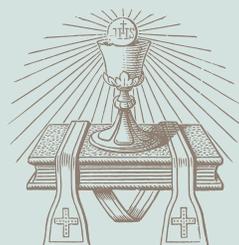


G R E G G R . A L L I S O N



**ROMAN
CATHOLIC**
THEOLOGY & PRACTICE

An Evangelical Assessment

“If you are looking for a few bullet points and caricatures, this book will disappoint. But if you are looking for a serious survey drawn from the Catholic Catechism and other primary sources, along with an evangelical assessment of each point, Professor Allison’s labors will pay rich dividends.”

Michael Horton, J. Gresham Machen Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics, Westminster Seminary California; author, *Calvin on the Christian Life*

“This book is good news to those who have long desired a reliable theological guide in dealing with Roman Catholicism. Based on a painstaking analysis of the 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, it covers the all-embracing trajectory of Roman Catholic theology and practice. Instead of juxtaposing ephemeral impressions and disconnected data, Allison provides a theological framework that accounts for the complexity of the Roman Catholic system and its dynamic unity. This book is to be commended for its biblical depth, theological acuteness, historical alertness, and systemic awareness. My hope is that this landmark book will reorient evangelical theology away from its attraction for a shallow ecumenicity with Rome toward a serious dialogue based on the Word of God.”

Leonardo De Chirico, Lecturer of Historical Theology, Istituto di Formazione Evangelica e Documentazione, Padova (Italy); pastor, Breccia di Roma, Rome; author, *Evangelical Theological Perspectives on Post-Vatican II Roman* and *A Christian Pocket Guide to the Papacy*

“Writing with an irenic and thoughtful tone, Allison engages with Rome via the Church’s official Catechism and helps the reader understand what Protestants and Roman Catholics share in common and where they differ. This book is neither spinelessly ecumenical nor harshly polemical, but a fair and principled engagement with the beliefs of Rome.”

Carl R. Trueman, Professor of Church History, Westminster Theological Seminary; author, *The Creedal Imperative* and *Luther on the Christian Life*

“A very useful evangelical assessment of Roman Catholicism. Unlike so many such books, it does not concentrate merely on points of difference, but considers the whole sweep of Roman Catholic teaching, as set out in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It affirms points of agreement as well as noting points of disagreement. It acknowledges that evangelicalism is not monochromatic and points to areas where some evangelicals would agree with Rome while others would not. This is a thorough guide that is warmly to be commended.”

Anthony N. S. Lane, Professor of Historical Theology, London School of Theology; author, *Exploring Christian Doctrine*

“With his characteristic depth and clarity, Gregg Allison escorts readers to the Catholic/Protestant intersection to analyze theological commonalities and differences. In addition to yielding indispensable insight, this volume exemplifies the sort of warmhearted and principled approach that today’s conversation desperately needs.”

Chris Castaldo, Director, Ministry of Gospel Renewal, Wheaton College;
author, *Talking with Catholics about the Gospel*

“Protestants and Catholics need to invent a new kind of relationship. The fire and sword of the Reformation era were unworthy of Christ; so were the desperate efforts of irresponsible leaders in the past century to deny that we ever really disagreed. Can we preach different views of the gospel and still love each other? If so, how do we understand that relationship, spiritually and ecclesially? With a systematic thoroughness worthy of Thomas Aquinas himself, Gregg Allison lays out the theological issues at stake. He provides a full overview of the questions that face us, and his commitment to fully love his Catholic neighbors while fully speaking the truth to them shows us how to handle our disagreements in a manner worthy of Christ. This book will reward the careful study it invites.”

Greg Forster, Program Director, Kern Family Foundation; author,
Joy for the World

Roman Catholic Theology and Practice

**ROMAN
CATHOLIC**
THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE

An Evangelical Assessment

GREGG R. ALLISON

Roman Catholic Theology and Practice: An Evangelical Assessment

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Roman Catholic Theology and Practice is dedicated to several men who have exerted a deep and abiding influence on my life: Roy Allison, who was God's great gift to be my dear father, who unconditionally loved, counseled, guided, and provided for me; Steve Kovic, who disciplined me during my university years and sacrificed his own dream for the sake of my further development; Wayne Grudem, whom God used to form me into a theologian who is unreservedly committed to the truthfulness and clarity of Scripture; Gerry Breshears, who shepherded me as my teaching career was beginning and knew just how to encourage and challenge me; John Feinberg, whose teaching, mentoring, and supervising have made me a better scholar and writer; and Bruce Ware, whose friendship and appropriately timed phone calls were God's instruments to direct me to the two faculty positions in which I have served. I love you men and am thankful to God for placing you in my life!

Contents

Preface: Intrigue and Critique	17
Abbreviations	21
1 Introduction	23
2 Scripture, Evangelical Theology, and Catholic Theology	31
Scripture and Its Interpretation	
An Evangelical Vision of Life with God and Human Flourishing	
Catholic Theology as a Coherent, All-Encompassing System	
<i>The Nature-Grace Interdependence</i>	
<i>Evangelical Assessment</i>	
<i>The Christ-Church Interconnection</i>	
<i>Evangelical Assessment</i>	
Conclusion	

I

Catholic Theology according to the
Catechism of the Catholic Church

Part I: The Profession of Faith

3 The Profession of Faith (Part I, Section I, Chapters 1–3)	71
The Human Capacity for God; the Doctrine of Revelation; the Doctrine of Faith	
Introduction: The Nature and Shape of the <i>Catechism</i>	
The Human Capacity for God (Sec. 1, Ch. 1)	
<i>Evangelical Assessment</i>	

The Doctrine of Revelation: God Comes to Meet Human Beings (Sec. 1, Ch. 2)

The Revelation of God (Art. 1)

The Transmission of Divine Revelation (Art. 2)

Sacred Scripture (Art. 3)

Evangelical Assessment

Divine Revelation

The Transmission of Divine Revelation/Sola Scriptura

Scripture and Its Interpretation

The Canon of Scripture

The Authoritative Interpretation of Scripture

The Doctrine of Faith: The Human Response to God (Sec. 1, Ch. 3)

Evangelical Assessment

4 **The Profession of Faith (Part I, Section 2, Chapter I, Article I—
Chapter 3, Article 8)**

117

The Doctrines of God, Angels, Humanity, and Sin; the Doctrines of the Person of Christ, the Incarnation, and the Immaculate Conception of Mary; the Work of Christ; Christ's Resurrection, Ascension, and Second Coming; the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

The Doctrines of God, Angels, Humanity, and Sin: "I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth"

(Sec. 2, Ch. 1, Art. 1)

Evangelical Assessment

The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ: ". . . and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord" (Sec. 2, Ch. 2, Art. 2)

Evangelical Assessment

The Doctrine of the Incarnation and the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception: "he was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and was born of the Virgin Mary" (Sec. 2, Ch. 2, Art. 3)

Evangelical Assessment

The Doctrine of the Work of Jesus Christ: "Jesus Christ suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried" (Sec. 2, Ch. 2, Art. 4)

Evangelical Assessment

The Doctrine of the Resurrection: "he descended into hell, on the third day he rose again" (Sec. 2, Ch. 2, Art. 5)

Evangelical Assessment

The Doctrine of the Ascension: “he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father” (Sec. 2, Ch. 2, Art. 6)

Evangelical Assessment

The Doctrine of the Second Coming and Divine Judgment: “from thence he will come again to judge the living and the dead” (Sec. 2, Ch. 2, Art. 7)

Evangelical Assessment

The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit: “I believe in the Holy Spirit” (Sec. 2, Ch. 3, Art. 8)

Evangelical Assessment

5 **The Profession of Faith (Part I, Section 2, Chapter 3, Article 9)** 159

The Doctrine of the Church

The Doctrine of the Church: “I believe in the holy catholic church” (Sec. 2, Ch. 3, Art. 9; Para. 1–3)

Evangelical Assessment

General Assessment

Oneness/Unity

Holiness

Catholicity

Apostolicity

The Doctrine of the Church: “I believe in the holy catholic church” (Sec. 2, Ch. 3, Art. 9; Para. 4–6)

Evangelical Assessment

Catholic Clergy/Hierarchy

Catholic Laity

Catholic Religious

The Communion of Saints

Mary as Mother of the Church

6 **The Profession of Faith (Part I, Section 2, Chapter 3, Articles 10–12)** 207

The Doctrines of Salvation, Our Future Resurrection, and Eternal Life

The Doctrine of Salvation: “I believe in the forgiveness of sins” (Sec. 2, Ch. 3, Art. 10)

Evangelical Assessment

The Doctrine of Our Future Resurrection: “I believe in the resurrection of the body” (Sec. 2, Ch. 3, Art. 11)

Evangelical Assessment

The Doctrine of Eternal Life: “I believe in life everlasting” (Sec. 2, Ch. 3, Art. 12)

Evangelical Assessment

Conclusion

II

Catholic Theology according to the
Catechism of the Catholic Church

Part 2: The Celebration of the Christian Mystery

- 7 **The Celebration of the Christian Mystery (Part 2, Section I)** 227
- The Liturgy and the Sacramental Economy
- Introduction: Why the Liturgy?
- Evangelical Assessment*
- The Sacramental Economy (Sec. 1)
- The Liturgy—Work of the Holy Trinity (Sec. 1, Ch. 1, Art. 1)
- Evangelical Assessment*
- The Paschal Mystery in the Church’s Sacraments (Sec. 1, Ch. 1, Art. 2)
- Evangelical Assessment*
- The Sacramental Celebration of the Paschal Mystery (Sec. 1, Ch. 2)
- Celebrating the Church’s Liturgy (Sec. 1, Ch. 2, Art. 1), and Liturgical Diversity and the Unity of the Mystery (Sec. 1, Ch. 2, Art. 2)
- Evangelical Assessment*
- 8 **The Celebration of the Christian Mystery (Part 2, Section 2, Chapter I, Articles 1–2)** 259
- The Seven Sacraments; The Sacraments of Christian Initiation: Baptism and Confirmation
- The Seven Sacraments of the Church (Sec. 2)
- The Sacraments of Christian Initiation (Sec. 2, Ch. 1)
- The Sacrament of Baptism (Sec. 2, Ch. 1, Art. 1)

Evangelical Assessment

Introductory Matters

Biblical Basis

Historical Development

Faith and Baptism

Extraordinary Scenarios

The Sacrament of Confirmation (Sec. 2, Ch. 1, Art. 2)

Evangelical Assessment

9 **The Celebration of the Christian Mystery (Part 2, Section 2, Chapter 1, Article 3)** 299

The Eucharist

The Sacrament of the Eucharist (Sec. 2, Ch. 1, Art. 3)

Excursus: The Contemporary Celebration of the Sacrament of the Eucharist

Evangelical Assessment

Sacramental Interpretation of the “Bread of Life” Discourse

Prefigurations of the Eucharist

The Dogma of Transubstantiation

Re-presentation of Christ’s Sacrifice

The Church’s Participation in the Offering of Christ

Infusion of Grace

Ongoing Worship of Christ

Relationship of the Eucharist to Penance

10 **The Celebration of the Christian Mystery (Part 2, Section 2, Chapter 2, Articles 4–5)** 327

The Sacraments of Healing: Penance and Reconciliation; Anointing of the Sick

The Sacraments of Healing (Sec. 2, Ch. 2)

The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation (Sec. 2, Ch. 2, Art. 4)

Evangelical Assessment

Penance Is Not a Sacrament

Pre- and Post-Baptismal Sins

Two Moments of Conversion

Acts of Penance

The Two-Sided Nature of Sin

Mortal and Venial Sins

Human and Divine Action

Two Effects of Penance

Indulgences

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick (Sec. 2, Ch. 2, Art. 5)

Evangelical Assessment

Anointing of the Sick Is Not a Sacrament

Other Disagreements

11 **The Celebration of the Christian Mystery (Part 2, Section 2, Chapter 3, Articles 6–7)** 357

The Sacraments at the Service of Communion: Holy Orders; Matrimony

The Sacraments at the Service of Communion (Sec. 2, Ch. 3)

The Sacrament of Holy Orders (Sec. 2, Ch. 3, Art. 6)

Evangelical Assessment

Church Government/Offices

Old Covenant Levitical Priesthood

Two Aspects of the Priesthood

Ministerial Effectiveness

Celebration and Recipients of the Sacrament

The Sacrament of Matrimony (Sec. 2, Ch. 3, Art. 7)

Evangelical Assessment

Conclusion

III

Catholic Theology according to the
Catechism of the Catholic Church

Part 3: Life in Christ

12 **Life in Christ (Part 3, Section I, Chapters 1–2)** 391

Human Vocation: Life in the Spirit; the Human Community

Human Vocation: Life in the Spirit (Sec. 1)

	The Dignity of the Human Person (Sec. 1, Ch. 1)	
	<i>Man: The Image of God (Sec. 1, Ch. 1, Art. 1)</i>	
	<i>Our Vocation to Beatitude (Sec. 1, Ch. 1, Art. 2)</i>	
	<i>Human Freedom (Sec. 1, Ch. 1, Art. 3)</i>	
	<i>The Morality of Human Acts (Sec. 1, Ch. 1, Art. 4)</i>	
	<i>The Morality of the Passions (Sec. 1, Ch. 1, Art. 5)</i>	
	<i>Moral Conscience (Sec. 1, Ch. 1, Art. 6)</i>	
	<i>The Virtues (Sec. 1, Ch. 1, Art. 7)</i>	
	<i>Sin (Sec. 1, Ch. 1, Art. 8)</i>	
	<i>Evangelical Assessment</i>	
	The Human Community (Sec. 1, Ch. 2)	
	<i>The Person and Society (Sec. 1, Ch. 2, Art. 1)</i>	
	<i>Participation in Social Life (Sec. 1, Ch. 2, Art. 2)</i>	
	<i>Social Justice (Sec. 1, Ch. 2, Art. 3)</i>	
	<i>Evangelical Assessment</i>	
13	Life in Christ (Part 3, Section I, Chapter 3)	413
	Salvation; Law; Grace and Justification; Merit; the Church, Mother and Teacher	
	God's Salvation: Law and Grace (Sec. 1, Ch. 3)	
	<i>The Moral Law (Sec. 1, Ch. 3, Art. 1)</i>	
	<i>Grace and Justification; Merit (Sec. 1, Ch. 3, Art. 2)</i>	
	<i>The Church, Mother and Teacher (Sec. 1, Ch. 3, Art. 3)</i>	
	<i>Evangelical Assessment</i>	
	<i>Law</i>	
	<i>Grace and Justification</i>	
	<i>Merit</i>	
	<i>The Church, Mother and Teacher</i>	
	Conclusion	
	Conclusion	
14	Evangelical Ministry with Catholics	453
	General Index	459
	Scripture Index	479

Preface

Intrigue and Critique

The Catholic Church is everywhere one turns. In terms of its sheer size, the Church claims well over a billion adherents, so the Catholic faithful are present in most parts of the world. Wherever they are found, they are leaders in government, educational institutions, health care, social programs, law, business endeavors, the arts, and much more. The head of the Church, the pope, wields enormous influence on the international stage, not only in terms of spiritual matters but also in the realms of politics, ethics, education, culture building, and the like. Recent scandals—child abuse by priests, the Vatican banking fiasco—have propelled the Church into the limelight with widespread notoriety. Whether for good or for bad, the Catholic Church is in the center of public attention.

This Catholic Church finds itself celebrating the anniversaries of two monumental events in its recent past: Vatican Council II, the twenty-first general council of the Church, was convened from 1962 to 1965. This *aggiornamento*, or updating, launched the Church on the path of modernization, the process of which continues as the Church celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of Vatican II. One of the most significant results of this journey so far was the 1994 publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a faithful and systematic presentation of the theology, liturgy, and practice of the Church. (For American Catholics, this *Catechism* replaced the *Baltimore Catechism* of 1885.) In 2014 the Church marks and celebrates the twentieth anniversary of the *Catechism*'s release.

Given the widespread profile of the Catholic Church and the conjunction of these two anniversaries, together with my own long-term familiarity with the Church, I offer this book. *Roman Catholic Theology and Practice: An Evangelical Assessment* seeks to accomplish two things: first, to note with fascination and appreciation the commonalities between Catholic and

evangelical theology—which I shall describe as the *intrigue* component; and second, to examine the differences between the two, demonstrating how Catholic theology and practice at these points of divergence do not conform properly to Scripture—I’ll call it the *critique* component. Though I offer this book primarily for evangelicals who want to become familiar with and assess Catholic theology and practice, I nourish a hope that some Catholics will also read it to learn what evangelicals think about Catholic theology and how they assess it. *Roman Catholic Theology and Practice* does not aim to be an anti-Catholic diatribe, though the critique that is offered is both sustained and pointed. It does not pretend to be an assessment of all things Catholic; indeed, it is quite circumscribed in its scope, focusing on Catholic doctrine and practice as unfolded in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. As such, it does not delve into how the Catholic faith is actually lived out by the faithful, nor does it engage the many faces of the Catholic Church in terms of its national, ethnic, theological, and liturgical varieties. Moreover, I do not claim to speak for all evangelicals or to represent the many versions of evangelical theology; given the expansive nature of evangelicalism, no one person and no one particular theological swath can accomplish that task. As for evangelical responses to this book, I anticipate that some will resonate thoroughly with its assessment, some will complain that it is too intrigued with and appreciative of Catholic theology, and some will object that it has overly criticized Catholicism. In any case, I hope to stimulate my readers’ reflection on and assessment of Catholic theology and practice by holding up the Catholic faith to Scripture and evangelical theology.

All authors owe a debt of gratitude to many other people for their personal counsel, guidance, inspiration, suggestions, editorial help, corrections, and the like; *Roman Catholic Theology and Practice* is no exception.

Specific contributions from Catholics came from Father James Keleher, my professor for “The Documents of Vatican II” course at St. Mary of the Lake Seminary; Don Pio Iorg, with whom I worked in Lugano, Switzerland; Father Slider Steurnol, who contributed to my Catholic theology classes at Western Seminary; and various priests, monks, and deacons who have contributed to my Catholic theology classes at Southern Seminary. Many thanks go to the original members of Alfa-Omega for giving Nora and me such an incredible opportunity to work with their nascent movement: Don Carlo Stanzial, Mario and Giulia, Ruggiero and Theresa, Lilli, Andrea,

Luigi and Anna, Antonio, Margherita, Ninetta, Maria, Sandro and Velia, Sandro and Ornella, Annamaria, Stefano and Emilia, Roberto, la famiglia Poppi di Sorbara, and others who have faded from memory.

Specific contributions from evangelicals came from Dr. Harold O. J. Brown, my professor for “Roman Catholic Theology” at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; Drs. Kenneth Kantzer and John D. Woodbridge, who shaped so much of my evangelical consciousness vis-à-vis other varieties of Christendom; and Dr. John Nyquist (and Peggy), who was a model of evangelical-Catholic dialogue.

Cru staff members who particularly shaped Nora and me while we were working in a Catholic context were Dennis Becker, campus director of Cru at Notre Dame; Kalevi Lethinen, European director of Cru; his close associates Piryö Salminen and Markku Happonen; Paul Cowen, national director of Cru in France; Jose Monels, national director of Cru in Spain; and Gioele Baldari, Elfi Thaon de Revel, LeeAnn Weibel, and Donald Malcomb. More recently, sixteen Cru staff participated in my Institute of Biblical Studies elective course “Ministering to Catholics” in July 2013 and permitted me to use them as “guinea pigs” for the rough, rough draft of this book. Their discussion during class, and their insightful written comments on the draft, prompted numerous changes and have made the final product a much better book. Accordingly, I thank Mike Bost, Dawn Dishman, Jessica and Nate Gilbert, Dan Hardaway, Linda Harrah, Bret and Elizabeth Hern, Andi Mitchell, Marci Scholten, James and Sarah Ward, David Westmoreland, Brian and Erin White, and my graduate assistant, Ben McGuire. The students in my most recent “Contemporary Roman Catholic Theology” course at Southern Seminary also deserve thanks for their attentive reading and discussion of a draft of this book. A special thanks goes to our good friend Ann Casas for her suggested improvements.

Colleagues and friends who have encouraged me in both ministry and the writing of this book are Frank Beckwith, with whom I’ve had the privilege of interacting in both print and oral presentation; Rob Plummer, editor of *Journeys of Faith*, who provided a written platform for Frank and me to exchange views; Chris Castaldo, author of *Holy Ground: Following Jesus as a Former Catholic*, who knows how to do just that in a winsome, direct way; and Leonardo De Chirico, whose PhD dissertation, published as *Evangelical Theological Perspectives on Post-Vatican II*

Roman Catholicism, was crucial to my understanding Catholicism as a theological system.

Most of all, many thanks go to my family for their support of my life and ministry: Lauren, Troy, Caleb, Ali, and Zoe Schneringer; Hanell, Mike, Anni, Hudson, and Vaughan Schuetz; Luke Allison; and my wife, Nora. She sensed the same call of God, shared the dream of ministering to and with Catholics, labored so incredibly hard with me at Notre Dame and in Italy, left family and friends to move to a new country to learn a new language so as to start and develop a new ministry, disciplined scores of women, and always encourages me to follow God's leading, whether that has been serving on Cru staff, pursuing advanced degrees in theology, teaching at two different seminaries, pastoring, writing books, or being her husband and the father of our children.

Abbreviations

Allison, <i>HT</i>	Gregg R. Allison, <i>Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine</i> (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).
Allison, <i>SS</i>	Gregg R. Allison, <i>Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church</i> (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).
<i>ANF</i>	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i> , ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, Philip Schaff, and Henry Wace, 10 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994).
Calvin, <i>Institutes</i>	John Calvin, <i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i> , ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960). (See also the listings below for LCC 20 and LCC 21; references for the <i>Institutes</i> are provided in those sources as well.)
<i>CCC</i>	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i> (New York: Doubleday, 1995).
De Chirico	Leonardo De Chirico, <i>Evangelical Theological Perspectives on Post-Vatican II Roman Catholicism</i> . Religions and Discourse, vol. 19 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003).
Grudem, <i>ST</i>	Wayne Grudem, <i>Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine</i> (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994, 2000).
Heppe	Heinrich Heppe, <i>Reformed Dogmatics</i> , ed. Ernst Bizer, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: Allen & Unwin, 1950).
Kreeft	Peter Kreeft, <i>Catholic Christianity</i> (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2001).
LCC 20	John Calvin, <i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i> , ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), in John Baillie, John T. McNeill, and Henry P. Van Dusen, gen. eds., Library of Christian Classics, 26 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), vol. 20.
LCC 21	John Calvin, <i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i> , ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), in John Baillie, John T. McNeill, and Henry P. Van Dusen, gen. eds., Library of Christian Classics, 26 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), vol. 21.
<i>LW</i>	Martin Luther, <i>Luther's Works</i> , ed., Jaroslav Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, 55 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–1986).

22 *Abbreviations*

- NPNF¹ *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, Philip Schaff, and Henry Wace, 1st ser., 14 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994).
- NPNF² *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, Philip Schaff, and Henry Wace, 2nd ser., 14 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994).
- Schaff Philip Schaff, *Creeeds of Christendom*, 3 vols. (New York: Harper, 1877–1905).
- Schmid Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1899).
- VC II-1 Austin Flannery, gen. ed., *Vatican Council II: Volume 1, The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, new rev. ed. (Northport, NY: Costello; and Dublin: Dominican, 1998).
- VC II-2 Austin Flannery, gen. ed., *Vatican Council II: Volume 2, More Post-Conciliar Documents*, new rev. ed. (Northport, NY: Costello; and Dublin: Dominican, 1998).

Introduction

Comically speaking, the genesis of this book occurred when I, as a five-year-old, was told by a similarly young (pre-Vatican Council II) Catholic neighbor girl that I was headed straight to hell because I wasn't Catholic. Greatly upset and fearing for my eternal destiny, I asked my parents if we could go to church, and they promptly responded by taking me to the local United Methodist church. Though that choice did nothing to change the neighbor girl's assessment of and warning about my future condemnation, it at least started me down the Protestant pathway. After nurturing me on the works of Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, John Calvin, John Wesley, and many others, this road has brought me to the place where I am today: an evangelical systematic theologian of the Reformed Baptist variety.

Seriously, however, the origin of this book began in May 1976, when my fiancée (now wife, Nora) and I were visiting a businessman in Chesterton, Indiana, near South Bend. We had received permission from Campus Crusade for Christ (now Cru) to begin raising support for our future campus ministry with that parachurch organization. During our conversation, in which Nora and I presented our upcoming work, the businessman jokingly exclaimed, "Wouldn't it be interesting if the two of you were assigned to be Cru staff at the University of Notre Dame." After a hearty laugh—"Sure, a Protestant missionary movement on the campus of the premier Catholic university in the United States!"—we concluded our presentation and said our thanks and good-byes. Getting into our car to return home, Nora (from the passenger side) and I (from the driver's side) looked at each other and, together, with a strong, divinely given conviction, said, "God is calling us to the University of Notre Dame."

After our wedding, honeymoon, and the commencement of our preparation as Cru staff, we received a Placement Request Form as part of our

training. One of the questions on this form had to do with where we hoped to be placed. We promptly wrote in our assignment preference: “the University of Notre Dame.” Soon after receiving our response, Cru leaders responsible for staff placement called us in for a little chat. They were quite intrigued that we wanted to go to Notre Dame (ND), as the Cru ministry was just beginning on that campus, and they were looking to assign more staff to join the small initial team. Nora and I, however, failed to meet their three qualifications: we did not come from a Catholic background, we were not veteran staff (who usually are responsible for starting new campus ministries), and we did not have children (so as to be in a similar season of life as the Cru staff couple already working at ND). Strike one. Strike two. Strike three. The Allison's were not going to be Cru staff at Notre Dame.

A bit later, to the same question on the second Placement Request Form, we wrote, “the University of Notre Dame.” Somewhat perturbed, our placement leaders called us in for another conversation, wondering what about the initial “No, you are not going to be assigned to Notre Dame” we didn't understand. They tried to comfort us with the possibility that we would end up at Notre Dame after we had been on Cru staff for a number of years, but they assured us ND was not in our immediate future. Of course, we assured them that we were willing to go anywhere they assigned us. But deep down inside lingered the firm conviction that God was calling us to Notre Dame.

Accordingly, when the third Placement Request Form was distributed a week or so later, our reply to the now infamous question was “the University of Notre Dame.” The placement leaders' flustered and emphatic response to what seemed like an intractable stance on our part was, “Perhaps God is calling you to Villanova or some other Catholic university, but you are not going to the University of Notre Dame!”

Another strike three for the second out.

Shortly thereafter, and along with all the new Cru staff, Nora and I received our Placement Envelope. Written on the form inside was our future assignment. Bound by a promise that we would not discuss the enclosed content with anyone else for a period of silence (twenty-four hours, which was to be used solely for the purpose of praying about our assignment), we found an isolated spot outside under a palm tree and nervously yet excitedly ripped open the envelope:

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is . . . the University of Notre Dame.

After the day-long period of silence—which for us was filled with great thanksgiving verging on giddiness—the Cru placement leaders confirmed with us that our crystal clear call to be on staff at ND outweighed any and all obstacles to our being assigned there. Upon completion of our staff training, Nora and I raised our support, packed our belongings, and moved to South Bend, Indiana, to begin our ministry at the University of Notre Dame.

So began a two-year stint (1976–1978) as part of a Protestant missionary movement on the campus of the most well known and highly regarded Catholic university in America. At the beginning of our second year, more than two hundred and fifty students expressed a desire to be in one of our weekly Bible studies; we ended up being able to accommodate one hundred and fifty of them. Communicating the gospel with clarity, teaching how to read and study the Word of God, discipling new believers, developing leaders in ministry—these core Cru ministries were contextualized for a Catholic university. Indeed, with more than 80 percent of Notre Dame students being Catholic, we learned a great deal about Catholic theology and practice and developed a deep burden for ministering to and with Catholics.

Out of this burgeoning interest in Catholic ministry, Nora and I signed up for a Cru summer project in Rome (1978), where the majority of our first few weeks was spent sharing the gospel with students at the University of Rome. Though we didn't know much Italian, we quickly learned one phrase that was part and parcel of most of our conversations with Italian young people: "Non credo in Dio" (I don't believe in God). Because this widely entrenched atheism had not been our experience working with Catholics at Notre Dame, we desperately asked the Italian national director of Cru if he knew any evangelical Catholics. "Do you mean Catholics who have become evangelicals?" he replied. "No," we clarified, "do you know any Catholics who are Catholics but who believe as we evangelicals believe about the gospel, justification by grace through faith alone, and so forth?" His response caught us by surprise: "Yes. Would you like to meet some?" The next day, as we walked into a meeting of dozens of Catholics who believed as evangelicals believe, we participated in the launch of a Catholic

lay evangelization movement called “Alfa-Omega: perché Cristo sia tutto in tutti” (“Alpha-Omega: that Christ may be all in all”). This encounter was the beginning of the fulfillment of a vision implanted several years earlier. Indeed, we committed to return to Italy to work with this movement.

After our return to the United States following the summer project, we raised support for our new assignment, completed three months of international staff training, and, moving to Firenze, studied Italian for six months before settling down in Rome. For the next three years (1979–1982), Nora and I were Cru staff embedded in Alfa-Omega. I served as the movement’s first training center director, helping prepare Catholic laypeople in how to share the gospel, lead Bible studies, disciple new believers, prepare leaders, organize evangelistic meetings, train Bible study leaders, and the like. We also led weekly Reading Groups of the Gospel that, meeting during the week, would focus on the text of the Gospel reading for the upcoming Sunday mass while teaching a very simple inductive Bible study method consisting of the reading of the text, observation, interpretation, application, and prayer. Our goal was to expose Catholics to the person and work of Jesus Christ as presented in the Gospels so that they could embrace the good news of salvation. Following Alfa-Omega evangelistic campaigns in parishes in Sorbara and Nonantola (near Modena, in the province of Emilia-Romagna, in northern Italy), Nora and I would remain behind for several weeks to help train Bible study leaders to work with the hundreds of residents who signed up to be in weekly Reading Groups of the Gospel.

Along with our ministry within Alfa-Omega came numerous opportunities to work with priests, meet one of the bishops of the Province of Rome, attend a “private” audience with Pope John Paul II (along with 9,998 other invitees), sneak the *Jesus* film into what was then called Yugoslavia, speak before hundreds of Catholic clergy (bishops, priests, monks, nuns, and seminary professors) on the topic “The Importance of the Bible in Ministry,” train other Cru staff for similar ministries with Catholics, and much more.¹

In addition to this robust experience ministering to and with Catholics, when working on the MDiv degree at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

¹ The claim by Dave Armstrong that I was “an undercover saboteur trying to find fault with Catholicism” during my ministry with Alfa-Omega is completely unfounded and false. I firmly deny the accusation (see <http://art-of-attack.blogspot.com/2011/08/brief-refutation-of-gregg-r-allisons.html>).

(1982–1985), I took a class, “The Documents of Vatican II” (S212; Fall 1983), at the nearby St. Mary of the Lake Seminary. Though this course was the extent of my formal training in Catholic theology and practice in a Catholic higher education context, I took a seminar on Roman Catholic Theology (DST 845A; Winter 1991) during my PhD studies at Trinity, regularly taught the Catholic theology elective course at Western Seminary (1994–2003), continue to regularly teach it at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, where I am Professor of Christian Theology (2003–present), and attempt to keep up with developments in Catholic theology through reading and writing. My writings that interact with Catholic theology and practice are, “The Bible in Christianity: Roman Catholicism,” in the *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 2613–2615; “The Theology of the Eucharist according to the Catholic Church,” in *The Lord’s Supper: Remembering and Proclaiming Christ until He Comes*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Matthew R. Crawford (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010), 151–192; and “A Response to Catholicism,” in *Journeys of Faith*, ed. Robert Plummer (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 115–128.

This introductory background sketch serves to highlight two points: First, though I do not have a Catholic background, I am an evangelical theologian whose experience with Catholic theology and practice is more extensive and personal than that of most evangelicals. Hopefully, this familiarity puts me in a position to be a trustworthy guide for evangelicals who desire to know about Catholicism. Second, my experience helps to explain the purposes of this book, which are twofold. One purpose is to highlight the commonalities between Catholic and evangelical theology, agreements or similarities that prompt *intrigue*. These shared doctrines and practices—e.g., the Trinity; the full deity and full humanity of Jesus Christ; worship and prayer—need to be recognized and appreciated, and they lead to thanksgiving for a limited yet real unity between Catholicism and evangelicalism. The other purpose is to underscore the divergences between Catholic and evangelical theology—disagreements or dissimilarities that require *critique*. These doctrinal and practical disparities—e.g., apostolic succession, transubstantiation, the immaculate conception of Mary, praying for the dead in purgatory—are serious points of division that must be faced honestly and sorrowfully, yet with a humble conviction that avoids minimizing the substantive distance between Catholicism and evangelicalism.

Such a book is intended for two primary and two secondary audiences. As for its primary audience, the first group consists of evangelicals who desire to become familiar with Catholic theology and assess it in terms of both Scripture and evangelical theology. The second group is evangelicals who wish to know better their own evangelical theology as compared with and contrasted to Catholic theology. As for the book's secondary audience, the first group consists of Catholics who want to learn what evangelicals think about Catholic theology and how they assess it. The second group is Catholics who want to learn evangelical theology as it is compared with and contrasted to Catholic theology, perhaps because they are moving toward embracing the evangelical faith.

It should be underscored that this book is not intended as a rabid anti-Catholic diatribe. Though it will strongly critique certain Catholic doctrines and practices, this criticism must be placed in the context of *in-trigue*—the book's appreciation of and thanksgiving for the many commonalities between Catholic and evangelical theology. Furthermore, it must be emphasized that this book is not intended as an ambiguous presentation emphasizing the similarities and minimizing the divergences between the two theological positions in an attempt to promote some type of "lowest common denominator" ecumenism. Though it will underscore with gratitude the many agreements between Catholic and evangelical theology, such approbation must be placed in the context of *critique*—the book's negative evaluation of certain Catholic doctrines and practices against which evangelical theology does and must take a strong stand.

To accomplish this task, I have designed *Roman Catholic Theology and Practice* to be a walk through the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Beginning in chapter 3 of this book, for each section of the *Catechism*, I first describe in summary form and without comment the Catholic theology or practice addressed in that section; then I offer an assessment of that Catholic theology or practice from the perspective of both Scripture and evangelical theology. In chapter 2, I explain my interpretive approach to Scripture and outline the evangelical theological perspective that I use throughout the book. In that chapter I also address my understanding of and approach to Catholic theology as a system that is characterized by two axioms: the interdependence between nature and grace, and the Catholic Church as the ongoing incarnation of Jesus Christ. I then briefly set forth how these two

tenets manifest themselves in concrete Catholic doctrines and practices. I conclude this chapter with an assessment of the two axioms.

Following closely the structure of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, chapters 3 through 6 will cover its first part, entitled, “The Profession of Faith,” because it describes Catholic theology as it is professed in the Apostles’ Creed (with a few additions from the Nicene Creed). Chapters 7 through 11 treat the second part of the *Catechism*, “The Celebration of the Christian Mystery,” which explains the Catholic Church’s sacramental economy and seven sacraments. Chapters 12 and 13 discuss the third part of the *Catechism*, on “Life in Christ,” which presents salvation, law, grace, justification, merit, and the like. Conclusions and applications will be drawn in chapter 14. The chapter divisions in this book are somewhat random and do not follow the divisions (noted according to their Part, Section, Chapter, Article, and Paragraph numbers) within the *Catechism* itself; rather, my chapter divisions are used to divide the large amount of Catholic theology and practice into manageable portions for readers.

For ease in following the flow of the *Catechism*, two structural notes may be helpful: From broadest to narrowest divisions, the *Catechism* moves from Part to Section to Chapter to Article, with some Articles being further divided into specific topics with Paragraph headings. For example, Part 1, “The Profession of Faith,” is subdivided into two sections: Section One, treating “I Believe”—“We Believe”; and Section Two, covering The Creeds. This Section Two is further subdivided into twelve Articles, one of which is Article 3 on the doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ, entitled, “He Was Conceived by the Power of the Holy Spirit, and Was Born of the Virgin Mary.” This Article 3 is further subdivided into three Paragraphs treating “The Son of God Became Man” (Paragraph 1), “Conceived by the Power of the Holy Spirit and Born of the Virgin Mary” (Paragraph 2), and “The Mysteries of Christ’s Life” (Paragraph 3).

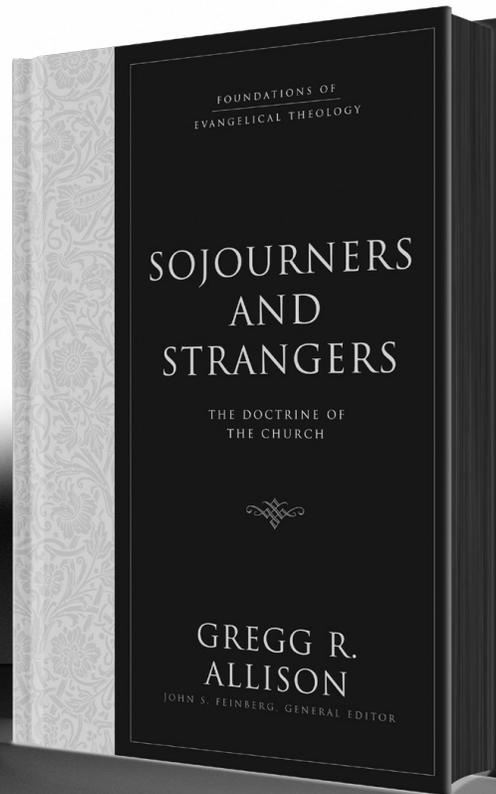
The second structural note is that every paragraph in the *Catechism* is consecutively numbered for easy reference. Here I use the word “paragraph” in a different sense than how it was just used as part of the overall structure of the *Catechism*—specifically, a Paragraph as a subheading under an Article. In contrast, “paragraph” is now used in a grammatical sense to refer to a series of sentences marked off by indentation and each of which expresses a self-contained idea or theme. Used in this grammatical sense,

each paragraph of the *Catechism* is numbered, and throughout my book I will refer to these paragraph numbers (e.g., CCC 813) as I describe and assess each main idea or theme of Catholic theology and practice. It should be noted that paragraph numbers are different from page numbers. These paragraph numbers are the same for all versions and languages of the *Catechism*, while page numbers vary.

Three versions of the Bible are used in this book. Because citations of Scripture found in the *Catechism* are taken from the Revised Standard Version and the New Revised Standard Version, whenever the *Catechism* is quoted and a biblical citation is embedded in that quotation, it will come from either the RSV or the NRSV.² All other citations of Scripture will come from the English Standard Version.

²Because the *Catechism* makes no attempt to distinguish which version is being quoted, I will not indicate the version.

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