

The “Myth” of the 33,000

and

Swallowing the Holy Ghost, Feathers and All

The other day I drove through town and on one side of the street there was McDonald’s, Wendy’s, Dairy Queen, Burger King, KFC, Pizza Hut, Macaroni Grill, Arby’s, Dunkin’ Donuts, Big Boy’s and Taco Bell.



On the other side of the street I saw church buildings: Presbyterian, Lutheran, Assemblies of God, Nazarene, Methodist, Reformed Baptist, Free Will Baptist, American Baptist, Southern Baptist, Missionary Baptist, Progressive Missionary Baptist and . . . ¹



We live in a consumer society and unhappily too many people choose a “church” along Main Street the same way their appetites and tastes dictate which fast food joint they go to. And just like people jump from one restaurant to another, many Christians jump from one church to another. It is often called “church hopping” from the pews, or “sheep stealing” from the pulpit.

My grandchildren play with Legos, constructing little buildings and

¹ Of course, I made up this particular list, to make a point, but it is typical of many American towns. But here is an ACTUAL list a friend sent me. “Here are some denominations on Ferguson Rd. in Dallas, TX all within a few miles of each other: Bethel Baptist Church Of Dallas, Jehovah’s Witness Kingdom Hall (maybe not a denomination but still evidence of further splintering from the Church), Casa View United Methodist Church, White Rock Church of Christ, St. Mark Presbyterian Church, Emmanuel New Life Fellowship, Faith Seventh Day Adventist Church in Centerville, Church Of Resurrection, Ridge Pointe Fellowship (Bible Church), Ethiopian Evangelical Baptist Church (Pastor: Rev Bedilu Tanku Yirgia), Ferguson Road Baptist Church, Faith Orthodox Presbyterian Church, I. P. C. TABERNACLE DALLAS INC. (Pentecostal Church).”

houses. While watching them one day my wife chuckled, saying:

“Can you imagine Jesus building lots of different little “churches” and giving them all different names? Imagine him saying, ‘This group will believe in infant baptism and have a High liturgy, but I’ll build *this* one to teach adult believer’s baptism and to oppose infant baptism. *This* group will be headed by an ordained pastor with elders and deacons, but over here, this group will have a presbytery with a group of teaching elders. I will let them all interpret the Bible in various ways for themselves and decide the extent of morality for themselves, especially about divorce and remarriage, contraception, abortion, and other personal and sexual issues. I will build many different churches so people can find one that suits their personal preferences and beliefs.’”

And then my wife imagined 2,000 years later Our Lord looking down at what he had made: “God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was *not* very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the 2000th year.” (My wife is a very clever girl.)



Happily, Jesus wouldn’t, *and didn’t* do such a thing. It’s absurd, yet many Christians live with this perception of what the “church” is. But Jesus said He would build *His* Church (Mt 16:18), and later referred to it as THE Church, not one of many “churches” (Mt 18:17)—but THE Church. This Church would have an address and be visible to the world. It would need to have a recognized leadership so that people would know where to find it.

Let me ask a hypothetical question: If I belong to a Reformed Baptist “church” and a Christian brother from a United Methodist “church” sins and I go to him and show him his fault in private, and then before two or three witnesses—and he refuses to listen, what am I to do?

Jesus said I should “tell it to the church and if he (the sinner) refuses to listen even to THE church, then let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (Mt 18:15-18).

So, my question is: Where is THE Church? Should I take the sinner to my Reformed Baptist “church” or to the sinner’s United Methodist “church”? The situation today makes a mockery of Jesus’ words.



For Jesus' words to make any sense, THE Church would have to be world-wide, visible, have a recognizable leadership, an ability to adjudicate in matters between peoples world-wide and have AN ADDRESS—otherwise, where would the average Christian be able to find it and how would you know it had the authority to do what Jesus commissioned it to do?

The Church must also have a claim to the Keys of the Kingdom and the power to bind and loose (Matt 16 and 18), to forgive or retain sins (Jn 20:23)—since Jesus gave his Apostles that authority with the expectation it would carry on “until the end of time” (Matt 28:20).

If someone says, for example, “My Reformed Baptist “church” can do this *just fine*, thank you”—then I would ask: Where would a Christian find a Reformed Baptist “church” in the 4th, or 9th or 12th centuries to adjudicate on their behalf? What was the address of the Reformed Baptist “church” Now, if the question was asked of me, I could easily direct them to the Catholic Church, which by the way still has the keys and the power to bind and loose?

Paul also recognized THE Church when he said that THE Church is “the pillar and support of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15) What church is that? Is it the invisible church invented by the Reformers to cover for their utter lack of any vestiges of visible unity after the “magisterial reformers” disagreed on doctrine at Marburg and many departed refusing to shake hands with their fellow “magisterial reformers”?

Jesus prayed His High Priestly Prayer of John 17 on his way from the Upper Room to Gethsemane (where we will celebrate Mass in 8 days). Knowing human nature and the tendency to argue and divide, to fight and cause schisms (literally “tears”), Jesus prayed that the believers would be “perfected in unity so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me” (Jn 17:23).



Notice that the unity was to be *visible!* Why visible? Because if not visible and real, how will the world be able to see it. *Instead*, if they see splits and fights, factions and schisms, denominations and non-denominations ☹ how will they then know that the Father sent the Son—as Jesus said?

In a real sense, Jesus is saying that the world has the right to say “the Father has NOT sent the Son because look, they have no unity.” Christians say “We have the truth, believe on Jesus!” But the world looks at Christendom and sees utter chaos and confusion

—spiritual anarchy—and they can legitimately say, “Why should we trust you? Who says you have the truth? You can’t even agree or live with each other?”

This was well stated by David Pearson in his review of the new book [*In the Beginning: Bibles before the Year 1000*](#). Here is the appropriate paragraph for the matter at hand:

Many of us also sense that the price of all the divisions among Christians today is high. Too high. The non-Christian world often can't hear Christians' evangelizing voice because, to many unchurched ears, there isn't a voice to hear. There's a cacophony. Untold swarms of self-assured ambassadors contradict and compete with one another even on such basic doctrines as what a person has to do to be saved. All cite Scripture.

That’s why even Luther spoke of those who had swallowed the Holy Spirit feathers and all. He saw the writing on the wall even during his lifetime—think of how distressed he would be today if he saw the train wreck he caused.

“There is no smearer;” [Luther] said, “but when he has heard a sermon or can read a chapter in German, makes a doctor of himself and crowns his ass and convinces himself that he knows everything better than all who teach him:” (Walch V. 1652). “When we have heard or learned a few things about Holy Scripture, we think we are already doctors and have **swallowed the Holy Ghost, feathers and all:**” (Walch V. 472). . . . “This one;” he says, “will not hear of Baptism, that one denies the Sacrament, another puts a world between this and the last day: some teach that Christ is not God, some say this, some say that: there are about as many sects and creeds as there are heads. No yokel is so rude but when he has dreams and fancies, he thinks himself inspired by the Holy Ghost and must be a prophet.” (De Wette III, 61). Seeing his power and authority to control the masses gone, he now in a spirit of disappointment sarcastically remarks: “Noblemen, townsmen, peasants, all classes understand the Evangelium *better than I or St. Paul*; they are now wise and think themselves more learned than all the ministers.” (Walch XIV, 1360). Thus Luther himself testifies to the utter failure of the cardinal principle of his so-called Reformation (*The Facts about Luther* quoted in full below).



How did the early Church, which was thoroughly Catholic, practice this visible unity? What did the Church look like and what did it use as authority in the in the generation after the apostles? The great 2nd century theologian St. Irenaeus wrote,

“As I have already observed, the Church, having received this preaching and this faith, although scattered throughout the whole world, yet, *as if occupying but one*

house, carefully preserves it. She also believes these points of doctrine just as if she had but one soul, and one and the same heart, and she proclaims them, and teaches them, and hands them down, with perfect harmony, as if she possessed only one mouth. For, although the languages of the world are dissimilar, yet *the import of the tradition is one and the same*. For the churches in Germany do not believe or hand down anything different, nor do those in Spain, nor those in Gaul, nor those in the East, nor those in Egypt, nor those in Libya, nor those which have been established in the central regions [Palestine] of the world” (*Against Heresies*, 1, 10, 2).

And this same Irenaeus taught that all churches worldwide must conform to the Church in Rome because of her preeminent authority.²

Notice it is not primarily the New Testament that Irenaeus appeals to—it hadn’t even been collected into a standard collection yet (see the insert entitled *Archaeo-Apologetics* which I’ve attached at the end of this paper.) It is the tradition passed on by the apostles and their disciples (e.g., 2 Tim 2:2). Can anyone extract from Irenaeus’ quotation any idea of denominationalism or *sola Scriptura*—ideas that would not appear on the scene for over 1,000 years?³ The local churches making up the one Church were “scattered throughout the whole world, yet, as occupying one house” being unified and taught by the hierarchy of the Church. This position is diametrically opposed to my Protestant background, where no matter how much we conflicted, dissented and split into multiple and various denominations and sects, we always claimed to have some vague notion of an abstract, “invisible’ unity.

² “[We put to confusion those who assemble in unauthorized meetings] by indicating that tradition derived from the apostles, of the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul; as also [by pointing out] the faith preached to men, which comes down to our time by means of the successions of the bishops. [For to this Church, on account of more potent principality, it is necessary that every Church (that is, those who are on every side faithful) resort; in which Church ever, by those who are on every side, has been preserved that tradition which is from the apostles.]

“The blessed apostles, then, having founded and built up the Church, committed into the hands of Linus the office of the episcopate. Of this Linus, Paul makes mention in the Epistles to Timothy. To him succeeded Anacletus; and after him, in the third place from the apostles, Clement was allotted the bishopric. . . . To this Clement there succeeded Evaristus. Alexander followed Evaristus; then, sixth from the apostles, Sixtus was appointed; after him, Telephorus, who was gloriously martyred; then Hyginus; after him, Pius; then after him, Anicetus. Soter having succeeded Anicetus, Eleutherius does now, in the twelfth place from the apostles, hold the inheritance of the episcopate. In this order, and by this succession, the ecclesiastical tradition from the apostles, and the preaching of the truth, have come down to us. And this is most abundant proof that there is one and the same vivifying faith, which has been preserved in the Church from the apostles until now, and handed down in truth” (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3, 3 in ANF 1:415-416).

³ Jesus taught John, John taught Polycarp, and Polycarp recited verbatim the words of the apostles to Irenaeus. He is an orthodox defender of the faith against heresies of his day. He would have refuted Reformed Baptists with a vengeance. He was bishop of Lyons and lived from 120-200. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* refers to him no less than 25 times. Should I trust a man like Irenaeus or an angry, pompous man like our naysayer?

Read my recent blog about divisions and splitting within Protest-antism. It is entitled "[Church's Name: Sad or Humorous](#)".

That the early Church saw the need for a visible unity based on the Chair of St. Peter can be seen in the words of bishop and martyr, St. Cyprian of Carthage (beheaded 258 AD):

“The Lord says to Peter: ‘I say to you,’ He says, ‘that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it. And to you I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatever things you bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth, they shall be loosed also in heaven.’ And again He says to him after His resurrection: ‘Feed my sheep.’ On him He builds the Church, and to him He gives the command to feed the sheep; and although He assigns a like power to all the Apostles, yet He founded a single chair, and He established by His own authority a source and an intrinsic reason for that unity. Indeed, the others were that also which Peter was; but a primacy is given to Peter, whereby it is made clear that there is but one Church and one chair. So too, all are shepherds, and the flock is shown to be one, fed by all the Apostles in single-minded accord. If someone does not hold fast to this unity of Peter, can he imagine that he still holds the faith? If he desert the chair of Peter upon whom the Church was built, can he still be confident that he is in the Church?”⁴

33,000 Denominations

There has been some question raised about my use of the number 33,820 related to denominations and para-denominations. I had quoted from the Oxford University Press's *Encyclopedia of World Religions*. I own this set of books, by the way, so I have access to the data, and the numbers are staggering, no matter *how* you slice the pie. But that is not the only source for these types of scandalous numbers.

Yes, there are a number of schismatic Catholic groups and Eastern Orthodox that have broke with Rome. That is a tragedy too! But keeping things in perspective, Catholics make up over 1 billion people with a visible source of unity in the Pope and the bishops—a source of unity that has existed for 2,000 years as the longest existing institution in the Western world.

However, **I think our opponent is missing the whole point—majoring on the minors and forgetting the majors.** No matter how you slice up



⁴ *The Unity of the Catholic Church* 4 in Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, 1:220 written between 251–256 A.D. For more on this see my book [Upon this Rock](#).

the pie, whether Christendom is divided up into 2,000, 10,000, 20,000 or 33,000 different groups or denominations—any such number is staggering. Whether it is Catholic or Orthodox schisms or Protestant denominationalist metastasis (cancer), it is a repulsive violation of Jesus' words and prayer. But even if it *were fraction* of the number we Catholic apologists rail against—that would *still* be a scandal in light of Jesus' prayer in John 17⁵ and Paul's condemnation of denominations and factions (e. g., 1 Cor 3:3-5; 11:18-19; Gal 5:20).

How many splinter groups and denominations does it take until it starts being NOT PERFECTED IN UNITY? Is it 2,000, 10,000, 20,000 or 33,000? How many is *more than one!* THAT is the point! When I use large numbers in the future I will be careful cushion them with a thousand qualifications, but the reality is that Christendom is in chaos as even Martin Luther acknowledged at the end of his lifetime.

When someone accuses Catholic apologist of intentionally “lying” when they quote large numbers for Protestant denominations should stifle their overly dramatic hysteria. The Catholic speakers and writers are getting the large numbers from many and reliable sources and have no intent to lie or deceive. One may accuse them of getting the exact numbers wrong,⁶ or misunderstanding the data completely, but accusing them of being liars is not only playing God—who alone can know people's true motives and intent—but is dishonest, unfair, and frankly, it smacks of hysteria, hostility and ignorance.

But even if these numbers are not all fully correct, a drive down Main Street still demonstrates the magnitude of the problem. No more do Christians share one meal (Eucharist), in one house (the Church) with one truth. Now we witness the most *segregated hour of the week* as thousands of competing flocks eat separate meals (or none at all), in many dens⁷ and houses many houses and competing “truths” that are all over the map.

Of course our antagonist, like thousands of other petty “pope-wanna-be's”—waves his sword in defense of their own little empire with his groupies gathered all around

⁵ Jesus prayed: “I do not ask on behalf of these [Apostles] alone, but for *those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one*; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, *so that the world may believe that You sent Me*. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, *that they may be one, just as We are one*; I in them and You in Me, *that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me*, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.” (John 17:20-23, NASB95).

⁶ Even the scholars and statisticians would admit that it is hard to collect the full and reliable data. With the ever changing and splitting scene of Protestantism, it is like counting blackbirds swooping around the neighborhood sitting in trees, flying over houses in their ever changing arrangement. It would be a daunting task and the landscape would change again in a matter of minutes.

⁷ St. Augustine used the title “dens” for those who gathered illicitly outside the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

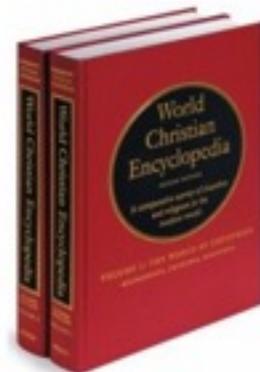
chanting. He thinks HE has the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. He thinks that because *he* is the one who has the CORRECT interpretation of the Bible all others should bow before him. Everyone should follow his angry “pontificating,” with salutes—they should march lock-stepped behind him and his know-it-all pronouncements.

For those who want to see some of the sources for the numbers used by Patrick Madrid, Tim Staples, Al Kresta, Dave Armstrong, myself and others, I have provided some info in the box below from Dave Armstrong’s website. I also have many other sources in my library and you can find it on-line. If you don’t need all this information, you can skip the boxed text below and continue reading.

“There are indeed sources for these numbers and they are neither Catholic nor unscholarly. To summarize briefly:

“According to the *Dictionary of Christianity in America* [Protestant] (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1990): “As of 1980 David B. Barrett identified **20,800** Christian denominations worldwide . . .” (“*Denominationalism*,” page 351). I have this book, so I have seen this with my own eyes. Barrett “classified them into seven major blocs and 156 ecclesiastical traditions.” This is from the Oxford [*World Christian Encyclopedia*](#) (1982) of which he is the editor. Also, according to the United Nations statistics there were over **23,000** competing and often contradictory denominations worldwide (*World Census of Religious Activities* [U.N. Information Center, NY, 1989]). This was cited in Frank Schaeffer’s book *Dancing Alone* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Press, 1994), page 4. Schaeffer is Orthodox [not Catholic]. The 1999 *Encyclopedia of Christianity* has this to say: “In 1985 David Barrett could count **22,150** distinct denominations worldwide.” (edited by E. Fahlbusch, et al., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999, vol. 1, p. 800, s.v. “Denomination”). Barrett is the statistical editor. Again citing the Oxford University Press’s [*World Christian Encyclopedia*](#) (1982): “. . . a projected **22,190** by 1985 . . . The present net increase is 270 denominations each year (five new ones a week).” (pages 15-18). [Steve’s Note: This report from Dave Armstrong was written before the latest appeared in 2001 which shows the markedly larger numbers of Protestant denominations due to increases in the number of fragmentations, new churches and denominations forming.].

“The definition Barrett worked with was that a denomination was ‘an organized Christian Church or tradition or religious group or community of believers or aggregate of worship centers or congregations, usually within a specific country, whose component congregations and members are called by the same name in different areas, regarding themselves as an autonomous Christian church distinct from other denominations,



churches and traditions.’ Now, this is where the figures ultimately come from. No doubt some Catholic apologists (even more well-known ones) use them as a kind of “folk truth” -- having heard them bandied about, and we will examine some serious problems with them below. But that doesn’t mean the numbers were entirely made-up and arbitrary. As we see, this is untrue: they come from these sources.”⁸

To see the actual pages from the [World Christian Encyclopedia](#), click here

[Denomination Chart page 1](#)

[Denomination Chart page 2](#)

[Denomination Chart page 3](#)

[Denominations pg 1 - World Christian Encyclopedia](#)

[Denominations pg 2 - World Christian Encyclopedia](#)

Let’s Look at the Data:

It may be the way one wants to read the data, but to call people liars because they read the data the way it is presented by the source is quite disingenuous. I have copied the chart covering three pages from the *World Christian Encyclopedia*. I think everyone involved with apologetics should have a copy of this set. This chart is what all the hubbub is all about.

Now you can see the data for yourself — and you can be the judge whose numbers are right and who's are wrong. You can see who is trying to be fair and who is being disingenuous.

You can see the Chart for yourself. It is entitled: "**Organized Christianity: global membership ranked by 6 major ecclesiastico-cultural megablocs and 300 major traditions AD 1970-2025.**" This chart is found on pages 16-18 of the [World Christian Encyclopedia](#) published by Oxford University Press.

The pages linked above are very significant because it has the total numbers along the bottom.

What do you see on the Chart?

When you look at the chart you will see the 6 megablocs are 1) Orthodox, 2) Roman Catholic, 3) Aanglican, 4) Protestant, 5) Independent, 6) Marginal Christian. Together these groups made up 33,909 "denominations" (their word, not mine) in 2000 AD.

1) Orthodox broke with Rome around 1000 AD. They are a schism and in 2000 AD made up 764 of this number.

2) Roman Catholics make up 242 of this number but they are almost all in union with Rome just with names like Melkite, Maronite, etc.

⁸ Quoted from “How Many Protestant Denominations Are There? The 20,000 30,000 numbers and David Barrett’s statistics” (by Dave1988 and others from the Catholic Answers boards posted April 12, 2005 05:52 PM itsjustdave1988) found at <http://www.bringyou.to/apologetics/a120.htm>

3) Anglicans made up 168 "denominations." Though listed in a separate category than "Protestant" they can certainly be seen as "protestant" having broke from Rome in the same century as the followers of Luther and Calvin. However, their numbers are insignificant.

4) Protestants make up 8,973 "denominations." This category includes mainline Protestant groups like Baptists, Adventists, Presbyterian, Lutheran, etc.

5) Independent Christian groups made up 22,148 "denominations" and included groups like Independent Baptist, Plymouth Brethren, Independent Methodist, Independent Lutheran, Apostolic Congregations, Charismatic denominations, Pentecostal, other Adventists, Reformed Anglicans, Independent Reformed Presbyterian, Old Catholic, and many more (see the chart). *Now, if you cut these out and say they are not "protestant" then my numbers are false.* But even though they are listed as "Independent" they are every bit "protestant denominations." To say that one who counts these as "protestant denominations" are liars is quite disingenuous.

6) Marginal Christian groups make up only 1,596. These include Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Liberal Catholic, Gnostic, Swedenborgian, etc. These are not "protestant" but certainly fall within the pale of appearing as "Christian" to an uneducated observer.

[My Sincere Apology:](#)

So, what do we have? Cut out the Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican and Marginal Christian groups and you end up with 31,121 Protestant and Independent Protestant denominations. So, I sincerely apologize for being 1,879 too high when I said the number was 33,000. That works out to 5.6% in error. You all have my sincere apology 😊

However, by now, 15 years beyond 2,000 AD, I suspect my number is now too low and maybe I should raise it to well over 40,000.

[Now what do we find projected for 2025?](#)

Here are the projections which you can also see on the Chart.

Catholics will go from 242 in 2000 to 245 in 2025. More rites loyal to Rome will be added.

Anglicans will go from 168 to 169.

Protestants Mainline denominations will go from 8,973 to 9,490.

Independent "protestant" churches will go from 22,148 to a whopping 49,431.

Marginals will go from 1,596 to 2,030.

Looking at these numbers – with the charts provided so you can see for yourself – if someone wants to call me and the other Catholic apologists liars, then I would be very careful about anything else they tell you. **And we may ask who really owes who an apology?**

[Division is a Scandal](#)

No matter how many splinter groups broke off during the Reformation or after—and have

continued to split and break off ever since—it is a scandal! And, the world—according to what Jesus said—has the right to judge the validity of the Christian truth and message based on that fragmentation—that lack of unity. According to Jesus the world can judge whether the Father sent the Son by whether the Christians maintain or discard a visible unity.

And, this unity cannot be some phantom, invisible, imperceivable unity. An invisible sort of “brotherhood of all real Christians” won’t due. It has to be a thing the world can see. It is the Catholic Church that still maintains this in its universality, theology and community.

And was *sola Scriptura* the cause of denominational fragmentation?

I would not say completely since schisms ruptured the Church before the Reformers even invented the novel and man-made doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. But it certainly helped and justified and furthered the fragmentation of Christendom—making it even acceptable. It is a dangerous, destructive and unbiblical teaching. It is novel and new and has brought as much damage to Christendom as about anything could.

Sheep need a shepherd. And because Jesus knew this before he went away to heaven to prepare a place for us, he appointed Peter his visible shepherd on earth (Jn 21:15-17). When a schismatic like Luther breaks open the gate of the sheepfold and encourages the sheep to ignore the shepherd and follow their own interpretations and whims, the sheep scatter. Look at Christendom today and notice the resemblance to a scattered flock of sheep.



Catholics have always held the principle of “evangelize, grow and multiply”—but maintain one flock with one shepherd. Protest-ants often have the attitude of “split and

multiply” and the result of this failed *sola Scriptura* fiasco can be seen today on Main Street in every American town.⁹

Even Luther saw the result of letting the cat out of the bag. I quote from the book [*There We Stood, Here We Stand : Eleven Lutherans Rediscover Their Catholic Roots*](#)

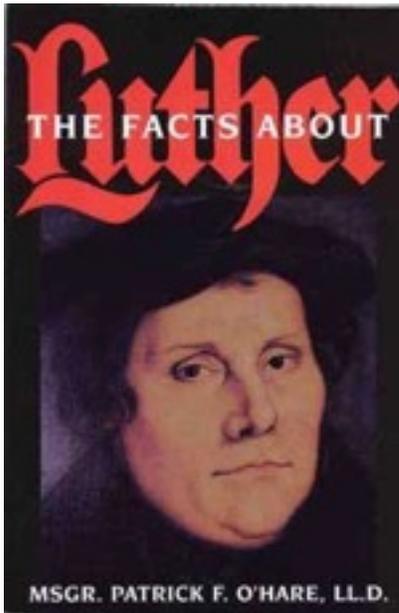
“Prior to his death, Luther was able to see the catastrophic effects of *sola Scriptura* as shown by this quote in a letter to fellow reformer Heinrich Zwingli. “There are almost as many sects and beliefs as there are heads; this one will not admit Baptism; that one rejects the Sacrament of the altar; another places another world between the present one and the day of judgment; some teach that Christ is not God. There is not an individual, however clownish he may be who does not claim to be inspired by the Holy Ghost, and who does not put forth as prophecies his ravings and dreams.” He conceded that reformers would again have to rely on church councils in order to preserve the unity of the faith that had been so fragmented by the interpretations given to Scripture.

“As little as a year after the Ninety Five Theses, Luther wrote to Pope Leo X that “I never approved of a Schism nor will I approve of it for all eternity ... that the Roman Church is more honored by God than all others is not to be debated ... though nowadays everything is in a wretched state, it is no grounds for separating from the Church. On the contrary, the worse things are going, the more we should hold close to her, for it is not by separating from the Church that we can make her better ... There is no sin, no amount of evil, which should be permitted to dissolve the bond of charity or break the bond of unity of the body” (edited by Tim Drake [1st Books Library, 2001).

More about Luther is included in the box below for those who want to see what happened with *sola Scriptura* even in his lifetime. If you want to skip ahead, read past the boxed text. The text is taken from the book [*The Facts About Luther*](#). It is a fascinating read!

⁹ Once I did a quick review of just some of the Baptist denominations. Here is the short list, most or all of whom our opponent would disagree with on some major issues: American Baptist Assoc., American Baptist Churches in the USA, Baptist Bible Fellowship, Baptist General Conference, Baptist Missionary Assoc. of America, Bethel Ministerial Assoc., Black Baptist, Central Baptist Assoc., Conservative (oops, already mentioned that one), Two competing Duck River Assoc. of Baptists, Free Will Baptist, General Assoc. of Regular Baptist Churches (the ‘regular’ really sets them apart), General Baptist (who claim to be the *true* followers of John Smyth), Gen. Conf. of the Evangelical Baptist Church., Inc. (formerly known as the Church of the Full Gospel, Inc., and now they’re just evangelical), Landmark Baptist, National Baptist Evangelical Life and Soul Saving Assembly of the USA (their only doctrine is “Bible doctrine as announced by the Founder of the Church, Jesus Christ”), National Primitive Baptist, North American Baptist (announcing their non-universal quality), Primitive Baptist, Reformed Baptist, Separate Baptist (they reject all creeds, however they have an annual statement of belief and refuse to be called Protestants), Seventh Day Baptist, Southern Baptist, and the Two-Seed group, United Baptist and United Free Will Baptist, not to count all the ones who are too small to categorize or refuse to be categorized.

This travesty of the Divine Revelation [Luther's translation of the Bible], falsified in most of its lines and stripped of its divine character, he gave to the people on his own authority to be henceforward their sole means of salvation and their guide in judging for themselves in all matters of faith. To spite the authority of the Church and advance his destructive theories, he constituted everybody, man or woman, young or old, learned or unlearned, wise or foolish, absolute judges of the meaning of the Bible. This arbitrary act pleased the unthinking multitudes, who now with lamentable folly began like himself to reject the authority of the Church established by God and to substitute, therefore, the authority of man, human, fallible, blasphemous and bent on the destruction of the Christian creed and of divine faith. Through the fluctuations of passion and the inconsistencies of the human intellect, divisions and parties and sects began to abound on all sides as a result of widely different interpretations, until the Inspired Word of God, made the text-book of party strife, lost all its divine character and sank to the human mind.



The work begun by Luther was followed up with ardor by those whom he led into rebellion against the Church. Beza, Zwingli, Calvin and a host of other malcontents claimed the same power and authority as Luther, to be supreme judges of the interpretation and meaning of the Scriptures. In their hands the Bible, without note or comment, without an infallible voice to which men may listen, became the fruitful source of disunion, the foundation of enormous and conflicting errors, and the destroyer one by one of nearly all the principal truths of revealed religion. It is really painful to read the lamentations of the Protestant writers of those days over the utter and inextricable confusion in which nearly every doctrinal subject had been involved by the disputes and contentions consequent upon the introduction of the

individual interpretation of the Bible. "So great," writes the learned Christopher Fischer, superintendent of Smalkald, "are the corruptions, falsifications and scandalous contentions which, like a fearful deluge, overspread the land, and afflict, disturb, mislead and perplex poor, simple, common men not deeply read in Scriptures, that one is completely bewildered as to what side is right and to which he should give his adhesion." An equally unimpeachable witness of the same period admits that "so great, on the part of most people, is the contempt of religion, the neglect of piety and the trampling down of virtue, that they would seem not to be Christians, nothing but downright savage barbarians:"

Luther sowed the wind and reaped the whirlwind. He saw the miseries of the distracted Reformation he brought into life and was plunged into the deepest despair.

Losing all control of himself, he would at times berate with severest, even unbecoming language, all who dared to put into practice the principle of private judgment. In one of his frequent exhibitions of temper he cried out: "How many doctors have I made by preaching and writing! Now they say, Be off with you. Go off with you. Go to the devil. Thus it must be. When we preach they laugh. ...When we get angry and threaten them, they mock us, snap their fingers at us and laugh in their sleeves." (Walch VII. 2310). What other treatment could he expect? He taught them to decide for themselves the meaning of the Bible, and as his teaching led to the creation of as many creeds as there were individuals, he had none to blame but himself. According to his own principle, the opinions of any of the rabble were as good as his in finding out their faith and in the interpretation of the Scripture. When he did away with divine authority and rejected a divine witness in dealing with the Bible, it ill became him to lecture his own children for imitating his example.

"There is no smearer;" he said, "but when he has heard a sermon or can read a chapter in German, makes a doctor of himself and crowns his ass and convinces himself that he knows everything better than all who teach him." (Walch V. 1652). "When we have heard or learned a few things about Holy Scripture, we think we are already doctors and have **swallowed the Holy Ghost, feathers and all:**" (Walch V. 472). Mark how this erratic man speaks of the third person of the Blessed and Adorable Trinity. Will the Bible Christian approve the blasphemous language? Does this show his mouth was the mouth of Christ? We will not wait for an answer, as we would learn more from Luther concerning the failure of his cherished teaching. "This one;" he says, "will not hear of Baptism, that one denies the Sacrament, another puts a world between this and the last day: some teach that Christ is not God, some say this, some say that: there are about as many sects and creeds as there are heads. No yokel is so rude but when he has dreams and fancies, he thinks himself inspired by the Holy Ghost and must be a prophet." (De Wette III, 61). Seeing his power and authority to control the masses gone, he now in a spirit of disappointment sarcastically remarks: "Noblemen, townsmen, peasants, all classes understand the Evangelium *better than I or St. Paul;* they are now wise and think themselves more learned than all the ministers." (Walch XIV, 1360). Thus Luther himself testifies to the utter failure of the cardinal principle of his so-called Reformation.

As early as 1523, when Carl von Bodmann heard that Luther declared the Bible's authority is to be recognized as far only as it agrees with one's "spirit," he asked the very pertinent question: "What will be the consequences of the Reformer's principle about the interpretation and value of the Sacred Scriptures? He rejects this book and that as not apostolic, as spurious, because it does not agree with his spirit. Other people will reject other books for the same reasons; and finally, they will not believe in the Bible at all and will treat it like any profane book."

Von Bodmann's words seemed to have in them the ring of prophecy. The outlook for the honor, dignity and authority of the Bible among the followers of the Reformer was indeed gloomy. Luther saw the injurious results of his principle of private interpretation. Depressed by the thoughts of what the future would unfold, he said to Melancthon one day whilst at table: "There will be the greatest confusion. Nobody will allow himself to be led by another man's doctrine or authority. Everybody will be his own rabbi: hence the greatest scandals." (Lauterb. 91). Just so. He opened the floodgates of infidelity, and nothing but ruin and disaster to countless souls might be expected in consequence" (Msgr. Patrick F. O'Hare. [The Facts About Luther](#) [Tan Books & Publishers; (Rep) edition (June 1987)], pgs. 206-209.

So much for the "myth" of the 33,000 denominations and the denial of the damage caused by *sola Scriptura*. In the future I will qualify the numbers—explaining that whether the Protestant denominations number 10,000 or 33,000 it is still a scandal and ultimately a result of the Reformation's legitimization of schism and factions and the building of new "churches" while despising and shunning the Church Jesus is building.

Again, I am proud to be Catholic and will spend the rest of my days proclaiming the truth of Jesus Christ and his Church.

There is a lot of truth in the following joke. It is exaggerated of course, but you don't have to go through too many fights and contentions involved in a church splits to know there is a lot of truth in this joke. We had our fair share when we were in various Protestant "churches."

Baptists on a Bridge

A man was walking across a bridge one day, and saw another man in despair standing on the edge, about to jump off. The first man immediately ran over and said "Stop! Don't jump!"

"Why shouldn't I?" he said.

"Well, there's so much to live for!"

"Like what?"

"Well ... are you religious or atheist?"

"Religious."

"Me too! Are you Christian or Jewish?"

"Christian."

"Me too! Are you Catholic or Protestant?"

"Protestant."

"Me too! Are you Presbyterian or Baptist?"

"Baptist."

“Wow! Me too! Are you Missionary Baptist Church or Progressive Baptist Church?”

“Missionary Baptist Church.”

“Me too! Are you Original Missionary Baptist or are you Reformed Missionary Baptist?”

“Reformed Missionary Baptist.”

“Me too! Are you Reformed Missionary Baptist following the reforms of 1979, or Reformed Missionary Baptist Church following the break in 1985?”

“Reformed Missionary Baptist, following the reforms of 1979!”

To which the first man said, “You heretic! You don’t even know the Bible! Go ahead and jump” at which point he pushed him off the bridge.

If anyone thinks that denominationalism has not metastasized into unbelievable proportions, take a ride down Main Street. Anyone claiming that *sola Scriptura* is normative, will have to go back and edit the history and writings of the first 1,000 years of Christianity!