dollar bills instead of giving them tips. In my case, various people befriended me while trying to make me adopt their beliefs. If I ultimately rejected their beliefs, their friendship would cease. By adopting their beliefs, their friendship would also cease, since their goal was achieved, and they put another notch on their bedpost.

With irreligion on the rise, believers could use apologetics to promote belief in a Supreme Being and the person of Jesus Christ. They could also spend time spreading basic Christianity: repenting of sin, being baptized into Christ, finding a church, and lovingly serving God and others, while encouraging people to revitalize their Christian walk.

Instead, precious time is consumed with believers trying to “convert” other believers. For example, Joe is faithful to church A. Yet someone from church B vilifies church A and convinces Joe. So he quits church A and switches to church B. Later on, someone from church C vilifies church B and convinces Joe again. So he quits church B and switches to church C. Later still, someone from church D vilifies church C and convinces Joe yet again. He quits church C and switches to church D. Finally, someone from church A vilifies church D and Joe is persuaded one more time. So poor old Joe quits church D and is back to the same church he started from. Having been a member of numerous diverse groups I now concentrate most of my efforts on the non-religious. That way, my efforts cannot backfire by harming someone’s spirituality instead of bettering it.

### Misguided Pontificating

Protestants often abuse Christian concepts, such as charging gays with being abominable, while Protestants ignore fifty other things that the Old Testament says are abominable. Straight men who don’t date are bashed over the head with God’s supposed command to marry and reproduce. People who don’t like their parents or aren’t close to them are smashed in the head by “friends” with “not honoring their father and mother,” even if the accuser never met that person’s parents. “Christians” condemn and blast those who drink instead of calmly voicing concerns over their drinking, or helping them quit or cut down. Apparently, most people who condemn alcohol abuse want others to continue abusing alcohol so they can condemn them and thus feel superior. Marijuana smokers were excoriated by a tee-shirt emblazoned “To Hell with You Pot Smoker.”

A poster having a picture of an egg said “This is your brain.” The second picture showed a fried egg, saying “This is your brain in Hell, any questions?” Believers sometimes call nonbelievers pagans to their face or inundate them with complicated concepts instead of introducing Christian basics. One television pastor was videotaped threatening an audience member with a gun because he protested what was being preached. And Protestants commonly insist that Hell’s punishments are eternal; anybody they don’t like is there right now. **Nastiness and coldness impede the cause of Christ.**

A popular practice is calling various groups cults. This is not proclaiming objective truth, it is subjective, like calling someone a nutcase. Because popular Christian books sell millions of copies by identifying so-called cults doesn’t make it right; we should be more professional. Concerning apostasy, ALL modern Christian groups have at least partially apostatized from original Christianity.

### Non-Professional Missionary Trips

Today, the entire church body is sometimes invited to go on mission trips to foreign countries, lasting from a week to several months. However, many people paying for short trips instead of few people making years-long commitments costs far more money per person. Besides, most laypeople are not

trained to deal with people from other cultures on a personal level, and don't know their language. Also, the brevity of these trips prevents them from getting to fully know the natives, and their shortly leaving creates a sense of abandonment among many.

As for spreading the Gospel, many foreign countries, "having few Christians," actually have more true Christians percentagewise, than Americans, as most Americans are "Christians" in name only. Oftentimes they already have easy access to the Gospel, but simply chose not to respond. And besides often being improperly trained to spread the Gospel, volunteer missionaries often leave copies of Scripture that their hosts cannot read.

As for doing physical labor, the brevity of these trips sometimes causes projects to be left incomplete, inconveniencing their hosts, who must scramble to finish half-completed shelters before they're flooded with rain. Other times volunteers, being untrained, consequently do far inferior work than some skilled natives could have eventually done themselves. Free labor also keeps their own men from providing cheap labor and so contributes to unemployment.

Then there are dubious attempts at ministry, such as engaging the natives in various recreational activities. And women doing missionary work is unscriptural regardless. Apparently, most mission trips amount to nothing more than glorified vacations. Despite well-meaning intentions, consider the massive amount of time and money wasted, and leave mission trips to the professionals!<sup>20</sup>

### Nondenominational-ism

Non-denominationalists are supposedly "Christians, no more, no less". Some churches make strong and seemingly legitimate claims to this. Others are merely denominations which use a nondenominational label, changing nothing. To show the true nature of nondenominational-ism, here are its general characteristics:

All nondenominational groups sprang from Protestantism but often intend to prove otherwise. There are convincing Church history charts; someone makes a thick unbroken path from AD 30 to now; that's them. Then many smaller paths branch off; that's everybody else. Yet anybody can label the thick unbroken path their church. Some do an excellent job charting the exact year when particular deviations arose and various denominations debuted. However, they never list their own deviations. When they differ in doctrine or practice from the first through fourth century Church, the early Church is conveniently labeled apostate, not themselves.

Besides, no nondenominational group can document their existence in every century from the first until now. Groups like the "Church of Christ" point out historical incidences of using the name Church of Christ, but provide no documentation as to what users of that name believed and practiced. Catholic and Orthodox churches have plenteous documentation of their historical existence; yet they ignore their many deviations, or call their deviations "progress." So; ALL Christian groups are forks in the road.

When the Catholic Church is mentioned, many "Christians, no more or less" become irate, and have false and hurtful ideas, such as calling the Catholic concept of Communion cannibalism. Many call the Pope the Wicked One, and the Catholic Church the Babylonian harlot; Protestantism indeed.

The nondenominational doctrine of "Scripture Only" is equally held by all Protestants. Trying to distinguish themselves by declaring that they have no creed books or catechisms is invalidated by having Bible commentaries, which are essentially the same thing.

"Non-denominationalists" claim to strictly follow the New Testament pattern, but they decide which elements constitute the pattern. They also have their own traditions; they're just against Catholic traditions and deviations. Some also condemn Catholic doctrine while having other doctrines which are also absent from Church history. Any type of feminism certainly disqualifies one from being the original Christianity.

Many non-denominationalists insinuate that singleness is bad and everyone should marry. One church linked to a website that said that single men only live to an average age of fifty-seven. During a Bible study in another church, a man's virginity was ridiculed. Many groups prevent the benefits of single leadership, stemming from misunderstood scripture passages. These attitudes betray a reaction to Catholic priestly celibacy.

Certain nondenominational groups admit that failing to practice New Testament observances like fasting are Protestant-like reactions on their part. They also proclaim that everyone is saved at a certain point like Protestants, with conflicting views on this "point of salvation." Catholics view salvation as an ongoing process.

Nondenominational groups only use sixty-six book Protestant Bibles, never the traditional seventy-three book canon with its deuterocanonical books. The early Church fathers quoted from or made reference to a deuterocanonical book over three hundred times.

Most non-denominationalists condemn religious images in Protestant fashion, likewise concluding that the entire Church became an idol's temple by AD 400. Many condemn the idea of special priestly robes, but don't mind coming to Church resembling beach bums or prostitutes. Again, they simply oppose Catholic practice.

Traditional ancient liturgies, whose lengths could be accurately predicted, are replaced by formats which cannot. Therefore a large face clock often adorns the back wall, which teenagers rudely twist around to stare at. Nondenominational churches also have makeshift observances to replace historical practices, such as non-sacramental baptism, placing membership instead of confirmation, merely symbolic communion, a coming forward or mourner's bench replacing confessionals, and election of leadership by popular vote. So they reinvented the wheel; poorly.

A chief doctrine of the early Church was apostolic succession. Any group attempting to recreate the Church directly from Scripture would lack this succession, thereby creating another denomination. Besides, denomination mean part of a whole. To avoid being a denomination, your group would have to be the exclusive representation of Christ's Church.

Church buildings are the biggest deviation in a literal sense. Having a special building disqualifies you from being the original Christianity! Early believers met in private homes. And little "Restoration" buildings are NO IMPROVEMENT over monstrous Catholic buildings; you end up with ten to twenty-five smaller buildings being erected for every giant one. For a full treatment of this subject, see 12.Clowning Around under Church Buildings.

The "Ante-Nicene Christian Fellowship" headquartered in Knoxville, Tennessee actually did without Church buildings and had home fellowships. However, these fellowships may be over two hundred miles from someone's home. And since this church is Anglican, what will keep it from eventually being absorbed into the greater Anglican Church? Anglicans have continually fluctuated; the Church of England was established against Catholicism, disestablishmentarians counter-defied the Church of England, and antidisestablishmentarians counter-defy the counter-defiant. Antidisestablishmentarianism, like its complicated word which signifies men's perpetual disagreements, seems chaotic. Regardless, no group goes far enough concerning restoration.

Conclusively, so-called non-denominational groups are Protestant. Besides failing to actually be nondenominational, these churches disagree among themselves. Since several different groups audaciously teach that everyone not a member of their church is lost, there will always be people who think you're lost; more disunity, not restoration.

### Counterfeit Christianity

Many people want Christianity's benefits without its commitment. Consequently, many variations of counterfeit Christianity exist. Counterfeit Christianity is also present among Catholics. However, I'm presently discussing Protestant reconstructions.

► Abusing Calvinism: Calvinists have five major points; Scripture actually seems to allude to each point. But this becomes problematic when these points are dogmatized. For example, Scripture has the term predestinate. But this likely means that God decides beforehand to call those who He knows will respond favorably to the Gospel, and does not call those who He knows will reject it. Also, the idea of God ever overriding anyone's free will is foreign to both Scripture and the early Church fathers.<sup>21</sup>

Though Scripture teaches that those who made a decision for Christ are under God's special care, it doesn't say that they CANNOT be lost. It repeatedly warns that they CAN, especially Corinthians chapter 10: "Therefore [since God's people were destroyed for disobedience] let him who thinks he stands beware lest he fall" [from grace]. Since it cannot mean literal falling, like slipping on a banana peel and falling, there's only one logical alternative: falling from grace. Consider that Peter's First Epistle was clearly written to Christians. Note Peter 5:8: "Be vigilant; because your adversary the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." You would need help to misunderstand that. For a thorough expository of "once saved always saved," see Scriptural refutation of "Eternal Security" on the website *The Interactive Bible*.<sup>22</sup>

Concerning the early Church, churchmen never postulated "once saved always saved." Instead, "Continual prayer and supplication is needed, that we fall not away from the heavenly kingdom." (*Cyprian's Treatise IV:13 AD 250*) "God had foreseen.....that faith---even after baptism---would be endangered. He saw that most persons---after obtaining salvation---would be lost again, by soiling the wedding dress, by failing to provide oil for their torches." (*Tertullian's Scorpiace Chapter VI AD 213*) "Those who do not obey Him, being disinherited by Him, have ceased to be His sons." (*Irenaeus Against Heresies Book IV chapter 41 verse 3 AD 180*) "Therefore, brethren, carefully inquire concerning our salvation, lest the wicked one, having made his entrance by deceit, should hurl us forth from our [eternal] life." (*Epistle of Barnabas Chapter II AD 100*).

Also, to defend the notion that Christians cannot be lost, the No True Scotsman fallacy is used.<sup>(23)</sup> Apparent counterexamples to the always saved idea: people who manifest devout faith but subsequently abandon the Christian way of life, are dismissed with "They were never really true Christians." If this approach was legitimate, then anybody from any group could deny that scandalous members were really part of their group, or only the best examples were true members. Their claims would be unfalsifiable. Instead, "Once Saved Always Saved" is an extremely dangerous doctrine that puts believers in harm's way through overconfidence. It also engenders condemnation of backsliders as phonies instead of helping those erring brethren.

If Calvinism becomes an excuse for failing to live the Christian life, then it's counterfeit Christianity. Extreme Calvinism has God arbitrarily choosing to save some and damn others, the ones that aren't chosen are hopeless, the chosen are saved whether they want to be or not, and the saved lack free will. God does everything that pertains to salvation; the person does nothing. The early Church knew of dogmatic Calvinism and refuted it as heretical. Not until the 1500s did these sporadic notions find their catalyst in Protestant revolutionary extremism.

Extreme Calvinism supposedly shames cantankerous people who allegedly think they can play God and save themselves. Truthfully, God desires a loving relationship with everyone. Relationships are two-way streets; God in His incredible lovingkindness humbled Himself to where Christians ARE actually part of the symbiotic salvation process. Calvinism tends to create spiritual laziness and indifference; and could eliminate the motivation to seek or maintain any personal connection with God or others. This Calvinism should be suspect; it not only claims to give something for nothing it potentially claims to give everything for nothing. Rather, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12).

Dogmatic Calvinism is foreign to the early Church, is an attack point for skeptics, and a potential stumbling block for prospective believers. Then atheist Antony Flew, while debating a Calv-

inist, “hung the man by his own Calvinism.” For in depth refutations of Calvinism, *What Love is This?* and *Why I Am Not a Calvinist* are examples of the many anti-Calvinist books out there.<sup>24,25</sup>

► **Abusing Sola Fide (Faith Alone):** Many people, which seemed to include some of the earliest Christians, believe that true faith produces everything necessary to live the Christian life. For instance, if you had faith that a million dollars was buried in your backyard, you would be automatically compelled to dig it up. And God certainly doesn’t need our good works; He’s all-sufficient.

As far as works go, I’ve been challenged: “What are you doing on a daily basis to show the world the true value of Christianity? Giving to the needy? Feeding the poor? Caring for the orphans, widows, and other dependents of our society?” In response, I rarely have opportunity to do those things. Besides, we shouldn’t do good works to boast against others; it’s not a competition. Rather, good works must come from the heart. Concerning the thief on the cross, Jesus declared that he was saved without doing any works since Jesus knew the intentions of his heart.

Martin Luther trumpeted Sola Fide when financially supporting the Church (a good work) was turned into a means of extortion. Martin Luther voraciously attacked this problem, but extremism ensued. Luther made a German scripture translation, *Luther’s Bible* 1534.<sup>(26)</sup> In Romans 3:28, he claimed that the German idiom required the word *allein*, akin to alone, making man justified by faith alone. Yet in the King James Version, the only scripture passage mentioning faith alone is James 2:24, which says that man is NOT justified by faith alone. Luther conveniently denounced James as “an epistle of straw.”

In Luther’s *Letter to Melancthon #99 Paragraph 13* (Aug.1, 1521) he wrote “Be a sinner, and let your sins be strong” (letting your trust in Christ be stronger) and “No sin can separate us from Him, even if we killed or committed adultery thousands of times each day.”<sup>(27)</sup> This cannot be literally true. Everyone sins, but we should do everything possible to avoid sinning. Giving Luther the benefit of the doubt, he may have been using hyperbole. To his credit, Luther said “Works are necessary for salvation but do not cause salvation; faith alone gives life.” However, his other statements can be very damaging.

Faith Alone is problematic when used as an excuse to have a naked faith and nothing else. For example, someone may say that people are truly absolved from their sins and justified simply because they believe themselves absolved and justified, or that nobody is truly justified unless they believe themselves justified, and that this faith alone procures absolution and justification. This is antinomianism, counterfeit Christianity in which salvific faith need not produce works of obedience to Christ. Some modern Scripture translations pervert Romans 10:10, so it makes salvation a one time confession of Christ. Romans 10:10 accurately translated is UNTO salvation. That is, one must confess Christ throughout their lives, and their lives must be consistent with this profession of faith. Otherwise, it’s a false confession. Theologian Stephen Ray thoroughly refutes antinomianism on his CD *Born Again? Faith Alone?*<sup>28</sup>

Since I partially agree with several different religions, am I then a Hindu Muslim, a Jewish Buddhist, and a Christian Pagan? By accepting that you can be a member of a religion, but be non-practicing, or can pick and choose which elements you believe in, you must logically accept my premise. And what about employees who sporadically don’t show up for work and violate some company policies while supporting others? Many have accepted the absolutely unacceptable; **faith without works is demonic and dead (James 2:19-20)**. Good works (physically aiding others when able, prayer, admonishing others, and spreading the Gospel) are indispensable because good works are natural extensions of love towards God and man. **Christianity is a religion of service; Christ came to serve.**

Antinomians cannot adequately answer the simple question posed by atheist Bill Maher: “Why is faith good?” Faith is good because we cannot love God without faith in Him, faith leads to love. Those who love another would help and support him if the opportunity arose. Though opportunities to directly help and support God can never arise since He’s all-sufficient, if we help and support

God's people, we help and support God's procuracy, and therefore serve God with our heart. Was Christianity properly conveyed by the apostles to the earliest disciples or did others need to come much later as second messiahs to enlighten everyone? Since numerous current definitions of salvation are problematic, I propose Sola Fidelitas. Fidelity, no more or less, is beyond reproach.

► **Abusing Millennialism:** Concerning the book of Revelation's thousand year reign of Christ, most early disciples took it figuratively (A-millennialism), believing that it symbolized the Christian era. Others felt that there might be a special thousand year period to come. Later, pre-millennialism (Christ setting up a thousand year kingdom on Earth before the world's end) was popularized in the nineteenth century and became the centerpiece of some denominations. You can be a pre-millennialist, post-millennialist, or A-millennialist and be a Christian just the same.

However, when one's pre-millennialism involves dozens of controversial ideas such as the rapture theory, an enormous amount of time is eaten away. Christians of the first eighteen hundred years focused on living out their Christianity instead of haggling over complicated theories. Overemphasizing millennialism, Bible numerology, or other speculations that the early Church had no interest in is blowing hot air and irrelevant to how we live our lives. It becomes counterfeit Christianity when it's postulated that the Church is optional, or a millennial kingdom replaces it. It's especially counterfeit when those who rejected Christianity throughout their lifetimes can allegedly be saved in a millennial dawn which forces them to see the truth instead of walking by faith. Besides, we already have more than a second chance; we have 365 new chances each year. Then we have the perennial distortions of universal salvation or that no-body will ever face God's vengeance.

Counterfeit ideas usually arise because some religious leader's mother, daughter, or other family member either rejected Christianity, or rejected some major precept of Christianity. The leader's theology is then adjusted to accommodate that relative, while everyone is expected to bow to that one person's unfaithfulness. Even atheism has supposedly become a viable option because someone's family member rejected God. **Jesus stated "He that loveth father, mother, son, or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me." (Matthew 10:37, Luke 14:26)**

### Misidentifying the Spirit's Presence

Some claim to possess God's Spirit in an extraordinary and full measure. By accepting this premise, you could conclude that whatever they said or did was God Himself acting; a potentially dangerous idea.

Someone thought that if you walked past chirping crickets, and they stopped chirping, that proved you had the Holy Spirit. A leader of a religious group did marathon walks around the country with his followers. He said: "If you shout out hooaha, that's not the Spirit, that's just your emotions, but shouting whooha is the Holy Spirit speaking." Besides miraculous signs, financial blessings allegedly indicate the Spirit's presence, although some billionaires are practically atheists. Memory of biblical passages was considered proof of the Spirit's presence, though this would imply that mentally handicapped adults don't receive the Spirit. Others believe you can accidentally misuse the Spirit's name, thereby immediately and irrevocably damning yourself. Many televangelists claim to lead everyone to the Spirit, as long as you sent money. One television preacher said that she'd like to give someone a Holy Spirit enema while another said he'd like to shoot someone with a Holy Spirit machine gun.

These warped and embarrassing ideas don't reflect what Christ taught. Even true evidence of the Spirit such as love and joy are perverted into pure emotionalism. After observing the chaos resulting from private Protestant interpretations, **Martin Luther said "There is no rustic so rude but that if he dreams or fancies anything, it must be the whisper of the Holy Spirit, and he himself a prophet."**<sup>29</sup>

## Presumption

Christians understandably believe that both God and the Devil's forces regularly operate. However, a common mistake is declaring what is working or when. For example, if I act righteously, we cannot know if it originated from God, myself, or someone else's good influence. If I act wickedly, we cannot know if it originated from Satan, myself, or someone else's bad influence. That goes for everyone. History shows that determining it by flipping a coin is more accurate than "spiritual intuition."

Concerning natural disasters and personal tragedies, nobody can demonstrate whether such mishaps were God's wrath, Satan's wrath, the result of environmental harm, God's plan for redemptive suffering, lack of preparedness, or coincidence. For example, some self-righteously declared that God punished Californians with earthquakes for their immorality, while people in their area never stirred God's anger.

If good fortune befalls me, I cannot know if it's from my own efforts, God's blessing, or mere chance. Let's say I self-righteously declare that God blessed me by giving me my wife Suzy Q., while John Smith, who is nicer than me, must stay single. Since there's no standard of evidence, declaring such knowledge simply stirs up controversy. Instead, we can humbly say "I don't know," while acknowledging that spiritual forces do operate.

## Attacking Traditions

Catholic holidays are labeled woefully pagan. Yet according to this logic, paganism is ever present. January was named after the two-faced god Janus. February came from Februalia, a time when pagan sacrifices "atoned" for sins. March came from Mars, god of war. May came from Maia, goddess of plant growth, June from the goddess Juno. Tuesday through Saturday (Tiw's Day, Woden's Day, Thor's Day, Frigg's Day, Seterne's Day) come directly from the names of Germanic gods. Names of Roman gods became the names of planets. All stellar constellations come from Greek mythology. The United States governmental system is patterned after that of ancient pagan Rome, including the building designs.

Some complain that Easter comes from pagan Ishtar; we mustn't use the term Easter. Following that "logic", they're wrong for using the names of the days, names of the month, and all else. You can't use any of those terms; you must change it all! Besides, Easter was first proposed by Saint Athanasius, the same person who first proposed our 27 book Christian canon. Condemning Easter and other holidays causes disunity. For some, holidays are pagan; for others they are celebrations of the life God gave us, and a reason to socialize. Still others view them as a nuisance, or their turn to send a stale fruitcake that they got twenty years ago. Regardless, we should be beyond reproach before we start nitpicking.

Christians aren't supposed to be like militant atheists, who attack anything religious that they don't like. Nor should they be like some Islamic soldiers who attacked a giant stone Buddhist statue, destroying its crotch with rocket launchers. Paganism was so ingrained that the Church decided to Christianize pagan holidays, statues, et cetera, instead of vainly trying to eradicate them altogether. For example, the phoenix legend symbolized the resurrection as early as AD 100 (*Clement's First Letter to the Corinthians* chapter 25). The Apostle Paul said he became all things to everyone to win converts (*Corinthians* 9:19-22).

Although Jesus condemned vain ungodly traditions, wholesome traditions touch one's heart in today's complex impersonal world, making the Church attractive as an opening flower on the end of a stem. Schools, companies, sports teams, families, governments, and Protestants all have traditions, helping both morale and inherent stability. Yet Catholic traditions are condemned. Why? There is absolutely nothing wrong with the Church's blossoming traditions if they do not change early Church doctrine or compromise Christian living. None of the Catholic traditions are considered necessary for salvation;



they're considered aids. Since bad thoughts may enter your mind, pleasant and positive traditions might help facilitate purified thinking. This is important in our modern era, with so much screaming for our attention.

And religious images are idols? Talk about being judgmental. Idols, by definition, are something we replace God with, an outlandish accusation. When most people were illiterate, art was an important vehicle to convey the Christian message. The legitimacy of religious icons was upheld long ago; the Seventh Ecumenical Church Council rebuked the iconoclasts in AD 787. Condemning religious images causes disunity. And if religious statues are graven images, where does that leave the golden cherubim in Exodus chapter 25? Where does that leave non-religious statues, dolls, and toy soldiers? Islam is the religion of condemning images, not Christianity; Islamists do this consistently.

Church buildings themselves are the biggest deviation and financial waste, trumping all other deviations. If your group has a special building, criticizing other deviations is nonsensical. Finally, fighting or dividing over questionable matters hurts the Christian's influence. Christians, reread Romans chapter 14 carefully.

### Why People Are Protestant

The masses don't become Protestant because they righteously abhor Catholic corruption. Rather, people attempt to escape Catholic teachings. Sometimes it's because of disbelief in Catholic doctrine or to avoid obligations like Confession. Sometimes it's because the Catholic Church does not allow female clergy or limits the laity's authority. Other times, it's to freely practice unapproved lifestyles. Some use Protestantism as an excuse to discontinue churchgoing altogether.

Though the Catholic Church was faithful to historic Christianity in these areas, many claim that she made these things up or use her corruption as an excuse. While Catholics ignore or defy Church teaching, Protestants go further, having their churches tailor made to escape guilt. Yet protesting does not procure salvation; obedience does. Protestants speak for Christ only when doctrine and practice reflect the early Church. The finest Protestants may speak for Christ, but most certainly do not.

### Is Protestantism Satisfactory?

In nineteenth century America, some Protestants supported slavery while many others were silent. In the twentieth century most Protestants supported the disastrous Vietnam War. Modern slavery and the Vietnam War were extreme violations of loving thy neighbor, the Golden Rule, and human rights.

These issues, coupled with the abuse of Sola Scriptura, their theory of ongoing revelation, and other issues I've mentioned, demonstrate beyond a reasonable doubt that Protestantism is unsatisfactory. However, CHURCH IS A MUST. See 16.Holy, or All Wet?; under Harping on the Church.

Protestantism's good points outweigh the bad; it leads many to Christ. But its brokenness turns many away from Christ. And there's little difference between today's Protestantism and today's broken Catholicism. So let's fix the brokenness and seek betterment. For a solution, see 14.Revival!



