ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST
CATHOLIC CHURCH

EVANGELIZING PROTESTANTS

By Fr. Emmanuel Akalue

Key:

1. Please, this presentation may appear long; yet concerning all that is important for evangelizing "Christians of Other Communions", it is not exhaustive.
2. Do not be scared about the length of this presentation. You do not have to read or study the entire content one-time. It is divided into sessions. This will assist you to read or study the content, at least, session by session. One session may be enough for one login.
3. There is a total of 7 Sessions here. To select a particular session (for instance "**Session 4**" or any other), please (on your keyboard): Press "**Ctrl** and **F**" together, and Type "Session 4" and Press the "**Enter key**." (This will only work on each page.)
4. You need to study the content as often as possible. In that way, you will absorb the content and grow in the ministry of evangelization.
5. Always pray to the Holy Spirit for guidance and enlightenment before you begin to read or study the materials.
6. Please, for questions, comments and clarifications: *contact the author at "emmanuelrev@yahoo.com."*
7. I wish you God's blessings. Amen.

Section 1: Overview & Methodology

SESSION I: Overview and Methodology

Objective of this Presentation:

The following presentation will help Catholic Christians primarily to understand how to evangelize our "separated brethren", the "Christians of other Communions" and bring them into Full Communion in the One Church founded and willed by Christ through Peter. Whatever they are called, Protestants, Separated Brethren or Christians of Other Communions, we refer mainly to Lutherans, Episcopalians, Methodists, Main Stream

Baptists, Anglicans, etc. Their teachings are similar but amazingly different. We will not cover all their different peculiarities. We shall simply discuss the essential areas. Prayer for unity is very important because it is the work of the Lord; grace is the effective power: *"Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain" (Psalm 127:1).*

Need to put aside Excuses: Many Catholic Christians do not see the need to evangelize and work for Full Unity, Full Communion. We must always follow the spirit of the Good Shepherd who does not relax until the lost sheep is restored and the scattered sheep are gathered into the fold. The Lord declares,

> *My sheep were scattered, they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill; my sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them. Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD.... **Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out.** As a shepherd seeks out his flock when some of his sheep have been scattered abroad, so will I seek out my sheep; and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the peoples, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land.... will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will watch over; I will feed them in justice (Ezek 34:6-7, 11-13, 16).*

Jesus came to gather into one fold the scattered children of God. We need to work for unity with Him. It is not open to our private sentiments or the tendency to say that divided Christendom does not matter. Jesus states categorically, *"He who is not with me is against me, and **he who does not gather with me scatters"*** (Matt 12:20; Mark 11:23). Accordingly, Pope Paul VI calls on all to emulate our Lord, His Apostles and committed evangelizers of all time and put aside obstacles and excuses that hinder evangelization, as follows:

> Our appeal here is inspired by the fervor of the greatest preachers and evangelizers…. They have known how to overcome many obstacles to evangelization. Such obstacles are … the lack of fervor. It is all the more serious because it comes from

> within. It is manifested in fatigue, disenchantment, compromise, lack of interest and above all lack of joy and hope…. This fervor demands … we should… put aside the excuses which would impede evangelization. The most insidious of these excuses are certainly the ones which people claim to find support for in such and such a teaching of the Council. Thus one too frequently hears it said, in various terms, that to impose a truth, be it that of the Gospel, or to impose a way, be it that of salvation, cannot but be a violation of religious liberty. Besides, it is added, why proclaim the Gospel when the whole world is saved by uprightness of heart? We know likewise that the world and history are filled with "seeds of the Word"; is it not therefore an illusion to claim to bring the Gospel where it already exists in the seeds that the Lord Himself has sown? Anyone who takes the trouble to study in the Council's documents the questions upon which these excuses draw too superficially will find quite a different view. [1]

Methodology and Principles for Effective Evangelization:

Need for Respect: It is important to make evangelization a respectful effort. The principle is that “What unites us is much greater than what divides us” (Pope John XXIII). We acknowledge that Protestants are truly Christians in as much as they are properly baptized; however, we must respectfully point out that they are “not churches” in the proper sense for the reasons disclosed above. In this area, since they are Christians, we do not consider them as “converts” when they come into the Catholic Church. So a Catholic evangelizer can make this very useful point to the person, “You do not need to convert to the Catholic Church. You are already a Christian with proper baptism; all that is necessary is to work toward Full Communion in the Catholic Church.”

IN GOD WE TRUST

Conviction that our brothers and sisters deserve to know the truth: We teach the truth in love. Christ says, *“If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free”* (John 8:31-32). Accordingly, Pope Paul VI declares,

> The Gospel entrusted to us is also the word of truth…. Every evangelizer is expected to have a reverence for truth, especially since the truth that he studies and communicates is none other than revealed

> truth and hence, more than any other, a sharing in the first truth which is God Himself. The preacher of the Gospel will therefore be a person who even at the price of personal renunciation and suffering always seeks the truth that he must transmit to others. He never betrays or hides truth out of a desire to please men, in order to astonish or to shock, nor for the sake of originality or a desire to make an impression. He does not refuse truth. He does not obscure revealed truth by being too idle to search for it, or for the sake of his own comfort, or out of fear. He does not neglect to study it. He serves it generously, without making it serve him. [2]

Accordingly, respect and sensitivity does not in any way imply dispensing with the truth. In this area, the History of the Church is very important. It will show how the age long teachings of the Church became entangled. The Teachings of the Fathers of the Church and the Ecumenical Councils will help to align the teachings correctly. These teachings are deeply rooted in Scripture and Apostolic Practice of the Church (Sacred Tradition) since the first century. It is important that the evangelizer be cognizant that he or she only proposes the truth in love, never to impose it, as Pope Paul VI advises,

> It would certainly be an error to impose something on the consciences of our brethren. But to propose to their consciences the truth of the Gospel and salvation in Jesus Christ, with complete clarity and with a total respect for the free options which it presents – "without coercion, or dishonorable or unworthy pressure" – far from being an attack on religious liberty is fully to respect that liberty, which is offered the choice of a way that even non-believers consider noble and uplifting. Is it then a crime against others' freedom to proclaim with joy a Good News which one has come to know through the Lord's mercy? And why should only falsehood and error, debasement and pornography have the right to be put before people and often unfortunately imposed on them by the destructive propaganda of the mass media, by the tolerance of legislation, the timidity of the good and the impudence of the wicked? The respectful presentation of Christ and His kingdom is more than the evangelizer's right; it is his duty. It is likewise the right of his fellow men to

> receive from him the proclamation of the Good News of salvation.[3]

Need for reconciliation: A great deal of information many Catholic Christians and our separated brethren have received about the "Reformation" are largely evaluations from human perspectives, namely, human reactions to some challenges in the Church. The truth is, as Vatican II admitted, both parties had their fair share of the blame. We cannot continue bickering over the past; rather we should listen to the voice of the Lord: *"So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift"* (Matthew 5:23-24). There is absolutely nothing wrong with admitting some flaws in the past and, possibly, apologizing, on behalf of the Church, for past sins and perhaps present sins too. St. John rightly stated, "*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1John 1:8).* Below are the words of Pope John Paul II calling for reconciliation between Christian "churches":

> Christians cannot underestimate the burden of *long-standing misgivings* inherited from the past, and of mutual *misunderstandings* and *prejudices*. *Complacency, indifference* and *insufficient knowledge of one another* often make this situation worse. Consequently, the commitment to ecumenism must be based upon the conversion of hearts and upon prayer, which will also lead to the *necessary purification of past memories*. With the grace of the Holy Spirit, the Lord's disciples, inspired by love, by the power of the truth and by a sincere desire for mutual forgiveness and reconciliation, are called to *re-examine together their painful past* and the hurt which that past regrettably continues to provoke even today. [4]
>
> The Catholic Church acknowledges and confesses *the weaknesses of her members,* conscious that their sins are so many betrayals of and obstacles to the accomplishment of the Savior's plan. Because she feels herself constantly called to be renewed in the spirit of the Gospel, she does not cease to do penance. At the same time, she acknowledges and exalts still more *the power of the Lord,* who fills her with the gift of holiness, leads her forward, and conforms her to his Passion and Resurrection. [5]

> It is necessary to pass from antagonism and conflict to a situation where each party recognizes the other as a *partner*. When undertaking dialogue, *each side must presuppose in the other a desire for reconciliation*, for *unity in truth*. For this to happen, any display of mutual opposition must disappear. Only thus will dialogue help to overcome division and lead us closer to unity. [6]

Need for Unity: It is proper to point out that the failings of the hierarchy and the laity does not give anyone the audacity to divide the Church. "*Christ calls all his disciples to unity*…. If they wish truly and effectively to oppose the world's tendency to reduce to powerlessness the Mystery of Redemption, they must *profess together the same truth about the Cross".* [7]

Need for Love: Granted, there are always those moments of frustration. Even St. Paul sometimes became frustrated: *"Paul was occupied with preaching, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be upon your heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles"* (Acts 18:5-6). As much as possible, we also should strive to do everything with gentleness and reverence and with a sincere conscience; always resist getting frustrated. One can point out the truth without becoming judgmental and condemning the other. Pope Paul VI provides us a general picture of what love in evangelization entails below:

> A sign of love will be the concern to give the truth and to bring people into unity…. A devotion to the proclamation of Jesus Christ, without reservation or turning back…. Respect for the religious and spiritual situation of those being evangelized. Respect for their tempo and pace; no one has the right to force them excessively. Respect for their conscience and convictions, which are not to be treated in a harsh manner…. Concern not to wound the other person, especially if he or she is weak in faith, with statements that may be clear for those who are already initiated but which for the faithful can be a source of bewilderment and scandal, like a wound in the soul…. [And] the effort to transmit to Christians not doubts and uncertainties born of an erudition poorly assimilated but certainties that are solid because they are anchored in the Word of God. The faithful need these certainties for

their Christian life; they have a right to them, as children of God who abandon themselves entirely into His arms and to the exigencies of love. [8]

Prayer for Unity:
Almighty God and Father, we beg you to bend our hearts to your will. Forgive us our sins of division. Help us to be ready to make amends that we may worship you as you will, not as we want or prefer to do. Grant us the anointing of your Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Unity and Truth, that we may work for the unity of your Church according to your irrevocable will. May we repent of our pride and yield to the glory of your Name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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Section 2: General Resources

SESSION 2: General Resources for Evangelizing our Separated Brethren:

Spiritual, Catechetical, and Doctrinal Resources to Evangelize Protestants: The Bible is the most important tool, especially as the starting point. At this level, the Catechism of the Catholic Church may not be advisable. Such proper “maturity of faith books” like the Catechism, Papal documents, etc, are good after the prospective candidates for Full Communion with the Catholic Church have began to appreciate the fullness of the truth. What will be useful, apart from the Bible, is Church History. Here, emphasis should be placed on the Ecumenical Councils (starting with Acts Chapter 15, the First Ecumenical Council in Jerusalem). Then the Teachings of the Early Father’s of the Church will be important to show the trajectory of development in what the Church has always believed and taught prior to the advent of the “Reformation.” Such an approach, I believe, could help many Protestants understand some of the mistakes of Protestant Reformation. Unless the errors are clearly presented to our separated brethren, it will be difficult for them to dissociate from such prevailing inaccuracies and misunderstandings.

Clarify their true Christian Status: It is important, I must reiterate this point, to clarify to our brothers and sisters in this category, that they are truly “Christians”, but NOT “Churches”. They truly belong to the Catholic Church, which is the one Church from Christ and the Apostles, for almost two thousand years. It is similar to children renouncing their family tree. That happens but it is always a superficial renunciation because their DNA will always give them away. This is not to denigrate our Protestant brothers and sisters in anyway. It is the truth, according to the Word of God. We must always respectfully point out to them that founding a Church is God’s prerogative. There is no reason why they cannot understand this. Only God can found His Covenant People; God/Jesus alone is “*the pioneer and perfecter of our faith*” (Hebrews 12:2). God alone is the initiator of His Covenant. Never is there any scenario in the Bible where a human being initiates a covenant and invites God to participate in it. The Church is the Covenant People of God. Only God founded it on His terms. God has never, in any passage of the Bible, mandated anyone to divide it or to initiate a new one. We need “to walk humbly with God” (Micah 6:8). That is precisely the error of Martin Luther and other protestant reformers. Many had good intentions but were “certainly misguided.”

Explain God’s Terms for His Church: Jesus willed only one Church, evident in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. From the Old Testament, we read,

“Et Omnes Unum Sint”: And All May Be One

> *Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel" (Exodus 19:5-6).* [Note that God did not promise two kingdoms or nations, only one].
>
> “*Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from all sides, and bring them to their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; and they shall be no longer two nations, and no longer divided into two kingdoms*” (Ezekiel 37: 21-22).

The above is what Christ came to fulfill, in the New Testament. Thus, he declares,

> "*And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd*" (John 10:16). This is why Jesus also prayed for oneness of His Church in these words, "*Holy Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one…. I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me*" (John 17: 11, 20-21).

However, a number of historical factors were exploited by some persons to divide the one Church. Many Christians in this category are truly ignorant about the enduring divisions. But they could renounce it and achieve Full Communion as soon as they open themselves to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of unity.

Recognizing Evangelizing opportunities for Protestants: There are many evangelizing opportunities. A Protestant friend or colleague at work may invite you to come and help prepare for a wedding or for child dedication or baptism; you may have lunch or dinner with them afterwards. It could be that you share the same apartment complex and you always hang out together. It could be your sports companion: golf, tennis, soccer, football, etc. It could be your children, grandchildren, visiting relatives; your children's friends, etc. It could be a small Protestant faith group that meets from time to time and you are invited. Please, perhaps, it is better to only attend when you have sufficient training in evangelization and knowledge of the Scriptures.

For Catholic Priests, apart from these, opportunities come during Baptisms, Weddings, Funerals, etc. These are moments where you can creatively explain the faith; why we do what we do, without becoming antagonistic. Please, make these teachings rich in biblical applications. Our Protestant friends have a point, admittedly, in demanding that we dwell more on biblical perspectives than on other sources. We cannot preach as if we are oblivious about the issues and controversies militating against Christian unity. Without calling any group by name, we should preach in a way that clarifies the teachings of the Church in the most vivid way. Thus, non-Catholic Christians who attend such celebrations get to hear the other side from time to time, in a "biblical" way

that will make impact on them. That is simply "sowing the seed of faith." Homilies and sermons should always be properly prepared and be attentive to the signs of the times.

Prayer for Unity:
Almighty God and Father, we beg you to bend our hearts to your will. Forgive us our sins of division. Help us to be ready to make amends that we may worship you as you will, not as we want or prefer to do. Grant us the anointing of your Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Unity and Truth, that we may work for the unity of your Church according to your irrevocable will. May we repent of our pride and yield to the glory of your Name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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Section 3: Why People Leave the Church

SESSION 3: Some Reasons why People Leave the Church:

The Usual Presumption when encountering a Protestant: We always presume that by discussing faith issues with people we will offend them. That is not my personal experience. It depends on how you approach the person. It could be that the two of you have never met before. Such meetings happen from time to time; it could be accidental or deliberately planned as an evangelization outreach. Begin respectfully; introduce yourself as a Catholic. You can mention the parish you attend, a little story about your Catholic history and background. Keep it to the beneficiary's comfortable level. Discernment is very important: through facial language (grimace), voice tone, emotional disposition etc. You may not need to introduce any faith discussion. Just stay on course in explaining how excited you are about your Catholic faith and practices. If the person is not interested in discussing, simply let it go; tomorrow is another day.

Perhaps, the person may tell you that he or she was a Catholic some or many years ago. He may proceed to tell you why he quit. If he does not, you may prudently ask, "If you do not mind, may I ask why you left the Catholic Church?" The follow up will depend on whatever answer is given. Some of the reasons you may expect as ***"Reasons why people leave the Church"*** are as follows: Sins of many Catholics through unwelcoming attitudes, unwillingness to extend the exchange the of sign of peace sign at Mass, perceived racial, or ethnic biases, certain age biases, uncaring attitudes or no concern for the

Why I Left The Church

neighbor's hurts, etc.; some Clerical Scandals through financial unaccountability and fraud, lack of commitment to the ministry and faith formation of the laity (especially through poorly prepared homilies), no Bible Studies and Doctrinal instructions, child abuse, or infidelity, etc. Other reasons are rejection of the Gospel of the Cross, the authority of the Church, the sacraments, such or such teachings of the Church on human sexuality, marriage and contraception, pro-life issues; ignorance or misunderstanding of some teachings and practices of the Church. Some are also due to seductive and deceptive communications against the Catholic Church, false hopes from the Evangelicals' "Miracle and Prosperity" centered Christianity, and yielding under the pressure of incessant pestering from unrelenting evangelicals, Pentecostal fundamentalists, Jehovah Witnesses or the Mormons, etc. From Christ's perspective in the Parable of the Sower, these reasons can only mislead those who are not well-founded in the faith. As Christ puts it,

> When any one hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in his heart; *this is what was **sown along the path***. *As for what was **sown on rocky ground***, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away
>
> (Matthew 13:19-21).

"To be forewarned is to be forearmed" - Need for Informed Evangelization:

To know such reasons beforehand helps you to prepare in advance to handle them as they arise. Take some moments and think about a good response you can provide for each of the reasons. The Book of Ecclesiastes declares, "*There is nothing new under the sun*" (Ecclesiastes 1:9). So, the objective in responding will be to show that things were far from perfect in the Church in the time of Christ and the Apostles, yet people were mature enough in faith to know it should not destroy their faith. What is therefore important is the need to aspire to maturity in faith, hope and love. Let us now consider the overall challenges in the Church from the beginning. It will help us to understand how to deal with crises as Christ and the Apostles did. It will show us why

dividing the Church or leaving the Church is wrong.

Prayer for Unity:
Almighty God and Father, we beg you to bend our hearts to your will. Forgive us our sins of division. Help us to be ready to make amends that we may worship you as you will, not as we want or prefer to do. Grant us the anointing of your Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Unity and Truth, that we may work for the unity of your Church according to your irrevocable will. May we repent of our pride and yield to the glory of your Name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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Section 4:
Why People
Leave the Church

SESSION 4: Addressing the Reasons why People leave the Church:

Consider, **FIRST**, the sins and failings of the Clerical hierarchy and some laity as a reason for division:

Who is a Priest According to the Scriptures? A perfect and sinless man? Not at all! This is not to justify sins and failings in any way. However, this needs to be explained and understood for the sake of providing us with a proper scenario for discernment and repentance. The priest, bishop or pope is striving for perfection. No priest, bishop or pope declares himself to be perfect. Scriptures says,

Aaron, the first priest (Ex 28)

> *For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. Because of this he is bound to offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people*
> *(Hebrews 5:1-3).*

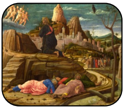
Cite Scriptural Examples of Failures of Church Hierarchy: The Scripture is laden with examples of the failures of the Church hierarchy during the Apostolic Times: Peter, the First Pope denied Jesus Christ three times, even with an oath (cf. Matthew 26: 69-75). Notice in the following passage, that Jesus foresaw it, yet did not change His mind on the choice of Peter as Pope (The First Leader): "*Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have* *you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and* *__when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren__*" (Luke 22:31-32). If Jesus, whom Peter betrayed, was able to forgive and did not reject him as His choice of leader, "What authority does anyone have to say, 'I will not follow Peter; I'm going to begin my own holy church?" Is that standing with Christ? I don't think so! Here, we need to call to mind Christ's words, "*Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone…."* (John 8:7). If our sinless Christ did not cast the stone of rejection at Peter, who then has the audacity to cast the stone of division? Let us consider other shortcomings among the Apostles and the laity in the following passages of Scripture:

> [Concerning the sins of Rivalry and Contestation for Authority, Scripture says]: *And they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" But they were silent; for on the way they had discussed with one another who was the greatest. And he sat down and called the twelve; and he said to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all" (Mark 9:33-35).*
>
> [Concerning the sins of "Continued" Rivalry and Jealousy, Scripture says]: *And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him, and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory…." And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John (Mark 10:35-43).*

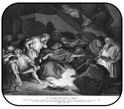
> [Concerning the sins of Hypocrisy and Stealing Church Money, Scripture says]: *"But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was to betray him), said, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" This he said, not that he cared for the poor but* *__because he was a thief, and as he had the money box he used to take what was put into it__*" *(John 12:4-6).*

[Concerning the sin of Betraying Jesus and His Church, Scripture says]: *Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What will you give me if I deliver him to you?" And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him (Matthew 26:14-16).*

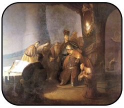
The two passages above clearly help us to reconsider the popular way we apportion blame on the bishops of the Church. We blame them for the sins of the priests and deacons. Perhaps, that may be correct in a few cases; but it should not be generalized. Consider how, even on Jesus' watch, Judas Iscariot (an Apostle) used to steal money from the treasury and dared to betray Jesus for "*thirty pieces of silver.* Should we hold Christ accountable for the sin of Judas Iscariot? Absolutely not!



[Concerning the sin of indolence or sleeping on the job, Scripture says]: *Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go yonder and pray…." And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak…." And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. (Matthew 26:36-45).*

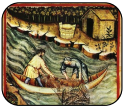


[Concerning the sin of Denial Jesus and His Church out of fear, Scripture says]: *Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a maid came up to him, and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you mean." And when he went out to the porch, another maid saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." And again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man." After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you." Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know the man." And* *immediately the cock crowed (Matthew 26:69-74).*

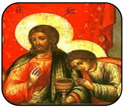


Judas Returning the Thirty Silver Pieces by Rembrandt

[Concerning the sins of Imperfect Repentance and Despair, Scripture says]: *When Judas, his betrayer, saw that he was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." And throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself (Matthew 27:3-5).*

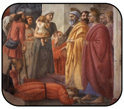


[Concerning the sin of Abandoning the Mission and Returning to their Previous Trade, Scripture says]: *After this Jesus [after His Resurrection] revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he revealed himself in this way…. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat; but that night they caught nothing. Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, have you any fish?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, for the quantity of fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" (John 21:1-7).*



Jesus & St. John

[Concerning the sins of "Later" Rivalry and Jealousy, Scripture says]: *Peter turned and saw following them the disciple whom Jesus loved…. When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!" (John 21:20-22).*



The Death of Ananias, by Masaccio

> [Concerning the sins of Vainglory and Hypocrisy, Scripture says]: *But a man named Ananias with his wife Sapphira sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? (Acts 5:1-3).*

> [Concerning the sins of insincerity, Cheating and discrimination, Scripture says]: *Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution (Acts 6:1).*

> [Concerning the sin of "Not Forgiving the Somebody's Failure in the Past", Scripture says]: *And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Come, let us return and visit the brethren in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are." And Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. And there arose a sharp contention, so that they separated from each other; Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of the Lord (Acts 15:36-40).*

In the above passage, Paul's imperfection was clearly evident; he could not forgive John Mark for past failure. There was a "*sharp contention*" between Paul and Barnabas over this. I can imagine Barnabas yelling at Paul, saying, "Can't you forgive? Practice what you preach!" But to no avail. Accordingly, they split as a team, but not from the Church.

> [Concerning the sins of insincerity, hypocrisy and discrimination, Scripture says]: *But when Cephas came to Antioch I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he ate with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And with him the rest of the Jews acted insincerely, so that even Barnabas*

> *was carried away by their insincerity. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?" (Galatians 2:11-14).*

In the above passage, Peter and Barnabas acted with insincerity and hypocrisy by discriminating against the Gentile Christian converts for fear of some Jewish Christians visiting from Jerusalem. St. Paul indicted or corrected them but never broke away from the will of Christ for one Church.

> [Concerning the sins of Fear and Deserting the Missionary Team, Scripture says]: *For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you; for he is very useful in serving me (2Timothy 4:10-11).*

Prayer for Unity:
Almighty God and Father, we beg you to bend our hearts to your will. Forgive us our sins of division. Help us to be ready to make amends that we may worship you as you will, not as we want or prefer to do. Grant us the anointing of your Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Unity and Truth, that we may work for the unity of your Church according to your irrevocable will. May we repent of our pride and yield to the glory of your Name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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Section 5: Caution & Testimonies

SESSION 5: Caution in Apportioning Blame; Testimonies of Full Communion:

On the whole, from the above passages, it is clear we need to review how we apportion blame concerning the failings of the hierarchy and members of the Church. Christ never preached that one should deny one’s friend

or anyone else; He never preached that one should steal, discriminate, be hypocritical, give others “dirty looks”, exhibit ethnic or racial bias against anyone. The Church, as Church, does not teach that one should commit any of these sins either. So, why hold the Church responsible for the sins and inadequacies of some members? However, if one falls away from the Church because they are in disagreement with the official teachings of Christ and His Church on the Gospel of the Cross, the authority of the Church, the sacraments, teachings of the Church on human sexuality and contraception, or pro-life issues; that is very unfortunate. All we can do is to strive to educate and clarify the teachings and pray to the Holy Spirit to enlighten them and bring them to the knowledge of the truth.

Think about it: If on Judgment Day, God asks you, “Why did you divide the Church?” Or “Why did you perpetuate division and not seek for unity?” How would you respond? Definitely, you cannot say, “I sinned because the Pope made me do it!” “I sinned because a bishop or a priest or a fellow Christian made me do it!” Remember Adam and Eve’s replies when they were indicted for eating the forbidden fruit: Adam said, “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate” (Genesis 3:12); Eve said, “The serpent beguiled me, and I ate” (Genesis 3:13). Did it work? Why then do you think this sort of response will be different? Nobody’s failure gives any other person the impetus to sin; all must take responsibility for their actions and strive to do God’s will.

IN ANOTHER SCENARIO, a person may tell you he or she was born Protestant. The person may proceed to discuss in a glowing fashion some versions of the “Reformation” that he or she was taught, painting the Catholic Church at that time as a corrupt entity and repudiating the practice of indulgences. You must respond in love: perhaps, begin by appreciating the work of whoever was responsible for sowing the seed of Christianity in this person. The approach is not to dabble into the errors of the past. However, if that is the issue the person really wants to discuss, then it is important to address it prudently. As already advised, you may begin by stating that the Catholic Church has acknowledged that there were problems at that time. You could acknowledge perhaps the handling of the problem was very poor at that time. However, maintain control as you state humbly and honestly that none of us today is to blame for the problems that happened then. This is Vatican Council II’s statement on it:

> Even in the beginnings of this one and only Church of God there arose certain rifts,

> which the Apostle strongly condemned. But in subsequent centuries much more serious dissensions made their appearance and quite large communities came to be separated from full communion with the Catholic Church – *for which, often enough, men of both sides were to blame*. The children who are born into these Communities and who grow up believing in Christ cannot be accused of the sin involved in the separation, and the Catholic Church embraces upon them as brothers, with respect and affection. For men who believe in Christ and have been truly baptized are in communion with the Catholic Church even though this communion is imperfect. [9]

Vatican II's statement is clear: "*Men of both sides were to blame*" [That implies, the people at the time it happened were to blame, not us today]. Thus, our "separated brethren" need to admit that Luther and the others need to receive their fair share of the blame. ***Luther himself conceded to a part of the blame and apologized in these words***: "I have no hesitation in admitting that in these I have shown greater violence than befitted a man of my calling; I do not set up for a saint, I do not say that my conduct has been above reproach." [10]

Explain to the person that those who passed on the faith to him or her have done a phenomenal job; however, the time has come when we should ask the question, "If Christ founded one Church, and we were not part of the era that had the misunderstandings, why should we remain divided contrary to the will of Christ?" Remember, you are only proposing, not imposing. So do it with gentleness. You are only proposing to an individual or a small faith group to consider coming into Full Communion with the Catholic Church, as willed by Christ: "One flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16). It is always a free choice; no pressure is necessary.

Examples of those who have come into Full Communion: The Author to the Hebrews says, *"We are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses"* (Hebrews 12:1). It is always helpful to give examples with many who were born Protestants and who came into Full Communion with the Church: John Cardinal Newman, Scott and Kimberly Hahn, and a host of others. Also, give examples of Catholics like Jeff Cavins and some others who left the Church and when they understood Christ returned to unity. We equally have the wonderful examples of the numerous Orthodox affiliations that returned to unity with the Church. They are recognized as Catholic Christians of the Eastern Rite. And recently, a group of High Anglicans began discussing terms of return to Full Communion with the Catholic Church. We do not

really have to remain divided or continue to identify with the errors of the past. May the Will of Christ be done!

Prayer for Unity:
Almighty God and Father, we beg you to bend our hearts to your will. Forgive us our sins of division. Help us to be ready to make amends that we may worship you as you will, not as we want or prefer to do. Grant us the anointing of your Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Unity and Truth, that we may work for the unity of your Church according to your irrevocable will. May we repent of our pride and yield to the glory of your Name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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Section 6:
Identifying Errors

SESSION 6: Identifying Some “Reformers” Foundational Errors

Scripture shows that the Jesus and the Apostles also applied the Gospel to different cultures, while making sure they preserved the integrity of the Message. [12] Consider how Jesus used many elements in the people's culture proclaiming the mysteries of the Kingdom of God:

> *The kingdom of heaven is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened…. The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field…. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls…. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net which was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind…. (Matthew 13:11-52).*

Another example is when St. Paul went to Athens to evangelize.

> *Then the brethren immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there…. Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols…. And they took hold of him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you present….?" So Paul, standing in the middle of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To an unknown god.'* ***What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you****. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man…." (Acts 17:14-24).*

Prayer for Unity:
Almighty God and Father, we beg you to bend our hearts to your will. Forgive us our sins of division. Help us to be ready to make amends that we may worship you as you will, not as we want or prefer to do. Grant us the

anointing of your Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Unity and Truth, that we may work for the unity of your Church according to your irrevocable will. May we repent of our pride and yield to the glory of your Name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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Section 7: Reviewing the Truth & Call for Unity

SESSION 7: Reviewing the Truth and Call for Unity

Clarify the Discrepancy between Faith and Practice:

Admittedly, the Catholic Church has, on occasion, erred in the area of "practice of the faith" from the Apostolic times, but has preserved the integrity of the teachings or doctrines of Christ through the years. This is hard to say; but consider Christ's repudiation of the Pharisees for their personal sins, while at the same time affirming their God given authority to teach His people, saying, "*The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice" (Matthew 23:2-3)*. Remember, we had other groups like the Sadducees, the Essenes and the Qumran. Christ never told us to practice and observe what these other groups taught; only the Pharisees where the legitimate teachers, in spite of their inadequacies. In like manner, we may have many groups of 'churches' today, but Christ has His legitimate authority we are obliged to listen to. Perhaps, it is important to ask [among the numerous groups of 'churches' today], "Which is the First Church that ever existed?" Surely, that is the one Christ authority resides in: *"He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me" (Luke 10:16)*. Or again, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives any one whom I send receives me; and he who receives me receives him who sent me" (John 13:20).* This authority began with His confirmation of Peter and, therefore, His Successors in the Petrine Ministry (Popes). Christ never founded a Church where anyone is free to believe whatever he or she likes. In Scripture, obedience to God and Christ is presented as inseparably linked with obedience to His approved leaders.

> *Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon BarJona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:17 -19).*
>
> *When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17).*
>
> *Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee.... And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age (Matthew 28:16-20).*

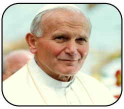
Throughout history, each time there was a breakaway from the One and Only One Church, it will be totally an error to think that the breakaway is as legitimate as the Original Church founded by Christ Himself. Concerning the teachings of the Church, please, I want to observe that all the dogmatic teachings of the Church are truly free from error. You can substantiate all from Scripture because they are teachings which the Church has proclaimed from the beginning. In fact, the Bible, properly interpreted and understood, teaches only the Catholic Faith that came down to us from the Apostles.

Unfortunately, as human beings, we sometimes fail in practice. As St. Paul admits subtly, saying, "*We have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent* *power belongs to God and not to us" (2Corinthians 4:7).* We have already pointed out the problems during the Apostolic times; it was not all perfection, they had their struggles as well. St. Paul acknowledged his struggles in these following passages:

> *We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate…. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it" (Romans 7:14-18).*
>
> *And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2Corinthians 12:7-9).*

St. John the Beloved Apostles says [and was not excluding himself in the context],

> *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us…. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us (1John 1:8-10).*



The world has a right to expect perfection from the members of the Church. However, the 'honest' members of the Church know that they are not perfect. Blessed John Paul II spoke of the reality and nature of sins in the Church and the world in terms of "*mysterium iniquitatis*," ("mystery of iniquity"). We cooperate with God's grace; nevertheless, our hope is essentially on the "Amazing Grace of God." Ponder on these lines of the Sacred Scripture and discern the truth:

> *"In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins" (1John 4:10).*
>
> *"While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly…. But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us…. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life" (Romans 5:6 -10).*

Helping our Separated Brethren to see the obvious truth:

All we have stated, by the grace of God, will help our "Separated Brethren" to rethink the problems of the enduring divisions in Christendom and seek Full Communion with the Catholic Church, as many individuals and groups of "churches" have done. **This is the simple truth**: The Church will attain perfection on God's terms; not on the terms of "human beings." Self-righteousness or the 'holier than thou' attitude is not the way we should go. St. Paul declared,

> *"Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself" (Galatians 6:1-3).* Again, "*Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil" (Ephesians 4:26-27).*

The Reformation Quest for a "Perfect Church":

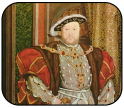
As we have shown, the failings of some members of the clergy or the laity can never legitimize the division of the Church. Today, we are in a position to evaluate the "churches" that evolved from the Reformation. Can our beloved Protestant brothers and sisters honestly declare that they have been free from abuses and sins? Thus, we come back to the very words of Christ, "*Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone…."* (John 8:7). What, then, is the value of the Reformation, in terms of the enduring division of Christ's Church, if we still have not arrived at "The Perfect church"? It implies a division for the sake of creating "the Perfect church" has no basis from the beginning. Therefore, we are obliged not by the Pope or any Council of the Church, but by the Lord Jesus Himself to seek Full Communion: "There shall be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16).

Guideline for Understanding Errors in Teaching:

> *"Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings…." (Hebrews 13:7-9).*

Here, we are provided with a yardstick for understanding the faith. From the beginning, the true teaching of Christ has been revealed; Jesus "does not change". His teaching remains the same in the First, Second, Third, Fourth centuries down to the present day. This could be seen from the proclamation of St. Vincent of Lerins in the 5th century: "What has been believed everywhere, always, and by all." In any teaching of the Church: Eucharist, Canon of Scripture, Baptism of Infants, Trinity, One Church, Purgatory, Sacraments, celibacy or virginal state, etc, ***what should we do to know or verify the Truth?***

First, study the Bible from the perspective of the authoritative interpretation of the Church on any teaching you want to clarify. **Second**, study how the different Ecumenical Councils responded (after the Apostolic Tradition of Ecumenical Council in Acts Chapter 15) and what they taught definitively about the teaching in question. **Third**, study several Fathers of the Church like Ambrose, Athanasius, Augustine, Clement of Rome, Clement of Alexandria, Cyprian of Carthage, Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory of Nyssa, Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus of Lyons, Jerome, John Chrysostom, Justin Martyr, Leo the Great, Tertullian, etc. ***For instance, concerning the teaching on the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist*****:** If you read Jesus Christ, St. Paul and St. John and they speak about "Real Presence" in the Eucharist; then you read each of the Fathers of the Church Teachings on the Eucharist and they speak of "Real Presence"; then you read the Councils of the Church and they all speak about "Real Presence", you will then understand where and when "Symbolic Presence" began. In that way, we can tell when the misunderstanding or error began through Luther and/or Zwingli, and/or the other Protestant Reformers. We cannot blame the present day "Separated Brethren" for these errors. However, they still have the responsibility to review these issues, align with the proper teachings of Christ and His Church and come into Full Communion. Remember, the Church has proclaimed her teachings for almost 1500 years before Luther and the other "Reformers" were born, raised in the Catholic Church and later fell away.



The case of King Henry VIII of England, it is somewhat complicated. It was not on grounds of abuses or doctrinal contestation. He actually wrote a piece on the Eucharist for which he received an award, *Defensor Fidei* (Defender of the Faith) from the Pope. Historical evidence shows it was truly a case of defiance and insubordination before God and His Church. It was the problem of marriage and divorce, in a manner contrary to the Teachings of Christ and His Church. All that is needed is the present generation to seek proper unity, Full Communion in the one Church. See how St. Paul emphasizes the importance of the unity in our Christian Calling:

> *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:1-6).*

Finally, I look forward to developing some specific and practical case scenarios about how to evangelize our Separated Brethren. In the meantime, strive to digest what we have here and see how you can use the information for the glory of God. May all who read these lines be strengthened by the Holy Spirit to become more committed toward working for the unity of the Church Christ purchased at the price of His most precious Blood. Amen.

Prayer for Unity:
Almighty God and Father, we beg you to bend our hearts to your will. Forgive us our sins of division. Help us to be ready to make amends that we may worship you as you will, not as we want or prefer to do. Grant us the anointing of your Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Unity and Truth, that we may work for the unity of your Church according to your irrevocable will. May we repent of our pride and yield to the glory of your Name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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Notes and References:

[1] Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi,* 80

[2] *Ibid.,* 78

[3] *Ibid.*, 80

[4] Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter on Ecumenism, *Ut Unum Sint*, 2

[5] Pope John Paul II, *ibid*, 3

[6] *Ibid.,* 29

[7] Ibid., 1

[8] Pope Paul VI, *op. cit.,* 79

[9] Vatican II, Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3

[10] Document online, available at http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/luther/lutheraccount.html

[11] Pope Paul VI, *op. cit.,* 54

[12] *Ibid.*, cf. *op. cit.*, 25