

Who Speaks for Christ?

by Robert Babecka

(Editor's Note: The scriptural references mentioned in the article are provided at the end, courtesy of King James.)

I claim that the Catholic Church speaks for Christ on earth. Does sacred scripture support this claim? Let's take a look.

What does scripture say about using the Bible as our sole rule of faith?

Jesus Christ did state that sacred scripture is authoritative, but He was only referring to the writings of the Old Testament. In fact the only passages speaking to the authority of scripture (in its entirety) are limited to those referring to the Old Testament.

The complete canon of sacred scripture is also not defined in the Bible. The Catholic Church first defined the canon in the Council of Hippo in 393 A. D. This was done because there were considerable disputes among the faithful as to which of the 200+ books in contention were inspired and trustworthy.

Even if we could ignore all of that, the Bible goes on to say that sacred scripture is not open to individual interpretation. (Acts 8:26-37, 2 Peter 1:20-21, 2 Peter 3:15-16) These passages show sincere readers of scripture may not interpret scriptures properly. This helps explain the existence of over 26,000 Protestant denominations. Would God be the author of such confusion?

Additionally, Paul reminded Christians that they were to pass on what he told them orally, as well as what was written. (2 Thessalonians 2:15)

Christ did warn about the traditions of men. (Keep in mind that tradition simply means that which is passed on. The Bible is a tradition. Sola Scriptura is a tradition.) However, He told his disciples to obey the teachings of the Pharisees, because they had legitimate teaching authority from God. The disciples were just to refrain from following the Pharisees' example. (Matthew 23:1-3)

What does Sacred Scripture say about the church?

The key is that the Bible describes the church as the pillar and foundation of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:15)

The Bible tells us that the church is to be the final arbiter in disputes, especially disputes involving what is sin. (Matthew 18:15-17) This would be impossible if Christ intended Christians to belong to many different churches.

What insights does the Bible give us regarding what this authoritative church looks like?

The word used for church is ekklesia. This word is used over one hundred times in the Bible, never to describe an invisible church. The Bible also clearly states the Church

was not when two or three are gathered together. (Matthew 18:15-17) Instead it seems like there is a single Church. Additionally, we are told to obey the leaders of the Church. The Bible does not give us the "right" to start our own church if we don't like what the Church tells us (Hebrews 13:17).

The Church founded by Christ was lead by a man (like you and I) who could speak authoritatively for Christ. Peter was the head or the rock upon which Christ established His Church. (Matthew 16:17-19) Protestants will admit that Peter means rock, but say there is a distinction between the rock Peter and the rock upon which the Church will be built. They point out that the rock of the Church is Petra, Greek for a large rock, and say Petros (for the rock of Peter) means small rock. However, this is not true. The translator of Matthew (from Aramaic to Greek) did not want to give Peter a feminine name. Petros is a masculine version of this feminine noun. It doesn't mean small rock. Small rock in Greek is lythos. In reality, he was called Kepha or Cephas, which means large rock in Aramaic; evna means small rock. (John 1:42)

The authority of Peter to speak for Christ becomes even more apparent when one looks to the Old Testament and sees how the authority of the prime minister of the kingdom is described, the same as Christ described Peter's authority. (Isaiah 22:15-22)

Christ also promised to be with His church forever. This means whatever church he established would endure forever. We have Christ's promise. (Matthew 28:18-20) Even if the leaders of the Church become sinful, we can rely on this promise.

Jesus Christ prayed for a unity in the church so that it will be obvious to the world it is of God. (John 17:18-23) The Catholic Church has over one billion members. The Orthodox churches (Eastern, Greek, Russian, etc.) have over 300 million members. The Protestant churches (with over 26,000 denominations) have less than 200 million members. Although many Catholics do not adhere to the teachings of the church, the lack of unity among Protestants is not just at the individual level, but between churches. As they disagree with the Catholics on essential Christian doctrine, they disagree with one another. To have the unity Christ prayed for the Church He established must be one in teaching.

Jesus sent the apostles as he was sent. (John 20:21-23) He specifically authorized them to forgive sins. This authority remains as the sacrament of reconciliation or confession. This passage shows Christ was sent with the authority to send others. Since the apostles were sent as Christ was sent, they would have this authority, too. This authority is the basis for apostolic succession. This is the practice in the church of ordination of bishops and priests by bishops. Basically, only those with the authority to send others (the apostles and their successors, bishops) can ordain. This authority was first demonstrated in the selection of Judas' successor. (Acts 1:15-26) It is interesting to note that Judas' successor, Matthias, is never mentioned again. From a scriptural standpoint the only reason he seems to have been mentioned is to show how succession is established in the church. The Catholic Church traces back the authority of each of its bishops to the apostles. This is what Catholics mean when they say their church is apostolic. Apostolos means one who is sent with the authority

of the one who sent him. Today's bishops have had authority given to them by those who had the authority to give. (1 Tim. 3:1, 1 Tim. 4:14, 2 Tim. 1:6) Once again the Bible shows unity or agreement in the church regarding who is authorized.

That this authority was accepted throughout the early church is demonstrated by the fact that even Paul could not settle the dispute among Christians as to whether Gentile believers had to abide by all of the rules of Mosaic law. It required a church council to be held much like the Catholic Church has continued to hold councils when there are large disputes. In the end scripture was not used to settle things. Instead Peter, the first Pope, simply made a declaration which was accepted by the Church. (Acts 15:1-41)

Scripture clearly shows there would be one church, it would last forever, it would have a visible head, it would choose successors, and it would speak with authority for Jesus Christ on earth.

Scriptural References

Acts 8:26-37

And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. [27] And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, [28] Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. [29] Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. [30] And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? [31] And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. [32] The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: [33] In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. [34] And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? [35] Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. [36]

And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? [37] And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

2 Peter 1:20-21

First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, [21] because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

2 Peter 3:15-16

And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; [16] As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

2 Thessalonians 2:15

Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.

Matthew 23:1-3

Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, [2] Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: [3] All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.

1 Timothy 3:15

But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

Matthew 18:15-17

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. [16] But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. [17] And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

Hebrews 13:17

Obeys them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

Matthew 16:17-19

And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. [18] And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. [19] And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

John 1:42

And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.

Isaiah 22:15-22

Thus saith the Lord God of hosts, Go, get thee unto this treasurer, even unto Shebna, which is over the house, and say, [16] What hast thou here? and whom hast thou here, that thou hast hewed thee out a sepulchre here, as he that heweth him out a sepulchre on high, and that graveth an habitation for himself in a rock? [17] Behold, the Lord will carry thee away with a mighty captivity, and will surely cover thee. [18] He will surely violently turn and toss thee like a ball into a large country: there shalt thou die, and there the chariots of thy glory shall be the shame of thy lord's house. [19] And I will drive thee from thy station, and from thy state shall he pull thee down. [20] And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah: [21] And I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand: and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. [22] And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.

Matthew 28:18-20

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. [19] Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: [20] Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

John 17:18-23

As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. [19] And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. [20] Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; [21] That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. [22] And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: [23] I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

John 20:21-23

Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. [22] And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: [23] Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.

Acts 1:15-26

And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,) [16] Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. [17] For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. [18] Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. [19] And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to

say, The field of blood. [20] For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take. [21] Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, [22] Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. [23] And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. [24] And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, [25] That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. [26] And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

1 Tim. 3:1

This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.

1 Tim. 4:14

Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.

2 Tim. 1:6

Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.

Acts 15:1-41

And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. [2] When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. [3] And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. [4] And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. [5] But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. [6] And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. [7] And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. [8] And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; [9] And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. [10] Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? [11] But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. [12] Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. [13] And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: [14] Simeon hath declared how

God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. [15] And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, [16] After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: [17] That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. [18] Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. [19] Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: [20] But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. [21] For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day. [22] Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: [23] And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: [24] Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: [25] It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, [26] Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. [27] We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. [28] For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; [29] That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well. [30] So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: [31] Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation. [32] And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them. [33] And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles. [34] Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still. [35] Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. [36] And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do. [37] And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. [38] But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. [39] And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; [40] And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. [41] And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.