

Canadian pastors reject Rome's 'Dominus Iesus'

A decisive moment is now before Evangelicals in the Christian world. In the Roman Catholic document, *Dominus Iesus*, Rome has declared her position as the sole depository of salvation and has adamantly declared that churches since the Reformation are not churches in the proper sense. A foremost ecumenist, Timothy George, has welcomed this statement of Rome. Now, leading evangelical pastors in Canada have written a rebuttal of Rome's claim. They urge you to endorse the refutation that they have drafted. In this way, a stand is made for truth in these tumultuous times of false ecumenism.

To give your backing to the statement below, kindly sign your name, and that of your position, church and city, and send it to Pastor Brian Robinson: brobby@idirect.com

Reply to: Declaration "Dominus Iesus"

(On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church)

Evangelical Pastors in Ontario, Canada

Brief History:

Many of you are now familiar with a flurry of ecumenical endeavours on the part of Catholic and Protestant churchmen. One document that recently caused lively debate is "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" (1994), a document signed by such leading Evangelicals as J.I. Packer and Charles Colson in which past differences between the divided communions were verbally minimized so that steps toward ultimate unity might be accomplished. Recently, the Vatican has responded to these ecumenical efforts, indirectly, with a document entitled "Declaration Dominus Iesus" (DI) (September 5, 2000) presented by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and approved by the "magisterium" of the Roman Church. This document outlines the direction in which Rome intends to proceed in ongoing dialogue with those outside the Roman Church. It re-affirms Rome's so called supremacy in matters of salvation, faith and practice. Timothy George, who is Dean of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University and the executive editor of *Christianity Today*, welcomes the document on the grounds that, "In an unusual way it is an encouragement to the kind of ecumenism we ought to be engaged in." As George goes on to explain, "In some ecumenical circles, the barometer of conviction has fallen so low that it no longer registers the temperature of truth." Clearly then, *Dominus Iesus* has presented itself with conviction and certainty.

What then is the *conviction* that the document is seeking to express? The answer is *the necessity* mentioned by Paul in I Cor. 9:16, to preach the Gospel! (The Gospel here would not be what Paul, or we, would understand by the Gospel but rather how the Roman Catholic Church perceives the Gospel according to her own peculiar tenets). To quote from Para. 2 of DI, "This explains the Magisterium's particular attention to giving reasons for and supporting

the evangelizing mission of the Church, above all in connection with the religious traditions of the world." In other words, the document is primarily addressed not to recent attempts at ecumenism but rather to a desire to confront modern society, awash in relativism, with the absolute claims of the Christ of the Roman Catholic Church. While recognizing faint glints of "truth" in other religions, the document claims that the full truth is confined to the Roman Church. It closes on this note, "We believe the one true religion continues to exist in the Catholic and Apostolic Church, to which our Lord Jesus Christ entrusted the task of spreading it among all the people."

Now, no one can quarrel with the intent of the document, as Catholics are certainly entitled to their convictions and to challenge the world to examine them. As has been mentioned, the document says little about the status of present ecumenical endeavours and inter-church relationships. Further, we can be thankful for DI because it sets out in no uncertain terms how Rome perceives herself in relation to other religions and other Christian expressions. With no pretence at dissembling, Rome explicitly declares her estimation of other Christian Churches. Under the section heading "Unicity and Unity of the Church", DI states that

"...the Church of Christ, despite the divisions which exist among Christians, continues to exist *fully only* in the Catholic Church, and on the other hand, that 'outside of her structure, many elements can be found of sanctification and truth' (1) that is, in those Churches and ecclesial communities which are *not yet* in full communion with the Catholic Church. But with respect to these, it needs to be stated that 'they derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church.'"

The Athenians at Mars' Hill should have felt cheated, had this been true. Nonetheless, is this not what Rome has always taught?" And the answer is yes. While we may marvel at "the mystery of iniquity", we also marvel at how slow present day evangelicals are to admit the totalitarian nature of the Roman Church. The Roman Church has by and large made herself into a substitute for God. As B. B. Warfield puts it in his treatise, The Plan of Salvation, "In a word, the Church in this system is conceived to be Jesus Christ himself in his earthly form, and it is therefore substituted for him as the proximate object of the faith of Christians" (Warfield, 54). Warfield reminds us that in Catholic thought the God of salvation is largely deistic. He, God, has provided the means of salvation and then has given the whole matter of salvation over to the Church to offer salvation to all men through the mediatorial role entrusted to the Roman Catholic Church. The difference between Biblical Christianity and the Roman system needs to be clearly understood. In the Roman system salvation is found only through the mediation of the Church and the various things she has to offer for lost sinners. God has provided a way of salvation for all men but it is up to the Church to administer the means to as many men as she can reach. On the other hand, classic Protestantism in the form of pure evangelicalism, as Warfield so succinctly states, "...suspends the welfare of the soul directly, without any intermediaries at all, upon the grace of God alone." A failure to understand this fundamental difference will mean that all ecumenical talks will fail or Evangelicals will capitulate completely to Rome, which is Rome's avowed aim. The only other course would be for Rome to recognize its error and dismantle its whole superstructure, along with its vaunted claims, something that would be most unlikely.

As space is a factor in our response, we will attempt to isolate the nature of the problem concerning our dealings with Rome and the above mentioned recent document. Under Section IV, the document, rightly, we believe, rejects the modern pluralistic claims that religious knowledge is subjective and not real knowledge. The Christian faith makes "truth" claims, *even more a Truth claim*, that seeks an audience in the "*public market place*" is verifiable on historical grounds. The question DI raises, as we see it, is where is absolute Truth to be found? The answer it gives is in the Roman Church. Para. 15 reads,

"Not infrequently it is proposed that theology should avoid the use of terms like "unicity", "universality", and "absoluteness", which give the impression of excessive emphasis on the significance and value of the salvific event of Jesus Christ in relation to other religions. In reality, however, such language is simply being faithful to revelation, *since it represents a development of the sources of the faith themselves.*"

Notice how Roman thought gives with one hand and takes with the other. Jesus Christ is the Truth but only as he is reworked through the "*development of the sources of faith themselves*".

Jesus declared an inviolable law when he stated that you cannot serve two masters (Mt.6:24). There are really only two sources of authority: the Church (authoritarianism) and the Written Word of God. For true believers, only the infallible Word of God is the ultimate and true source of Divine and liberating authority. Again as in other instances, the Roman Church arrogates to herself what rightly belongs only to God and His Word. Rome claims to be the infallible arbitrator and interpreter of all questions relating to the truth as it is found in Christ. The Roman Church insists that we owe absolute allegiance to "the magisterium" because to them God has vouchsafed his Son as well as his Word. If such grandiose claims are false, as we insist they are, Rome's culpability will not go unnoticed by God. The Para. 15 quote is not humble submission to the infallible Word but rather an arrogant assertion by fallible men presuming to develop the Christian faith into whatever form they deem necessary to maintain their claims to absolute power. In a real sense it removes God from the picture and assumes an authority that God never granted to any man or group of men.

Nevertheless, the document in Section IV outlines certain non-negotiables to which we could heartily assent. These non-negotiables are such as: the "definitive" revelation of God in Christ Jesus our Lord; the uniqueness of the Christian faith in relation to other non-Christian faiths; the uniqueness of the Bible in comparison to claims made about the sacred books found in other religions; the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ; the mystery of the Trinity as revealed in Scripture; and the salvation that is to be found in and through Jesus Christ alone. All this, of course, we as Protestants would want to affirm, claiming that the mystery of the Universe is unlocked in the 'key' which is, Christ the Creator and Redeemer of the same. So far, DI has only asserted that to which the devil himself must give assent. But then the document adds to that list the following, "*the universal salvific mediation of the Church*" and "*the subsistence of the one Church of Christ in the Catholic Church*". In these additions, they are claiming that God has granted the Church of Rome the monopoly to bestow salvation upon all men and that the one true Church *is the Roman Catholic Church*. These arrogant claims we utterly

reject, finding them to be seriously flawed and without any substantial proof either in history or in the Word of God.

Therefore:

#1 We reject the claim that the Roman Church has been given by God a mediatorial role in the salvation of God's elect. At the heart of the disagreement is the very nature of salvation itself. The essence of *evangelicalism* is that God deals directly with the soul of man in the salvation of his people. This historic position is directly opposed to *sacerdotalism*, which claims that the efficacy of salvation is to be found in the administration of the sacraments by a duly appointed and recognizable priesthood. We re-affirm the priesthood of all believers as taught in the New Testament (1 Peter 2:5) while at the same time confessing that in the ultimate sense there is but one High Priest to whom we must go, and that is Jesus Christ our Lord who is a "priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 7:17). B. B. Warfield said it long ago in The Plan of Salvation, "Over against this whole view [sacerdotalism] evangelicalism, seeking to conserve what it conceives to be only consistent supernaturalism, sweeps away every intermediary between the soul and its God, and leaves the soul dependent for salvation on God alone, operating on it by immediate grace" (Warfield, 19). The Roman Church, in her arrogance, has sought to replace God and the Holy Spirit in the salvation of men and women by replacing God's unique and rightful activity in the redemption of his people with the activity of a fallen and sinful hierarchy.

#2 We reject the claim of the Roman Church to be the true Church of God and the successors of the Apostles. Instead, we believe that the true successors of the Apostles are those who hold fast to Apostolic doctrine and Apostolic practice as revealed in the Word of God. We further reject as outlined in Para. 16 that Christ's Church is identifiable and "subsists in [subsist in] the Catholic Church governed by the Successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him". The true Church consists of all those, and only those, who are in union with Christ through saving faith in his finished work on the Cross and whose union with Christ is exhibited in lives that reflect something of the holiness of God. We further reject the specious claim that apostolic authority has been passed on through the laying on of hands and that the Pope is the true successor to Peter, as there is no Scriptural evidence that Peter was to head the Church and to have successors. This is especially true when we see that the early Church in Jerusalem was guided by James, the brother of Jesus, and not by Peter (Acts 15).

The word for Church in the Bible is not an ecclesiastical organization that can be visibly seen by the naked eye. Rather, it is the word 'ekklesia' (1 Cor. 1:2) meaning the "called out ones", that is, those who have been called out of this world by the Holy Spirit's regenerating work in their lives and who have been savingly joined to Jesus Christ. The "called out ones" of which the Bible speaks are first of all, invisible (see Eph. 2:19-22) and consists of all who are in Christ spiritually by faith (not simply those joined to a visible Church). This Biblical truth means that no one denomination can claim to have a monopoly on the truth. Further, mere membership in a particular brand of Christianity does not necessarily mean one is saved and going to heaven. The true Church does have a visible presence in that it is made up of local

assemblies consisting of true believers in Jesus Christ. As Warfield underlines the above, "In direct opposition to the maxims of consistent sacerdotalism, he (that is consistent supernaturalism) takes therefore as his mottoes: Where the Spirit is, there is the Church; outside the body of the saints there is no salvation" (19). Such gatherings are under the leadership of duly called pastors and deacons, who themselves are under the ultimate leadership of Christ, who alone is the Lord and Head of every local congregation.

#3 We reject the claim that while it is all right for the Roman Church to proselytize Protestant congregations, the Protestant congregations must not return the favour. We believe that many in the Church of Rome are utterly ignorant of the way of salvation and are trusting in their works and the spurious merit of saints and Mary to get into heaven. We reject Timothy George's statement, in his reply to "Dominus Iesus" as reported in *Viewpoint* (Jan/Feb 2001 Reformation and Revival Ministries) that "there are countless Roman Catholics who know Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, just as there are, no doubt, (in my denomination) many Southern Baptists who have been duly dunked but are still spiritually dead". This is to compare apples with oranges. It is one thing to baptize unconverted souls (unwittingly) while warning them that the rite they are about to undergo does not save them or in any way make them right with God. It is indeed quite another thing to baptize countless infants and, in the process, tell the whole world that these are now Christians, regenerated unto newness of life, through the sprinkling of holy water, especially when the Scriptures do not give one iota of proof for infant baptism at all and never claims that baptism renders anyone saved (see I Cor.1). We believe that all Roman Catholics need to be challenged with the truth of the Gospel and the glorious liberty of the sons of God, who put their faith in Jesus alone for their salvation, in fact, the vast majority of those who adhere to the Catholic faith are lost and undone, being entangled in a web of deceit that has Satan as its author and not Christ.

#4 We reject the statement found in Para.17, which reads, "Therefore, there exists a single Church of Christ, which subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the Successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him". Agreed that there is a single Church of Jesus Christ, but it does not *subsist* in the Roman Catholic Church. This pretentious claim has been refuted both by the Bible and by history. Many of the *so called* successors of Peter would not be recognized by Peter either as to their claims or their immoral life style. As Savanarola (1452-1498) once put it, "In early Christianity we had prelates of gold and chalices of wood but now we have prelates of wood and chalices of gold." The whole superstructure of the Roman Church is not found in Scripture and is solely based on the ethereal foundation that Peter started the Church in Rome. Martin Luther years ago fought this battle with Eck pointing out that,

"If the reverend doctor desire to attack me, let him first reconcile the contradictions in Saint Augustine. For it is most certain that Augustine has said many times that the rock was Christ (as in Matthew 16:18), and perhaps not more than once that it was Peter himself. But even should Saint Augustine and all the Fathers say that the apostle is the rock of which Christ speaks, I would resist them, single-handed, in reliance upon Holy Scriptures, that is, on divine right: for it is written: '...other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.' Peter himself terms Christ the chief

cornerstone, and a living stone on which we are built up a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:6)".

The further claim that the "magisterium" alone is the infallible interpreter of the Word of God is equally false. This usurps the role of the Holy Spirit who guides the renewed conscience in understanding the mind of God as found in the Word of God. Moreover, it is a fact that the interpretation of Scripture by the Church hierarchy has been singularly inept and more often than not misleading and in error. In truth, it is amazing to Protestants that the Roman Church cannot see itself in II Thess. Ch. 2 and Rev. Ch. 17. As Luther whispered to Spalatin, "I am reading the decrees of the pontiffs and (I whisper this in your ear) I do not know whether the pope is the Anti-Christ himself, or his apostle, so greatly is Christ misrepresented and crucified in them."

#5 We reject the extra-Biblical and unholy traditions that have evolved in the Catholic Church. While this is not addressed directly by "Dominus Iesus", as it seldom is in ecumenical discussions, it is still a primary stumbling block, as is the whole business of the Virgin Mary and her glorified status in Roman Catholic thought and worship. The glorification of this peasant girl to "Queen of Heaven" and "co-mediator" with Christ is the exaltation of the creature in the place of the Creator (Rom.1:25). Further, there is the unholy worship and exaltation of saints, the transfer of merit as if Christ's merit were not enough, the use of icons and statues, candles, prayers for the dead, purgatory, the submission of one's conscience to fallible men, celibacy, forbidding of foods, confessions to priests rather than to God, special dispensations and the multiplying of the sacrament when Christ has given but two. All these issues demonstrate clearly that the house must be swept clean of this religious bric-a-brac before there can be any hope of ecumenical oneness for such is not Christianity but a perversion of all that is holy and righteous. "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient." (Eph. 5:6)

#6 We reject the Roman Catholic teaching concerning the way sinners are instructed to reconciliation with God. The Bible makes it clear that God justifies sinners and the ungodly, not the righteous (Romans 5: 8). The fact that Rome never addresses this problem but simply re-asserts time and again that to be made right with God, one must be in union with the Church of Rome gives us little hope of progress in bringing about meaningful unity. In "Dominus Iesus" Para. 16, it is stated that "...the fullness of Christ's salvific mystery belongs also to the Church, inseparably united to her Lord." It is true that one might possibly interpret this as Christ saving his people but this is not the intent. Christ is pictured here as working his salvation through the Church as he is *united* (bound) to the Roman Church! How does a sinner get right with God? The Roman Church declares that a sinner gets right with God by the means of grace provided through the Roman Church. They are made Christians by the sprinkling of holy water at baptism so that God's grace is imparted to the candidates, thereby enabling them by the help of the Church and God to live lives pleasing unto God. In their thinking, that which is lacking in Calvary's expiation is met by Christ's continual sacrifice in the Mass, by their own good works, by the works of others, by the satisfaction offered to lift one from purgatory to heaven etc., etc. The whole edifice is quite astonishing and mind boggling compared to the simple teaching of Scripture concerning the way of salvation. Christ

is in heaven and the Church is on earth. Rome's assumed task for herself is to be the Saviour of the world through the grace committed to her by an ascended, and mostly absent, Lord. This is simply untrue. It is Christ, and Christ alone, who saves his people. That our Lord uses human instrumentality to bring the Gospel message to the unconverted we would not deny. This is reaffirmed by Paul in Romans 10: 14ff. Even here Paul speaks not about sacraments, but rather of preaching the good news of how Christ and Christ alone, affects the salvation of his own. In Roman Catholic theology, however, the Church is seen as the Saviour while Christ is absent in glory.

#7 We reject the whole sacramental system of the Roman Church. Baptism in no way makes one a Christian. It does not infuse a holy nature into anyone. The claim that all sins are forgiven in Baptism is fatuous and should be exposed for the error it is. The fact is that water has never washed away one sin, let alone a multitude. The only cleansing power for sin is the blood of the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world (Rev.13:8), and the only way the blood is applied is by faith in the Son of God (Eph.1:13). Millions are deceived and doomed to an eternal Hell by the lie that they are Christians because they have been baptized. Such errors cannot be overlooked else we too will have blood on our hands, having failed to warn those so deceived when we ourselves had been delivered from such snares (Ezek.3:18). Further, we reaffirm the judgement of the Reformers on the Mass. The claim that the priest sacrifices Jesus over and over again in a bloodless sacrifice is the devil's lie and not the truth of God. To claim the wafer is the actual body of Christ is without Scriptural warrant or scientific evidence. Jesus' teaching that we are to feed on his flesh, in John 6:53-59, is to be understood metaphorically, not literally. The Roman Church's claim that the true sacrifice for sin took place in the Upper Room has no support in Scripture nor in the history of the Church for hundreds of years following the first century. Why Protestant leaders do not protest the blasphemy inherent in the Mass, which renders Christ's once and for all finished work on the cross superfluous, is a puzzle to all who are seeking to be faithful to the Word of God.

#8 We reject this statement in Para.14: "It must therefore firmly be believed as a truth of Catholic faith that the universal salvific will of the One and Triune God is offered and accomplished once for all in the mystery of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Son of God." At first glance, this statement only reaffirms what is taught in Acts 4:12 "...that there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we can be saved". The problem for this Roman Catholic document is how to square Christ's rightful claim to supremacy as sole Saviour of mankind with other religions in the world that make truth claims for themselves. Like many Protestant thinkers today, it acknowledges Christ's unique mediatorial role while at the same time affirming that truth and salvation can be found through other religions, but ultimately such mediators are subsumed under the one true mediator Christ. Thus, a sincere Moslem can be saved through Christ's unique role in the universe even though the Moslem denies Christ's uniqueness in any salvific sense.

In other words, according to many modern theologians, Catholic or Protestant, a Moslem is a Christian, he simply is not aware of this fact. This is affirmed in Para.14, "The Second Vatican Council, in fact, has stated that: 'the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude; but rather gives rise to a manifold cooperation which is but a participation in this one source'".

But, we ask, what cooperation is there between Christ and Belial (II Cor. 6:14)? The uniqueness inherent in Christ's mediatorial role excludes all who do not believe on his name. The attempt to satisfy those who give a role of truth to all religions is to tempt God. Paul's words stand true, "...for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'" (Rom.10: 13) And how can they call unless they hear, and how can they hear unless someone is sent? And if someone is not sent, how can they be saved? "Dominus Iesus" is a document that struggles to reconcile the absolute truth claims of the Roman Church with secular concerns about other religions as having legitimate truth claims, as well. The document recognizes not primarily the uniqueness of Christ but rather focuses on the perceived uniqueness of the Roman Church in the saving of men's souls. Thus with supreme irony DI, while grappling with the claims of other religions who wish for themselves the legitimate right of being true to reality (and are not), reveals that the whole Roman system is not true to the God of the Scriptures and therefore joins the false religions of this world in whom there is 'no light' (Isaiah 8:20).

In Conclusion:

We see little in the document "Dominus Iesus" and in on going talks between Protestant and Catholic representatives that gives us much hope for any future breakthroughs. It seems as if the Roman Church is made of elastic, that is, she may bend but she never breaks and never really changes. She may adapt herself to changing circumstances but the message is always the same, that where the Roman Church is there is the Spirit, and outside of the Church the Spirit is not. This document goes so far as to say that if Protestants have any light at all, it is entirely due to the mediatorial work of the Church of Rome. We therefore reject the proud pretensions of the Roman Church and insist that history and Scripture continue to show that she is a counterfeit of the genuine Church, which is made up of those redeemed in Christ, who have been saved by faith alone. That is, we are saved by the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ imputed to our account that he might have all the glory and the praise. We question why so many evangelicals want to apologize on behalf of the Reformers when no apology is necessary. While recognizing the need to continue to reform, the Reformation remains the work of the Spirit reviving and re-fitting his Church for service to God and man. We wonder why evangelicals wish to sell their inheritance for this mess of pottage?

(1) Italics in the quotations from DI are those of the authors not of the document itself.

Signed,

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To give your endorsement of the above statement, kindly sign your name, and that of your position, church and city, and send it to Pastor Brian Robinson: brobby@idirect.com