SCOTT HAHN & ROBERT KNUDSON...THE AUTHORITY DEBATE

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[The following is a transcript of a taped debate between Scott Hahn, Catholic convert and former Presbyterian minister, and Dr. Robert Knudson of Westminster Seminary.
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MODERATOR
Tonight we're happy to have you all here. My name is Patrick Madrid. I'm from Catholic Answers, and we are a Roman Catholic apologetics organization based in San Diego, California. Our Lady of the Rosary parish and Catholic Answers are jointly sponsoring this debate between Professor Scott Hahn and Professor Robert Knudson, and we'd like you all to prepare for a moment of prayer before we begin. I'd like to introduce you to the pastor of this parish, Father Harry Romano.

FR. ROMANO
In the Middle Ages when they would engage in theological debate or discussion it was the custom to quote a little Latin saying that went something like this: "In essentials there should always be unity, in nonessentials there should be freedom, in all things there should be charity." I think that's an excellent maxim we can always follow, and with that in mind I'd like to read a scripture passage from 1 Corinthians 13. "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have and deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful, it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child I spoke like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. So faith, hope and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

MODERATOR
Thank you, Fr. Romano. I'd like to say first of all, as some of you who were here last night may have heard my colleague Mark say, we at Catholic Answers have become somewhat adept at looking over an audience like this and being able to tell who's Catholic and who's not. Those of you who are here for the first time can try this experiment for yourselves. Just look around you, look at your neighbor, and if you see someone without a Bible, he's probably a Catholic (laughter). The emphasis tonight will not be on quarreling or bickering, but on focusing on the serious differences that exist between Evangelical

Protestants and Roman Catholics with regard to the questions of authority and justification. Tonight we are privileged to have two eminent speakers.

On the Protestant side we have Dr. Robert Knudson, who is Professor of Apologetics (also holds the chair of that department) as well as Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary. I'd be curious to know how many Westminster folks are here tonight. Welcome. Dr. Knudson holds his Ph.M. from Westminster in apologetics. He received his S.T.M. from Union Theological Seminary in New York. He also holds a Ph.D. from the Free University in Amsterdam in philosophy.

On my left I'd like to introduce Mr. Scott Hahn, who is Professor of Theology at the College of St. Francis in Jolliet, Illinois (***editor note: Dr.Hahn now teaches Scripture and Theology at the Franciscan University of Steubenville, in Steubenville, Ohio). When Mr. Hahn received his B.A. with a triple major, actually, in theology, philosophy and economics from Grove City College in Pennsylvania. He went on to receive his M.Div. in theology at Gordon Cornwall University in Boston, and he is currently finishing up his Ph.D. program at Marquette University in systematic theology. So these two eminent men are here tonight to present the pros and cons of two very important topics.

The first one we're going to deal with tonight is the question of authority. Now, all of us are familiar with the quibble between Protestants and Catholics. On the Protestant side we have the doctrine of sola scriptura, meaning that the Bible and the Bible alone is the sole rule with regard to doctrine and morals for Christians. And as most all of us know, I'm sure, the Catholic position is that sola scriptura is not doctrinal and that it is actually the Bible and sacred tradition or apostolic tradition as it is know, together that comprise the sole rule of faith for Christians. So the first part of the evening will devoted to discussing that topic. We're going to have time for questions and answers at the end of this session. After our break in the middle of the evening we're going to pick up with the second half of our topic, the subject of justification, another very divisive subject that separates Protestants and Catholics. Our two speakers will discuss how a person is justified, what is the Biblical basis for our justification in the sight of God. Is it strictly forensic, or imputed, justification, or is there some element which involves works?

You'll notice on the debate schedule another session for questions and answers from the audience, and when we get to each section for questions I will lay down the ground rules, but just very briefly before we begin, let me ask that we all participate this evening in the spirit of charity, as Fr. Romano read from 1 Corinthians. We're here to shed more light than heat, so we ask that if you feel like jeering or hissing or booing, or clapping for that matter, please try to refrain until the speaker has finished his comments. We also ask that there be no heckling or standing up in the audience and blurting something out, either Catholics or Protestants. We also ask that in the question and answer periods that you confine your questions to, preferably, 15 seconds. If it should take 30 seconds, that's the absolute cutoff because we're following a tight schedule tonight. One last thing. We don't want any testimonies or preaching services tonight; that's what we have these two men here for. So without any further ado, I'd like to introduce our first speaker, Dr. Robert Knudson.

KNUDSON
Beloved in Christ Jesus, I'm very happy to be with you this evening. I see from the flyer that went out that youþre very happy to see me this evening, because you gave me a degree I don't have; you gave me a Ph.D. I also want to say that I appreciate and my church friends appreciate our common effort to stem the terrible tide of abortion, which is contrary to the will of God. And furthermore I want to commiserate

with you for the tragic murder of the six priests in El Salvador. I think that we are all very sorry that such things happen in our modern day. But let's get down to the subject. If you've been looking at Time magazine, if you're been looking at your newspaper, you will have realized that some of us have celebrated an anniversary of the French Revolution. The French Revolution sought to base things on reason and not on the Word of God, and in doing that it was what we call revolutionary. It set reason up against the Word of God and it had a revolutionary cast to it. One of its "Nie dieu, nie masteur", meaning "We don't want God and we won't have any masters." Now one of the things I want to say first of all is that if we look at the Reformation, if we look at what is at the heart of the Reformation, that we do not find there a rationalism, that we do not find a revolutionary spirit, but rather, we find a respect for authority. Now, why is that? That would be because the Reformation is centered on the Word. Being centered on the Word, it respects the authority of God, that God does speak to us with authority through his Word, and that we ought then to be subject to that. Now, we know, because we are after all acquainted with the scripturesI was in faculty meeting just this last Monday and we had a report from one of our professors who had had a sabbatical and he said, "Let's turn in our Bibles..." and only a couple of us had our Bibles in faculty meeting, so perhaps that is not only on one side of the fencebut we know the scriptures, and we know that there was the logos, there was the Word of God before the very creation. And then when the logos, the Word, this Jesus Christ was incarnate, he himself made himself subject to the Word of God. He said, "In the roll of the Book it is written of me, 'I come to do your will, oh God.'" Then we have that strange statement concerning Moses that he was the meekest man on the face of the earth. Meekness means subjection to the Commandments of God, to the will of God as expressed in His law, in His Word. We know about the apostle Paul, how he went out into the desert and there he received revelation from God. And how, having received this revelation, he wanted to be sure that it corresponded to the teaching that was being promulgated in Jerusalem, so he went there and he submitted what he had received and he received their blessing. We know from the scriptures that the spirit of God witnesses to the Word and that the spirit of God empowers the Word. And so I want to say that as I stand before you this evening it is the purpose as we talk about authority to stress the importance of the Word of God.

Now we say that the Bible is the Word of God. The Bible as the scriptures say is God-breathed, the very breath of God. But now are we simply interested in the Bible alone? We are certainly interested in that. The way I put it in my classes is that the Bible gives us the key to knowledge, it gives us the key to understanding, it gives us the key to unlocking the mysteries of our lives. But we also teachthat God's revelation is everywhere. Not every bit of wisdom that we can glean from life comes from the Bible. There are, indeed, interpretations that we have within our churches; we try to interpret the scriptures, and that is often a very wonderful source of information and wisdom. But the point that we make is this: that the Bible is the only infallible rule of faith and practice. That is, if we want to have that which is at the heart of the matter, that which gives us the key to everything, we shall turn to the scriptures. Indeed, God through His Spirit guides His church, but we also maintain that the church must be subject to the Word of God as written in the scriptures. We can have, then, a profound appreciation for tradition, but we maintain that any tradition of the church must be subject to the Word of God as contained in the scriptures. Now, Calvin himselfof course, you know Calvin was one of the major reformershe said in his Reply to Sadalito, "Although we hold that the Word of God alone lies beyond the sphere of our judgment and that fathers and councils are of authority only insofar as they accord with the rule of the Word we still give to councils and fathers such rank and honor as is meet for them to hold under Christ."

Now we say about the scriptures this: that it is necessary because of the sinfulness of man that God give us a sure source, a written source, of His will that would not be lost. As I pointed out we say that the Bible has authority. We say, furthermore, that it is, that is, it is possible even for the simple believers to read the scriptures and to find there enough knowledge that he will know how he is to come to Christ and how he is to put his faith in Christ for his salvation. Furthermore, we say that the Bible is sufficient, and I believe that will be one of the issues that we must address this evening. But as soon as we say sufficient, we have to say, sufficient for what? It certainly isn't sufficient to give us answers to every question that might possibly come to us; it does not give us theorems in geometry, for example. But we say that it is sufficient to give us that knowledge, that understanding, which is necessary for us to come to Christ and to put our faith in him.

Now, this Word also witnesses to our heart, and there it brings in our hearts an assurance that we are in Christ and that Christ is in us, that we have been taken up in the Body of Christ. Now, why would it bring assurance? For the very things that I've been talking about: that it is sufficient, it is clear, it is understandable, it calls forth our personal response and as we express our personal response then we live forth that life Christ wants us to live. Now I think that one of the major issues is that we too will honor tradition, but the question is, where is the infallible rule of faith, where is the infallible canon of faith? The position we take is that even the simplest saint coming to the clear Word of God, the Word of God that is understandable, even the simplest saint, armed with the Word, not in a revolutionary spirit, but armed with the Word, is able to challenge the ministry, the councils, and so forth. Why? Because everyone in Jesus Christ has become a prophet,a priest and, as well, a king. Let me then remind you of this: I am in the line in my own thinking of a Dutch professor journalist, statesman, Abraham Khyper. Abraham Khyper was brought up in a liberal style of thinking. There was a simple woman in his congregation who was schooled enough in the Word of God to come to him and to reason with him from the Word, and that meant a tremendous change in his life. It meant that from a arid rationalism that he was brought to embrace Jesus Christ as his own and he became a stalwart preacher and defender of the faith [applause].

MODERATOR Thank you, Dr. Knudson. And now please welcome Professor Scott Hahn.

HAHN It sure is good to be here with you and share with with you, and I want to reaffirm what I heard Pat say a few minutes ago. That is, we're not here to pounce on each other, we're not here as a spectacle, we're here out of a deep and sincere loyalty to Christ and reverence for his Word. There is so much agreement that I think we can rejoice in the fact that both of us share the conviction that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, hence it is infallible, hence it is authoritative in our lives; and it's a practical guide, it's one in which we can hear the voice of God, the living voice speaking to us in our own lives. The real question, then, is not much whether the Bible is the Word of God, inspired, infallible and authoritative, but whether it itself teaches that it is the only, exclusive authority governing the Body of Christ.

I was a Presbyterian minister for a few years, a graduate of an Evangelical seminary, and a very great respecter of the Westminster Theological Seminary tradition, and I still am, but I have one question today as I have for several years since I left the ministry and I gave up teaching at a Presbyterian seminary. It was a question raised to me by a former Catholic in the seminary in the middle of a seminar on creeds and confessions in the church. He asked me, where does scripture teach sola scriptura? And I panicked, I played around, I even said "That's a dumb question." and I never heard myself say that before in a classroom. And I realized going home that evening why I'd said it: it was because I wasn't prepared to answer it. I thought I'd just had a sudden bout with amnesia, but I thought about it some more, I consulted my books, I even called two or three of my professorsand I've had the privilege to study under some of the very greatest professors in the Evangelical world, and I thank God for thembut I

didn’t come up with any satisfactory answer. That’s critical; as one of the greatest Evangelical theologians of our day says, J. I. Packer, "The Reformers’ whole understanding of Christianity depends on the principle of sola scriptura; that is, the view that the Bible as the only Word of God in this world is the only guide for conscience in the Church. It’s the only source of true knowledge and of God’s grace, and it’s the only qualified judge of the Church’s testimony and teaching. That’s the view of a Protestant Evangelical theologian whom I respect very much. However, the only thing I disagree with Dr. Packer about is the Word ’only’. I do believe that the Bible is to be regarded by all Catholics as our guide, as our source, as our judge, as the living and active Word of God, alive in our lives, in addition to which the Church confesses a living tradition to which she is bound out of obedience to Scripture. For Scripture speaks of that living tradition very naturally, very easily and matter-of-factly, as we’ll see in 2 Thessalonians 2:15 where Paul commends and commands the Thessalonian Christians to hold fast to what Christ passed on to him, to what he passed on to them, to the tradition, whether it is written or whether it is spoken. Now Paul could take matter-of-factly, and he could state matter-of-factly the authority and existence of a living tradition. He didn’t feel any need to argue for this living tradition; he assumed it and he assumed the Thessalonians knew what he was talking about, so I would ask my Protestant brethren, where is that living tradition and how is it that we are held fast to that living tradition and how is that living tradition distinct from my own individual interpretation of the Bible? Ultimately, after several years of struggle because I was very anti-Catholic as a Presbyterian. In fact me and my best friend were the only Presbyterian seminarians at Gordon Cornwell in the Presbyterian Fellowship who endorsed the old Westminster Confession which charged the Roman Catholic Church with being the Antichrist, and he opposed me vigorously when I was thinking about joining the Catholic Church. He now is also a member of the Roman Catholic Church and he’s finishing his doctorate at Westminster seminary, ironically enough. I believe that the doctrine of sola scriptura, that the Bible alone is our only authority, is itself unscriptural. I can’t find anywhere in scripture God telling his people that the Bible alone is their sole authority. It would have been very convenient for me in terms of my career to find it, and I looked and I tried, but I couldn’t. Second Timothy 3:15 doesn’t teach that. It teaches the inspiration of Scripture, but just because the Bible is inspired and profitable, it doesn’t mean that only the Bible is inspired and profitable. Matthew 15 condemns tradition which is merely human and which contradicts the Word of God, but 2 Thessalonians 2:15 speaks about a tradition through which the Word of God is conveyed authoritatively. How can that be? St. Paul also commends the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 11:2 for ’holding fast to the traditions that he had handed on to them’.
So I rejected sola scriptura because it was unscriptural. I also came to the conclusion that sola scriptura is unhistorical. That is, the Church was spreading for decades, long before the New Testament books were written, gathered and officially canonized, or collected in an authoritative collection. I believe that historians who are objective will see that the Church saw itself bound top the Word of God as it was handed down from Christ to the apostles and their successors in their doctrine, in their worship and in their morals apart from New Testament books. The New Testament books were in a certain sense occasional documents written to help certain congregations or certain area churches with particular questions, but nowhere does the Bible say, or does the New Testament regard itself, as a compendium that is sufficient for everything we need to know to live the Christian life. I should say that I believe the Bible has a lot more than most Christians realize, and there’s a lot more to be gained than many Catholics and Protestants have actually acquired, but I think it’s unhistorical to regard sola scriptura as true and binding upon the believer. I think it’s also contrary to sound reasoning. It’s illogical. How do you know what Scripture is? How do you know what books are inspired? Do we leave it up to each individual Christian to read all of the books that were possibly included or excluded? Have you read and studied The Shepherd of Hermas? The Epistle of Barnabas? The Book of Clement? The Epistles of Ignatius? All of these were circulated in such a way as that some regarded them as scriptural. Others didn’t. The Church had to decide and, thanks be to God, Jesus Christ gave to his apostles his own

authority to decide, and their successors carried on their authority so that we could have a New Testament today, But I believe it's illogical to suggest that the Bible alone is our authority when the Bible alone can't give to us what books are and aren't to be included in the Bible. How could it? If revelation included a list of every single book to be included we would only be able to trust that if we knew that revelation itself was inspired. But no book can confirm or authenticate its own inspired status. I think it's also impractical. This is a very hard point to speak about, but I think that it almost results in a kind of anarchy within the church. Since the Protestant Reformation over four centuries ago we have literally thousands of denominations and splinter groups that are continually splintering over various interpretations of the Bible. Several Presbyterian denominations. We affectionately and somewhat complacently refer to ourselves as the 'split P's'' because we have so many Presbyterian groups. And then Methodists, and Lutherans and even Episcopalians, especially in the last ten or fifteen years. It hasn't brought greater unity into the Church, it's brought a very tragic disunity to impose the Bible as the sole authority so that every individual is left up to himself or herself to decide what doctrines are true. Can every believer be expected to understand and articulate the hypostatic union of the two natures of Christ? The Council of Calcedon passed on to us a legacy that we need to hold fast to, but very few lay people dare say very few seminarians could give a very articulate, detailed defense of that doctrine, which everybody at Westminster Seminary upholds, but very few people have actually generated on their own by interpreting the Bible by themselves. It's anarchistic. It would be like writing the U.S. Constitution only not establishing a judiciary or an executive or a legislative branch to apply that with authority. I would be like constitutionally investing individual citizens with the right to disagree with and rebel against judicial decisions handed down from any level of the court system. It would be up to them to interpret the Constitution with regard to any legislative decisions and executive enactments. You would have no nation; every man and woman would be a nation unto himself or unto herself.

Is that what Jesus Christ intended for the family of God that he died and was raised to build upon the Holy Spirit? I don't think so. I don't think so. I also think it encourages a subtle and unconscious and unintentional presumption, or tyranny. As we enforce church discipline in Protestant churches, I recall the very funny feeling that I had as I would argue and articulate my views and then face the prospect of disciplining members in the church just because I was able to get a consensus among my elders, or among the congregational members.

Is it really that way? No pastor presumes to be infallible in the Protestant tradition. No head of any denomination presumes such, but they all have to continually discipline people and in many cases excommunicate people on the basis of their own fallible and frequently erroneous interpretations. That seems somewhat dubious. I also believe that its inconsistent. The doctrine of sola scriptura is inconsistent. Everybody has some tradition. They might be Americans, or Westerners. They might think in an individualistic thought world. They might be Methodists; they might have come up in the Episcopal tradition or the Presbyterian tradition, but all of us have categories that we receive from our spiritual fathers and mothers, those who have nurtured us in the faith. They have transmitted to us thought categories about which we know little, and yet they influence our interpretation so much. The question is not whether or not an interpretation will be authoritative, the question is whether it's the tradition that Christ instituted through the apostles and maintains through the apostolic tradition in one holy Roman Catholic Church. Its also improbable. I believe that any doctrine without a single defender for the first thirteen centuries of the Church is questionable to say the least. The along came Wycliffe in the fourteenth century and he began to develop it rather defensively. Because he disagreed with the pope, he thought his interpretation of the Bible was sound, therefore, he concluded, the Bible alone must be authoritative. It wasnt until the Protestant Reformation that such an interpretation became widespread. In Wycliffe day his own university colleagues condemned the proposition. Is it really the case that for fourteen centuries the Holy Spirit could guide nobody to see what the Protestants regarded as the formal principle of the Reformation, the article on which the Church stands or falls, along with justification by faith? And finally I believe that practically speaking it becomes somewhat incoherent. We say, well, the Bible alone is our sole and exclusive authority, but we will listen to and respect tradition. Well, what do you think of somebody who says, "I will accept with respect the words of Jesus and follow them whenever I agree with them". That isn't lordship, and that isnt servanthood. If we submit to the living Word of Jesus Christ I believe that it will cause us to see the Apostolic Tradition that Jesus Christ handed down to his family through his apostles, his spiritual sons and through their successors, the grandsons and greatgrandsons. A binding, a divine, an authoritative tradition found in the liturgy of the Church, found in the Creeds, found in the writings of the Fathers, and exhibited in statements such as St. Paul makes in 2 Thessalonians 2:15, 1 Corinthians 11:2 and other places as well. My reasons, then, for accepting Tradition are mainly biblical. I don't believe that Scripture teaches sola scriptura; I believe it's unhistorical; I believe its illogical; I believe the Protestant doctrine is impractical, inconsistent, improbable and incoherent, whereas I feel and I believe and Ive come to see that Scripture teaches the authority of Sacred Tradition, that it is the context in which the Church came to recognize the gospels and the New Testament. As St. Augustine said, "I would not believe in the Gospels were it not for the authority of the Catholic Church." That authority is not tyrannical, it is not human, it's the life of Jesus Christ transmitted by the Holy Spirit through those successors that he has graciously overseen and guaranteed because of his love and his power manifested in his living Body, the Church of Christ. Thank you very much.

MODERATOR Now we will hear a five minute rebuttal by Dr. Knudson..

KNUDSON Thank you very much, Scott. I simply want to say this: as I tried to point out in my opening comments, I believe that a true Protestant position does not despise tradition. We have it. I stand myself, after having been raised for a while in the Methodist tradition, I stand now in the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition, and I am very partial to that. I love it very much and I try to defend it. But now Scott himself pointed out where the real difference lies, where the crux of the matter lies. He says, "It is, then, the tradition as interpreted by the one, holy Roman Catholic Church." And if your churchand I do believe that he is representing it correctlyholds to the full authority of Scripture, then what relationship does tradition have to that? Is it then an infallible interpretation of the church that stands beside the scriptures, or even over the scriptures? Now Scott talked about matter-of-fact, that of course there was tradition in the early church, and that as a matter of fact is true. There was a time before there was the New Testament written form, the canon, and canonics is a very difficult subject, I admit. Certainly, but then when the epistles went out, when these writings went out, they had apostolic authority, and they were brought together and together they are on the order, then, of the oracles that were, then, in the Old Testament times, and as Paul says, "What advantage has the Jew? He has, then, the oracles of God." Now, as far as anarchy is concerned, I tried to indicate that it seems to me at least within the Protestant framework there can be and is a profound appreciation for authority. Things are not quite at loose ends as Scott points it out in church discipline, for example. We have our presbyteries, we have our sessions, we have a set of teachings which are applied and we excommunicate people only, then. in very rare instances and only when it seems to us that they do not manifest that they are children of God in Jesus Christ, and then the discipline is always in the interests of restoring them to the Lord Jesus Christ. There are other things that he talked about: inconsistency, incoherency, presumption and so forth, but I do want to emphasize again, since we have such a limited time, what the crux of the matter is. I tried to bring out what that crux was at the very end of my comments. It is illustrated for one thing as Martin Luther stood before the Diet of Worms and he said, "If you can convince me by Scripture that I am wrong, then I will recant, but unless you can convince me by Scripture, then here I stand. I can do no other." I think that is the crux of the matter. It does not come from an anarchistic spirit, it does not come from a wild and woolly lack of tradition, but it comes from an idea that it is in the Word of God written that there is the key, that there is, then, the final standard..

Hahn: I certainly dont mean to be taken in any way to suggest that Westminster Seminary or the orthodox Presbyterian Church and Reverend Knudson are anarchistic in intention. I happen to have awesome respect for his particular denomination and especially the seminary. I do wish to point out, however, that the Presbyterian tradition as it has developed is quite, perhaps, otherwise. The orthodox Presbyterian Church probably constitute less than two percent of the Presbyterians in this country. Most of the Presbyterians in this country belong to a church that has already gone on record as endorsing abortion in some instances as an act of Christian stewardship. The mainstream Presbyterian denomination in which I was born and raised also has a task force consisting of homosexual members who are advocating not only the ordination of homosexuals, but many other things too. I only point this out to highlight the fact that despite this small Presbyterian seminary and this very respectable denomination, there is, nevertheless, not only among individual Presbyterian members and pastors, but within the official documents of the denomination itself, as well as many other Protestant denominations, a kind of wild spirit. I don't believe that Luther intended it. I don't believe that Calvin intended it. Their intentions notwithstanding, the effects are before us..

Id like to also point out that when we are speaking about being centered on the Word, I say yea and amen. Youve got to remain centered in on the Word of God, but I dont see anywhere in Scripture proof that we should reduce the Word of God to the printed page. And I sense that thats what sola scriptura does. Respect for authority? Yes, but it's a pick and choose kind of respect. "I will respect authority only when it agrees with my interpretation". Well, most parents would not tolerate that kind of respect within their household. I once asked my mentor and theological instructor, What do you think is the pillar and foundation of truth? He looked at me, and he knew I was struggling with the Catholic Church, and he said, "Why, the scriptures, of course." And I said, "Well then, why is it that in 1 Timothy 3:15 that St. Paul says, "The pillar and foundation of all truth is the Church, the household of faith." That's a strong statement. Just as our Lord says in Matthew 18:17, "If somebody refuses to listen, even to the Church, let him be to you an outsider, as a tax collector or a Gentile." Jesus would not say if he hasn't successfully communicated, and he doesn't individually assume the fact that the authority of the Church is his own authority. As he says, "I will build my church..." And he also gives the keys of the kingdom to Peter and he says, "Whatever you bind and loose on earth will be bound and loosed in heaven." It;s not Peter and it isn't the popes, it's Jesus Christ himself whose living presence through the Holy Spirit underwrites and guarantees fallible men who hold the office of St. Peter and his chair and hold the keys that symbolize succession. Its the living power and life and love of Christ that upholds the family of God, the pillar and foundation of truth which is not Scripture by itself, but the Church. The Church has also said in Vatican II and elsewhere as well, that the Church finds herself under the Word, not over the Word. Under the Word written and also under the Word orally transmitted through its worship and through the life of the community. You know how strong and large families live through several generations? Many things are passed down that are heirlooms; many customs that are respected and in a sense held dear. Well, in a divine family, the one that was built at the expense of the Body and Blood of our Savior, the one that he purchased for us, the one that he built with his own Body and Blood, the Church, God's family, there you find traditions that aren't just written down, but are spoken and lived, and contagiously transmitted from one age to the next. And the saints are the ones who recognized it. Dr. Knudson said that the littlest saints can read the bible, and when the littlest, the moderate and the great saints did read the Bible, for two thousand years saints in every inhabited continent have come to the same conclusion, and that is that Jesus Christ upholds the Roman Catholic Church as the family of God. If the Holy Spirit alone is a sufficient guide to our reading of the bible, then Ill close with a question: Why do spirit-led Protestants continue to disagree so strongly over so many important issuesbaptism, worship, government, divorce, remarriage, the Second Coming, altars, pictures, statues, kneelers, alcohol, cigarettes, cards, Zionism, birth control, and the list could be extended almost indefinitely? Why is that led by the Spirit, guided by the Word, they have come to so many disagreements, and how is it that you are so sure that the two thousand year consensus represented by the Catholic Church, shared by hundreds of millions of Catholics on every inhabited continent is so grossly wrong that you must condemn and break away from them to form groups which in less than five hundred years have splintered into hundreds and thousands of more groups? Hard questions, but I am sincere in searching for answers..

MODERATOR Now were going to have a cross examination section beginning with Dr. Knudson, in which he will pose a question for Mr. Hahn. Mr. Hahn will have two minutes to respond. Dr. Knudson will rebut that response, and Mr. Hahn will have the last say: he will rebut the rebuttal. Then we will return that. Mr. Hahn will begin with his question, and the process will continue. After that we will pick up with about 15 minutes of audience questions, so just bear with me while I move this microphone and well get started..

KNUDSON [Question]: Well Scott, you were talking about the fact that my own denomination is very small, and indeed it is. From your size it’s insignificant. But that doesn’t mean it can’t stand for the truth of the Word. You mentioned Augustine; he stood for the truth of the Word and against many antagonists. Many of the Fathers, as you well know, stood almost alone against such heresies as Pelagianism. I do not see that mere size is a real deterrent. We should, of course, attempt to join with all those of like faith, we should be properly ecumenical, but how do you come to the conclusion or how is it that you say that because we are small and splintered somehow that we’re rather wild-eyed? Do I detect that that reflects somehow on our understanding of the Word of God?.

HAHN [Reply]: I thank you for the question because if gives me a chance to clarify a point insufficiently made clear. My point is not so much to question the size or propriety of one denomination or another, but rather the theological principle that gave rise to such an unbelievable proliferation of splinter groups and small denominations everywhere that sincerely but emphatically disagree on countless basic points of doctrine, worship and practice. I have still great respect for the orthodox Presbyterian Church. They’re not wild-eyed, but I am pointing out the presence of hundreds of denominations that all point to sola scriptura and their own individual or group interpretations of the Bible, and Im asking the question: Is this really the way God fathers His family?.

KNUDSON [Rebuttal]: As far as the way God fathers His family, Jesus Christ himself in his great high priestly prayer prayed that all Christians would be one. We must never forget that; we ought to be properly ecumenical. On the other hand there is one thing that animates us above all else, and that is fealty to the teaching of the Word of God, and we must struggle with that also within our own traditions. The tradition in which I standI am a member of a very small denomination, that is truebut we do stand within a Reformed tradition that is much bigger than we are, and I think, much more grand than we are.

And I should only pray that the prayer of Jesus Christ might eventually be realized because he will do all things according to his will..

HAHN [Counter-rebuttal]: Once again, it might help to focus the question. The question as I see it and as I feel it is, where does Scripture teach that Scripture alone is the binding Word of God? When Scripture very easily refers in passing in many passages to a living Word and to an oral tradition transmitted by Christ through the apostles to their successors who in an unbroken line of succession have maintained by the help of the Holy Spirit the family of God. It's that, I think, more than any problem in any denominationwhich really doesn't concern me at all tonight - it's that which I find disturbing. Scripture itself does not teach sola scriptura, history doesn't reflect it, practical common sense does not leave an organizational body with a document and no authoritative institutions to enforce it over time..

HAHN [Question]: Id like to raise the question again that I referred to, and that is: Where does the bible teach that it alone is the Word of God and that it alone is above the Church, when the Church is called the pillar and foundation of truth? Where does the Bible teach that it is taken by itself it is sufficient, clear and understandable, but especially sufficient and exclusive in its authority. I'd also like you to comment on 2 Peter 3:15 where Peter says, "Some things in Paul's writings are difficult to understand which lawless and unstable men [presumably sincere] distort to their own destruction."?.

KNUDSON [Reply]: There are laws on discipline and unwise people who distort things to their own destruction, that is quite true. On the other hand, that is certainly not the norm within Protestant circles and I would remind you even though you do have a tremendous unity centered in Rome in your church, there are a great number of different opinions and a great number of different movements within your own community. Now, Scott keeps on asking where does the Scriptures, where does the New Testament explicitly say that is is the sole authority, that it is the final authority, let us say even over the authority of the Church? I think that I can find that where I put it before, that once these epistles, once the writings were established, they were authoritative in the Church. They had the apostolic authority, as Paul, as apostle, had apostolic authority. Now, indeed, there was a time before these were written. That is true, but I drew an analogy between the writing in the New Testament and the writing in the Old Testament, and that Jesus Christ himself pointed to the Old Testament and referred to it constantly, and said, "Not the lest part of the Old Testament, not one jot or tittle of the law will pass away until everything is fulfilled." Furthermore, we know that the writings of the New Testament are authoritative and that furthermore when it says that the Church is the pillar and ground of the truth, Im glad that Scott emphasized that it is the pillar and ground of the truth. The truth is supreme and that truth is sufficient because when looking at the written documents of the New Testament is unable to gain a knowledge that he needs that he come to Christ and believe in him..

HAHN [Rebuttal]: So once the epistles were written, collected and formally gathered into a canonical collection they're authoritative, but it was the Church that established the canon. It was the Church that had the hard task of deciding which books to include and exclude. Now, why do you trust their decision there but not with regard to their decisions with regard to the sacraments, church government. For instance, Irenaeus said, "Anyone who wishes to discern the truth may see in every church in the whole world the apostolic succession clear and manifest. That is true," he goes on to say, "Not only with regard to the apostles in general with the successor to Peter in particular." It seems to me that Christ didn’t write a book, Christ did not commission men to author books, but to go out and preach and teach and establish the Church in which they would rule, as their successors would, as divinely authoritative spokesmen and interpreters of God’s Word. I believe that is the clearest guideline we have in Scripture, and so therefore, Scripture itself leads us away from ascribing exclusive authority to the Bible. Bible-only Christianity has led to chaos, sincere but substantial chaos..

KNUDSON [Counter-rebuttal]: I’ve tried, of course, to say again and again that when one speaks of the Bible only, when one speaks of it only as the authority, then one has to say that according to us it is the only infallible authority. There are authorities that we can honor and I quoted John Calvin to that effect. Now, did the Church establish the canon? Or did men in this process, did men collect things which then had the quality of authority about them already? The Church did not establish that authority, the Church simply recognized that authority. Now as far as the sufficiency of Scripture is concerned, I think that I can speak factually there too. I believe I can simply say this: that if, even the humble believersand all of us in our hearts want to be humble believerscomes to Scripture, he can find as in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son and whoever believes in him shall have everlasting life." One can understand those sayings. The Scriptures are sufficient to lead us to Jesus Christ..

MODERATOR Thank you. Now we’re going to have questions from you all in the audience. Id ask that anybody who has a question please line up over here. We’ll take as many as possible within a fifteen minute period. Please pay attention to our timekeeper and make sure you don;t exceed the limit on questions. Please remember that there will be no testimonies, no sermons, and you will not be allowed to read sections from the Bible. You may refer to the Bible for passages that relate directly to your questions. One last point. We’re going to allow the person who did not receive the question to give a one minute rebuttal to the person who did receive it..

QUESTIONER 1 Why the Bible doesn’t say sola scriptura is because the Bible was not yet complete for the first century, therefore there had to be oral teachings. However the Bible does teach in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 that prophecy and knowledge would come to an end. The Catholic Church teaches it continuing, I believe the Bible teaches clearly when it comes to an end related to the apostolic age, therefore I believe the age is ended. Do you know what the Bible teaches as a requirement for one to be an apostle?.

HAHN [Reply]: OK, I want to clarify one thing right away, and that is that the Roman Catholic Church does not hold to continuing public revelation at all. In fact it holds de fide that there is no public revelation continuing, and that is binding upon the people of God. In other words popes, councils and bishops do not invent new doctrines, they dont change old doctrines, they cant fabricate any teachings. All they are responsible to do is transmit the teachings that Christ gave to the apostles, nothing more. Public revelation indeed ceased with the closing of the apostolic age. I’m in hearty agreement, as is the whole Catholic Church. Join us [laughter]...in love. Anyway, the apostolic authority that Christ gave to the Twelve, and then Judas died and then Peter very naturally rose up and in Acts 1 replaced Judas with Matthias. There was apostolic succession assumed there. And the apostles transmitted that to bishops. The bishops are the ones who officially and authoritatively decided what was to be included in the New Testament books and what was not. Have you read The Shepherd of Hermas? Or the Epistles of Ignatius or Clement? Many, many books people regarded as potential scripture werent included, whereas many books that are now in the New Testament such as Jude, Revelation and others, for years in many churches were not regarded as Scripture. Who was to decide? The Holy Spirit, of course, who knows what is inspired and what is notbut guiding who? Whose judgments do you trust? Does every Christian in every generation have to read all of the books that applied for inclusion into Scripture and decide for themselves? No, of course not. Martin Luther himself admitted that he was indebted pure and simple to the Roman Catholic Church and the authority of the bishops to decide what to include and what to exclude, that is, what our Bible would be..

KNUDSON [Rebuttal]: As far as the statement that Scott has made, that the revelations and prophecies do not continue, that is precisely the position that I would represent. Furthermore, that the hierarchy or whatever you want to say, the bishops or whatever, other than produce the Word are simply interpret the Word, that is exactly what I would say about any of our presbyters or anyone in our particular churches, in our confessions. The question then comes, where does the final authority come from? I maintain that the final authority comes from the Word of God..

QUESTIONER 2 You made a statement that the apostles made no doctrine. Did you say that earlier or did I misunderstand that?.

HAHN That Christ is the truth that the apostles received and transmitted. But they were given new doctrine by Christ through the Holy Spirit..

QUESTIONER (CONTINUING) OK, there are three books back there and all three of them make the same statement, "Instead, through God’s will, grace is not conferred on anyone without Mary’s cooperation." My question is, since all three books are saying that Mary must be in cooperation with salvationall three state thatmy question is after it got recorded in the Bible, therefore it had to be put into existence by the Church later on, probably from what I read, twelfth century. Is that true or not?.

HAHN [Reply]: OK, this debate is on authority, not Mariology. I would love to have a public forum on Mariology. I would love to have a forum to discuss Mary because I was one of the most anti-Marian, anti-Catholics Ive ever known. I remember with glee ripping up my grandmother’s rosary beads after she died. I felt that it was an idolatrous superstition. I don’t see it that way any more. I would just say that there are two principles in Scripture that ground the Church’s belief on Mary. The first is that Christ in accepting the Father’s mission to become human accepted the law of the Father; the Ten Commandments summarize that law. The first law with regard to human relations is Honor your father and mother. Honor in Hebrew, covoda, means to bestow glory or honor. Everything that is done to Mary Christ initiates. He honors, he glorifies his mother more perfectly than anybody ever obeyed that law. The second principle is just simply that the Church imitates Christ, and from that all proper Marian devotion flows. Those are the scriptural planks on which this belief is grounded. [Outburst, commotion, shouts].

KNUDSON [Rebuttal]: This question raises another question, that is, has the Church been wrong sometimes, absolutely wrong? Now that is a point that John Calvin made, that the Church in its interpretation has been wrong, and has promulgated those as infallible. As far as Mary is concerned, certainly we honor Mary, but as soon as we get onto that question on was the Church right, I shall simply ask the question when it thinks of Mary as the mediatrix of grace when the scriptures clearly teach that Christ is the one and only mediator between god and man..

QUESTIONER 3 My question is also for Mr. HahnI think were picking on him. The fundamental ideas behind the Protestant Reformation were that Christ is the supreme authority, the Bible is the best way that we can understand it, and I think that what the Reformers were concerned about is that the fallible humans that were now interpreting it in that particular day and age in history, amid the corruption that was going on in the papacy at that time, they felt that no longer could we assume that a fallible human should be the person that's giving out interpretations. Could you comment on that Protestant principle?.

HAHN [Reply]: OK. Insofar as Christ is the head Catholics lock arms with you, but I would add that the people who wrote the New Testament were also fallible humans. If the Holy Spirit could so preserve fallible humans from fallible mistakes and render their work infallible so that the Church could receive Christ's truth without adulteration and error, why can't the Holy Spirit continue using fallible leaders to interpret that revelation through the ages, and why wouldn't that be a natural a normal thing that Christ would do out of love for his children?.

QUESTIONER That's what Protestants think goes on right now: that the Holy Spirit's sticking to us..

KNUDSON [Rebuttal]: Yes, we believe that Christ said that his spirit would guide the Church to all truth, and I'm referring to the Church not just as the Roman Catholic Church but the church in the larger sense. Is there any possible analogy between God so inspiring the writers of the New Testament that they then spoke his word; has he not also then guided the Church? I have to admit that there is the possibility of analogy but that the question is again what is the final authority? The analogy is there, but still the written word is the final authority..

QUESTIONER 4 (Garbled) speak of tradition. Which tradition? The Roman Catholic tradition, the Orthodox tradition, or maybe the Coptic tradition?.

HAHN [Reply]: Good question. Nice and short and simple and difficult. The premise of the question I want to highlight and then proceed to answer. It's hard to answer every part of a complex question to everybodys satisfaction, especially when they come with a little bit of animosity toward your Catholic faith. The premise of your question is scripture and tradition, and I want to comment that it seems to be patent in 2 Thessalonians 2:15 that Paul quite easily and naturally and offhandedly regards traditionboth oral and writtenas divinely binding and authoritative. What tradition is it? Well, there are only two churches that are applying for the job. One is the Orthodox and one is the Catholic Church. No Protestant body ever claimed to have the Holy Spirit transmitting an infallible gift of interpretation. The Orthodox and the Catholic do. They both agree on 99.9% of their doctrine: transubstantiation, most all of Marian doctrines, all the things that Protestants find offensive. So the tradition the Catholic Church holds is held substantially in common by the Orthodox Church. Thats why at Vatican II the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church and the Pope of the Catholic Church both lifted the excommunications, because they both recognized in their respective traditions and in the others a living tradition which goes back to the apostles, which is substantially, considerably similar if not absolutely identical..

KNUDSON [Rebuttal]: The question that was asked during the time of the Reformation, if the apostolic succession was so important then are there not several who claim that? I'm not in a position to answer that question but it does bear on something that Scott said a moment ago..

QUESTIONER 5 Professor Hahn, in your appeal to put on a par tradition by calling it inspired and Scripture on a par with that youve said that Christ did not commission men to write books, was the Apostle John outside Christs commission when he said, "These are written that ye may believeWritten!that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ and that believing have life through his name?"

HAHN [Reply]: I don't believe that he was out of line, I just don't believe that in writing he was responding to anything that we find in the gospels by way of direct command from Jesus to the apostles. I do find, however, John also saying in 2 John, "I have much to write you but I don't want to use paper and ink. Instead I hope to visit you and talk face to face so that our joy may be complete." Likewise in 3 John, "I have much to write you but I don't want to write with pan and ink. I hope to see you soon and we will talk face to face." In other words, as far as I can tell, my zeal for tradition came from a zeal against tradition. I was only trying to remain prayerfully open to the Bible and follow the Bible wherever it led me, and the Bible led me away from Bible-only Christianity to see that the writers of the Bible regarded oral tradition on par with written tradition, and both stemming from our living Christ, our Savior who died for us.

KNUDSON [Rebuttal]: As far as this question is concerned, I might simply mention that we keep on talking in the sense that the apostles went forth and they talked and they said they were going to visit and all that. They spoke, of course, with authority. Then, according to our view, the apostolic time did disappear along with revelations and prophecies and so forth. Now what speaks authoritatively, that is, the final authority? I answered that question.

QUESTIONER 6 Professor Hahn, in your remarks with sola scriptura breeding rebellion, schism, and so on, you pointed to larger Presbyterian denominations embracing homosexuality and abortion as somehow the product of sola scriptura....

HAHN In official teaching....

QUESTIONER Now, you know, having graduated from Gordon and being familiar with Westminster (garbled) you know very well that the OPC and certain denominations in the PCA do not at all embrace homosexuality and abortion and certainly you cant say that the Catholic Church is immune from this being as (garbled) not one of John Pauls visits to a gay Catholic church in California.

HAHN To urge them to repent and to embrace the full grace of the Gospel. I want to add though that the PCUS, the PCUSA, the UPCUSA, all of these denominations formerly condemned these things as sins too. My point is that these denominations have changed because all they had to go on was Scripture and the shifting sand of human opinions and cultural fad. My point is not that there aren't hypocrites in the Catholic Church but there are in the Presbyterian and other Protestant denominations. Were all hypocrites to some extent. My point is that in the official teachings of the Catholic Church we see a very painful but courageous holding fast to moral teaching which this century finds repugnant. And on a worldwide, universal basis. Whereas the only way Protestant denominations have been able to maintain that is by constantly splitting off from denominations whose moral stands are becoming increasingly decadent.

QUESTIONER Do you equate sola scriptura with homosexuality?

KNUDSON [Rebuttal]: It is indeed the case, I was talking with one of my presbyters earlier today, and he said that he had been in a discussion and there was a Roman Catholic brother there who seemed to take a very radical stand for the homosexuals. He thought he'd have a buddy there, but he found that he was really very far off to the left. However, as Scott points out and as I pointed out in my earlier remarks at the very beginning, we appreciate the stand of the Catholic Church against abortion and against many of these evils. There are certainly Protestants and Catholics who go astray from the clear teaching of the Word of God. I want that understood, that I know that. However, I do believe that Scott is not quite being fair in that he suggests that because of sola scriptura principle that we lay ourselves open to that. I don't believe that for one minute.

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