scarcely one extrinsic, objective thought in it. It is all "in
and in and in," a return to sentimental, effeminate,
medieval mysticism. No wonder one of the points of
dialogue between Pentecostal leaders and the Roman
Catholic Church is the remarkable similarity between
Pentecostalism and Catholic mysticism. The starting
fact of the crumbling of Protestant resistance to the
charismatic movement illustrates the decadence of the
Protestant churches. Even the word Protestant is becoming
a dirty word. And to be critical of Catholicism is now an
obscenity in evangelical circles. We have now come to
the time when the issues of the sixteenth century have to
be fought out again. This time the conflict will be more
severe, and it will be final. Roll up the old denominational
boundary lines. There is going to be a regrouping of the
religious world. On the one side there will be a grand
union of Roman Catholics, pseudo-Protestants, and
Pentecostals in what appears to be a movement for the
conversion of the whole world. On the other side there
will be a movement to restore the everlasting gospel in its
pristine purity and power. The gospel will triumph.
Though antichrist may be victorious for a moment, his
doom is sure. One little word shall fall him. Ω

The Crux
of the
Reformation
by John Murray

The nailing of Luther's ninety-five theses to the Church
door in Wittenburg on October 31st, 1517 was the event
that more than any other event marks the inception of the
movement called the Protestant Reformation. It is well
that we should celebrate that event (cf. Psalm 77:11). If
we are to honour God, our remembrance will proceed
from profound gratitude to him for the light that shone in
the midst of darkness, and for the emancipation that
occurred when the Reformers were cut loose from shackles
of superstition and idolatry.

What was the light that arose in darkness? What is the
heritage the Reformation has bequeathed? The issues at
stake were not questions removed from the deepest and
highest interests of men. They were issues that concern
the human soul in its relation to God and ultimate destiny.
They were intensely religious. I am going to focus
attention on two of these.

Authority

First and foremost is the issue of authority, the standard
or rule by which we are to answer all religious questions.
The ultimate answer to that question is that God is the
authority. Rome does not deny that proposition. To say
that God is the authority does not, however, answer our
practical concern. For the question arises: how does the
will of God come into relevant relation to us? How does
the mind of God come into contact with our mind, so that
God's mind for us on the great issues of life may be known
and become our mind? The answer is, revelation from
God to us. Again Rome does not deny that proposition;
but even this proposition does not meet our quest. For we
have to ask the questions: Where is this revelation?
Where do we find it?

Here there is a decisive answer. We find it in Holy
Scripture (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16), and we have gone a long
way. We have revelation from God in our hands, concrete
and intelligible. It should not be overlooked that Rome,
at the Reformation and now, says the same of Holy
Scripture. Vatican II has declared that 'the books of both
the Old and New Testament in their entirety, with all their
parts, are sacred and canonical, because having been
written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit...they have
God as their author and have been handed on as such to
the Church'.

Yet there is the great divide and it appears at this precise
point in our progression. Rome says there is another
treasury of special revelation besides Holy Scripture, a
treasury that is likewise from God and to be coordinated
with Holy Scripture. It is what may be called oral
tradition, sharply distinguished by the word 'oral' in
contrast with 'written'. It means that there were revelations
given by Christ and by the Holy Spirit that were not
included in Scripture, but are handed on from generation
to generation in the church and by the church, particularly in and by the bishops as the alleged successors of the apostles...consequently it is not from sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything that has been revealed. Therefore both sacred tradition and sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of devotion and reverence' (Revelation, II,9). 'Sacred tradition and sacred Scripture from one sacred deposit of the word of God, which is committed to the Church' (Revelation II,10).

The task of authentic interpretation of both has been entrusted exclusively to the living, teaching office of the Church. Thus tradition, Scripture, and the teaching authority in the Church are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the other (cf. ibid). Tradition develops because there is a progressive understanding and consensus in the church. This is why in the Church of Rome we have such dogmas as the immaculate conception (1854), the infallibility of the pope (1870), and the assumption of the virgin (1950). Closely related to this claim to the teaching authority of the church is the primacy of the Roman Pontiff. The decrees of Vatican II are permeated with this claim.

'The divine Redeemer wanted his Church to be equipped with this infallibility in the definition of doctrine of faith and morals...In virtue of his office, the Roman Pontiff, head of the college of Bishops, enjoys this infallibility, when he makes a definitive pronouncement of doctrine on faith or morals, as the supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful....The infallibility promised to the Church exists also in the body of Bishops, when it exercises supreme magisterium in combination with Peter's successor. The assent of the Church can never fail to be given to these definitions' (ibid).

Here we are not dealing with an academic question; it is one of intense religious concern. If I must listen to the voice of the Church as it comes to expression in the consensus of bishops, and particularly in definitive pronouncements of the Roman Pontiff, I must have assurance from God that this voice is invested with divine authority. I must have assurance from God that this voice is His voice. I must have a word from him certifying to me that this is likewise his word. Where am I to find this assurance? To be most concrete, where am I to find God's own certification that the Pope’s, the Roman Pontiff's definitive pronouncements of doctrine on faith and morals, are infallible and therefore binding me to faith and obedience?

I do find that the Lord Jesus said to Peter, ‘On this rock I will build my church...And I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven’ (Matt. 16:18,19). But I also find that Jesus breathed on the ten apostles and said: “Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained’ (John 20:22,23). So the binding and loosing referred to in the word addressed to Peter is not the exclusive prerogative of Peter. I also find that the church, as the household of God, is ’built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone’ (Eph. 2:20). I look in vain in the teaching of the New Testament, or in the practice of the apostolic church, for any primacy of Peter.

There is abundant evidence in the New Testament, and more particularly in the teaching of Jesus, for the authority vested in the apostles by delegation from Christ. And the legacy of the apostles, authoritative by the institution of Christ and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we find in the books of the New Testament. But nowhere do we find that the apostles have successors invested with equivalent authority by delegation from Christ. Far less do we find any evidence for a successor to Peter in his supposed primacy.

What we do find in the claims of the Roman Catholic Church is a pretentious superstructure, based upon assumptions for which there is no evidence in the revelation God has given us. The consequence is a tyrannical distortion of what our Lord himself affirmed, and the Scriptures of the New Testament witness, respecting apostolic authority. The most recent pronouncements of Rome continue to reiterate and enforce the usurpations in respect of authority whereby the basic principles that God alone is the source of all authority, and his revealed will the norm, are made void in the magisterium of the Church, and most particularly in the supreme magisterium of the Roman Pontiff. It is the irony of this usurpation that in Roman claims we have the most blatant example of lording it over God’s heritage in contravention of Peter’s own inspired utterance: ‘Neither as lording it over God’s
committed to your charge, but becoming examples to the flock’ (I Peter 5:3).

Justification

The second issue on which I am going to focus attention is that of justification. The basic religious question is: How can man be just with God? If man had never sinned the all-important question would have been: How can man be right with God? He would continue to be right with God by fulfilling the will of God perfectly. But the question takes on a radically different complexion with the entrance of sin. Man is wrong with God. And the question is: How can man become right with God? This was Luther’s burning question. He found the answer in Paul’s Epistles to the Romans and the Galatians, that we are justified by faith alone, through grace alone—justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus’ (Romans 3:24); and ‘being justified by faith we have peace with God’ (Romans 5:1).

It is to be acknowledged and appreciated that theologians of the Roman Catholic Church are giving a great deal of renewed attention to this subject, and there is a gratifying recognition that ‘to justify’ is ‘to declare to be righteous’, that it is a declarative act on God’s part. But the central issue of the Reformation still remains. Rome still maintains and declares that justification consists in renovation and sanctification, and the decrees of the Council of Trent have not been retracted or repudiated.

...the central issue of the Reformation still remains. Rome still maintains and declares that justification consists in renovation and sanctification, and the decrees of the Council of Trent have not been retracted or repudiated. Renovation and sanctification are indispensable elements of the gospel, and justification must never be separated from regeneration and sanctification. But to make justification consist in regeneration and sanctification is to eliminate from the gospel that which meets our basic need as sinners, and answers the basic religious question: How can a sinner become just with God?

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When Paul invokes God’s anathema upon any who would preach a gospel other than that he preached (Gal. 1: 8,9), he used a term which means ‘devoted to destruction’. It is a term weighted with imprecation. Why such language of passion? Paul was impassioned with the love of Christ and of Christ’s gospel. To the core of his being he was persuaded that the heresy combated was aimed at the destruction of the gospel. It took the crown from the Redeemer’s head. It is this same passion that must imbue us if we are worthy children of the Reformation. Central to the issue that raised the banner in 1517, and central to the issue with Rome still, is the gospel of a full, perfect, and irrevocable justification by free gift through faith in Jesus Christ, on the basis of a righteousness undefiled and undefiled, a righteousness in which omniscience find no blemish, a righteousness of God, the righteousness of him who fulfilled all righteousness and was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. It is this righteousness that prophets extolled. ‘I will greatly rejoice in the Lord’ (Isa. 61:10). ‘Behold, the days come, saith the lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch...In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, the Lord our righteousness’ (Jer. 23: 5,6). It is in this righteousness that believers glory. ‘Not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness of by faith’ (Phil. 3:9).