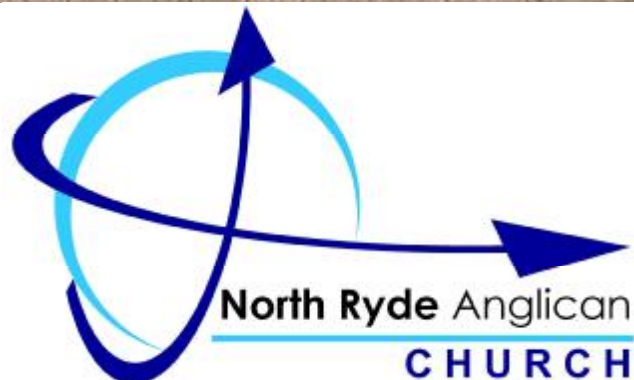


# 5

## *Solas of the Reformation*





# 5 Solas of the Reformation

The Five solas are five Latin phrases (or slogans) that emerged during the Protestant Reformation and summarize the Reformers' basic theological beliefs in contradistinction to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church of the day. The Latin word sola means "alone" or "only" in English. The five solas articulated five fundamental beliefs of the Protestant Reformation, pillars which the Reformers believed to be essentials of the Christian life and practice.

Topic:		Sermon	Page	Key Passage
1. Sola Scriptura	("Scripture alone")	1 <sup>st</sup> June	8	2 Timothy 3:10-4:5
2. Solus Christus	("Christ alone")	8 <sup>th</sup> June	10	Hebrews 9:1-15
3. Sola Gratia	("Grace alone")	15 <sup>th</sup> June	12	Ephesians 2:1-10
4. Sola Fide	("Faith alone")	22 <sup>nd</sup> June	14	John 3:1-21
5. Soli Deo Gloria	("Glory to God alone")	29 <sup>th</sup> June	16	Romans 5:1-11

This material incorporates resources from a number of sources.

Special mention is made of 'Ideas that Changed the world' by Dominic Steel & Laura Sieveking. We recommend the DVD that accompanies the series. More details from:

[www.buildinggodspeople.com](http://www.buildinggodspeople.com)

Other material has been incorporated from Matthias Media.

[www.matthiasmedia.com.au](http://www.matthiasmedia.com.au)

# Is the Reformation over?

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Mark Noll and Carolyn Nystrom contend that because differences between Roman Catholics and evangelicals have lessened, the Reformation is basically over. Are they right?

Is modern Roman Catholicism different from the animal against which Martin Luther protested in the 16th century? If so, can Protestants and Catholics call an end to their disagreements? Evangelical historian Mark Noll and freelance writer Carolyn Nystrom have co-authored a book that seeks to shed light on this issue. It is provocatively entitled, *Is the Reformation Over?*, and it is a work of special interest for evangelicals—not least because of Noll's credentials as a penetrating historian of Evangelicalism.

What are Noll and Nystrom's aims? Firstly, they examine the relationship that now exists between many evangelicals and Roman Catholics in comparison to the antagonism of a distant era. Secondly, Noll and Nystrom evaluate this changed relationship without presuming to make their conclusions exhaustive or final. The authors also acknowledge their particular focus on the North American situation without ignoring other parts of the world (pp. 13-14).

The thesis of the book is this: since the 1960s, changes have occurred that mean Roman Catholics and evangelicals are now close enough theologically to join hands in mission.

The authors do not deny that significant differences do still exist. However, Noll and Nystrom are convinced that both Roman Catholicism and Evangelicalism contain enough common gospel truth to be partners in Christ:

Among evangelicals and Catholics who are open to cooperation there now exists a broad and deep foundation of agreement on the central teachings of Christianity. [...] Whatever differences may still exist between such Catholics and evangelicals with respect to the foundations of Christianity are infinitesimal when compared to differences between traditional Christianity [...] and modernist Christianity of all sorts. (p. 230)

The authors argue their thesis in nine chapters. In Chapter 1, they examine the evidence for changed relations between evangelicals and Roman Catholics—for example, Billy Graham's shift from having no Catholic attendance at or involvement in his crusades in the 1950s to the reverse by the 1990s. In Chapter 2, Noll and Nystrom recount a brief history of Roman Catholic and evangelical relations from the Reformation to the present—from antagonism to general acceptance, at least in the USA.

Why the sea change? Chapter 4 provides the reasons. There have been mutations in Catholicism itself (especially in and through Vatican II [1962-65]), world Christianity (as its centre of gravity has shifted from the West to the global South), American politics and society (seen especially in the election of John F. Kennedy, a Roman Catholic), and finally Evangelicalism (as it has learned to be self-critical).

Chapter 5 then turns to the many ecumenical dialogues between Catholics and a variety of Protestant denominations. Here Noll and Nystrom attempt to show that, despite

stubborn differences, many mutual anathemas have been annulled and much common ground has been recognized. Chapter 6 continues the ecumenical dialogue with a discussion of the four ‘Evangelicals and Catholics Together’ (ECT) documents. In Chapter 7, Noll and Nystrom examine the four current evangelical stances on Catholicism: antagonistic, critical, in partnership and converted. The last two chapters attempt an evaluation of the current situation: Chapter 8 does this from the perspective of American history and politics, and Chapter 9, from the perspective of the Bible and theology. The authors conclude that the Reformation would appear to be over.

Noll and Nystrom are a good example of how to graciously listen to a tradition not their own. James 1:19 tells us to be quick to listen and slow to speak, and the authors have respected this principle. They have attempted to interact with Roman Catholicism itself, not simply with portrayals of it from fellow evangelicals. Moreover, Noll and Nystrom have collected a good deal of fascinating information about relationships between Roman Catholics and evangelicals, especially in North America.

## WHY THE REFORMATION STILL EXISTS

However, the book is disappointing in its analysis of the theological differences between Catholics and evangelicals. The authors fail to recognize that, while there has been something of a change in Rome since the '60s, the church has not rescinded any of her teaching on the issues that caused the Reformation. It is true that much ecumenical dialogue has occurred between Protestants and Catholics in the last 40 years. However, of all the ecumenical documents in which Roman Catholics have been involved, only one has been officially accepted by them: the *Joint Declaration on the*

*Doctrine of Justification*, signed on 31 October 1999, by the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation.

Since both sides in the *Joint Declaration* affirmed “justification by God’s grace through faith in Christ”, Noll and Nystrom conclude that evangelicals and Catholics “now believe approximately the same thing” about justification (p. 232). But it is by no means that simple, and the *Joint Declaration* was hardly a full renunciation of Rome’s position on salvation. The words ‘justification’, ‘faith’, and ‘grace’ have very different meanings to Catholics than to evangelicals.

Noll and Nystrom believe that the major theological difference between Catholics and evangelicals is not salvation but church (ecclesiology). So the great points of difference—the papacy, Mary, the sacraments, mandatory celibacy of priests, etc.—all concern a different understanding of church. But, again, it is not that simple; the differences regarding church are manifestations of the deepest difference of all: an understanding of the gospel.

We need to examine why Catholics and evangelicals agree on some of the words but disagree over the gospel.

## CHRIST ALONE

The fundamental difference between Catholics and evangelicals concerns the death of Christ. Noll and Nystrom simply do not address this issue and, as long as the atonement is ignored, the incompatibility of Catholicism with Evangelicalism will be misunderstood. Following Anselm, Catholics believe that Christ’s death did not win a *complete* salvation for humans. This is because Christ died for *sins* (abstract things) not *sinners* (actual people). The traditional Catholic understanding of the

atonement is that Christ's death won an infinite amount of merit (or 'grace'). Catholics call the unlimited grace that Christ earned the 'treasury of merit'. Grace is a spiritual power that, when applied to people, gives them forgiveness of various sins and purifies their souls.

What this means for Catholicism is that if Christ's death only produced a treasury of merit, salvation for humans was made possible but was not completed. Something more is needed than simply Christ's work on the cross. The implication for Catholics is that salvation is never complete; it is a lifelong process which depends on our works.

In contrast, the evangelical view of Christ's death comes not from Anselm but the Reformers. The crucial difference is that evangelicals believe Christ's death won a *complete* salvation (Heb 10:12-14). The completeness concerns a person (Jesus), not a treasury of merit. Christ's death did not produce an impersonal repository of grace (Catholicism) but a personal and complete saviour (Evangelicalism).

The reason why salvation is found in a person (Jesus) and not an abstract storehouse is precisely because Christ died for *people* (sinners) not *things* (sins): "by your blood you ransomed people for God" (Rev 5:9). This personal aspect of the atonement is especially found in the notion of substitution: Jesus was a substitute for real people in his death. As our substitute, Jesus was punished in our place, paying the whole penalty for our sin. This is the classic evangelical doctrine of penal substitution which Roman Catholicism denies.

Therefore, Catholics and evangelicals differ fundamentally over the death of Christ. According to Scripture, to deny that Christ's death won complete salvation is to deny the

very gospel itself: "if justification were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose" (Gal 2:21). Such a different understanding of Christ's death implies a very different way of Christian living. Let's see what this entails.

## FAITH ALONE

How do we receive the blessings of Christ's work individually? The answer to this question shows how vast the chasm is between Catholicism and Evangelicalism. For evangelicals, because Christ's work is complete, salvation must be a gift. A gift, by definition, can only be received. Moreover, if Christ's salvation is complete, it can only be received all at once. So how do we receive complete salvation? By faith and faith alone (Eph 2:8-10).

Faith cannot be accused of being a work that earns salvation; faith is simply the way in which we receive the completed gift. Let's say someone gives me a box of chocolates. When I receive it, I am not earning it. But if I don't receive the present, it's not mine. It's the same with salvation: faith is simply the way we receive it.

How can our salvation be complete when we haven't yet reached heaven? It's because salvation is found in the *person* of Jesus Christ. Faith unites us to Christ so that we are spiritually connected to and united with the saviour (Col 3:1-4). He is the vine and we are branches (John 15:5), and when we are connected to him by faith alone, we enjoy "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Eph 1:3). All works in the Christian life are the fruit of our salvation.

How do Catholics receive the benefits of Christ's work on the cross? There are two elements to this answer. Firstly, as we noted above, the Catholic must continually apply

Christ's merits to themselves because Christ only produced a store of merit. Secondly, the application of merit is mediated to people through the ritual activity of the priesthood (the mass, baptism, penance, sign of the cross, etc.). So human salvation is inextricably bound to the institution of the Catholic church.

Now we can see the gravity of difference between Roman Catholicism and Evangelicalism. If I deny that salvation is received by faith alone, I am denying that Christ's death was complete. As I have already noted, to deny the completeness of Christ's death is to deny the very gospel itself (Gal 2:21). In other words, 'faith alone' safeguards the more important idea of 'Christ alone'. No wonder Paul was stirred to white hot anger over the false teachers in Galatia who denied justification by faith alone (Gal 1:1-10)!

So the Roman Catholic understanding of church is directly dependent on its understanding of the gospel. The ritual activity of the priesthood denies the completeness of Christ's work on the cross. If the Catholic church truly agreed with penal substitution, all their ritual activity would cease. While it continues, Catholicism is incompatible with Evangelicalism.

## GRACE ALONE

In denying 'Christ alone', Catholicism not only denies 'faith alone' but also 'grace alone'. Catholics claim to believe in salvation by grace alone, but they have a different understanding of the word 'grace'. For them, grace is a spiritual blessing that Christ won which we continually apply in our pilgrimage towards salvation.

The word 'grace' is used in a number of senses in the New Testament. It's a state (Rom 5:2), it's the work of God's Spirit in us (1 Cor 15:10),

it's Christ's work (Titus 2:11), and it's God's gift to believers (Rom 12:6). However, all of these uses derive their meaning from the gracious attitude of God which has provided complete salvation for sinners (Eph 2:8-9; Rom 11:6). The fundamental meaning of grace is God's attitude of unmerited favour toward sinners.

Therefore, in the biblical texts that speak of salvation being by grace, the meaning of grace is God's unmerited favour towards humans (Titus 3:5). If Christ's work on the cross is complete, then salvation must be a gift of God's grace because he gives it free of charge. The inclusion of human works as a necessary requirement for salvation is a denial of God's grace (Gal 2:21).

## WHY THE REFORMATION MUST CONTINUE

The Catholic church is full of people who do not affirm what their institution still officially believes and teaches, and so we will find truly converted people within it. But this does not mean that the institution or its hierarchy have become evangelical. The perpetual difficulty when dealing with Catholics is their use of identical words with different meanings: statements they make may *sound* evangelical, but hidden beneath them is a system which denies Christ alone, faith alone and grace alone. Would that the Reformation were over! But while traditional masses are still said, gospel differences still exist.

# Study #1: Sola Scriptura ("Scripture alone")

*Read Psalm 115:28 followed by Psalm 33:4-11*

1. What picture do we get of the idols made by [he hands of men? Contrast the picture of the idols with the character of God (think particularly in terms of communication).

2. *Read Psalm 19:7-11*

What are the characteristics of the Word of the Lord?

What does following the Word of the Lord lead to?

3. *Read 2 Timothy 3:14-17*

What does this tell us about:

- the authority of the Scriptures?
  
- the purpose of the Scriptures?

## Thinking Further

4. William Tyndale was arrested and executed for making the Bible accessible to the English common man. Why do you think that at the start of the 16th century the Roman Catholic Church did not want an English Bible translation to be publicly available?

5. Read the following verses and note down what each verse tells us about the Word of God and the role it should play in the life of a believer.

- Acts 20:32
- 1 Corinthians 10:11-12
- 1 Corinthians 2:12-16
- Hebrews 1:1-3
- 2 Peter 1:20-21

## Personal Application

6. Some say: 'A Christian must read the Scriptures every day.' What do you think?
7. What are some ways that we (as a group) can use the Scriptures to teach, rebuke and train in righteousness?
8. What practical life choices can I make to ensure that I am regularly reading and reflecting upon the Word of God?

*Read Mark's Story on page 19*

## Pray

# Study #2: Solus Christus ("Christ alone")

1. *Read Hebrews 9:1-10*

- List the specifics involved in Old Testament Sacrifice
  
- What are the problems with the old system of sacrifice?

2. *Read Hebrews 9:11-23*

- What is the significance of blood in this passage?

*Continue reading Hebrews 9:24-28*

- How does Jesus' sacrifice supersede the old system of sacrifice?
  
- Why doesn't Jesus need to repeat the sacrifice as was the way in the old covenant?

## Thinking Further

Transubstantiation is the Roman Catholic theory where when the priest holds up the bread in offering to God it physically changes into the body of Christ, and similarly the wine is physically changed into the blood of Christ. Contrast this way of thinking with what is taught in Hebrews 9:1-28 (for further examination look at chapters 10 and 11 as well).

3. How should we respond in church to Jesus' 'once for all' sacrifice?

*Read 1 Timothy 2:56*

Is there any place for praying to saints/Mary/ancestors etc.?

*Read Hebrews 4:14-16*

4. Discuss how Jesus' role as priest affects our:

i approach to God in prayer

ii assurance of salvation

iii motivation for godly living

iv times of personal weakness

*5. Personal Application*

Do I have complete faith in the finished work of Christ?

How might this play out in my attitudes and actions?

*Read Cora's Story on Page 19*

*Pray*

# Study #3: Sola Gratia ("Grace alone")

Read *Ephesians 2:1-10* and answer these questions directly from the passage.

1. What contrasts can you find in this passage?

1.

2.

3.

2. What does God do (look for the verbs)?

verse 5

verse 6

verse 6

verse 8

3. Why does God do it?

4. Where does 'faith' come from?

## *Thinking Further*

Read 'Grace Alone' on page 7 of this booklet.

5. Given what you have read in Ephesians 2 what are the key differences between Protestant and Catholic understandings of grace?

6. Read Romans 6:1-4

How does our understanding of grace alone affect our view of sin (especially 6:1)?

7. 'A Christian can sin because they're covered by the grace of God anyway'. Discuss this statement in light of the passage in Romans.

## *Personal Application*

8. Have I accepted God's gift of grace making me alive (or am I still dead)?

9. How can I encourage others to 'walk as God created us to'?

*Read Jasper's Story on page 18*

*Pray*



## **Thinking Further**

'by penance we make satisfaction for our sins...' Cardinal George Pell

[Lenten Penance, Cardinal George Pell, St Mary's Cathedral Sydney, Jan 17 2007]

4. If we are able to *do* something to attain salvation, how does this affect the role of Jesus' death?

5. If we receive salvation by grace through faith, then does this mean we are no longer accountable for our actions? (see James 2:14-26)

6. 'The righteous will live by faith' (Romans 1:17) What does this look like in day to day life?

## **Personal Application**

7. Do I have faith in what God has done in making me righteous through the death of Jesus?

*Read Christine's Story on page 13*

*Pray*



## *SERIES Reflection*

6. Flip over the previous studies, and think of three areas in which you have been challenged by the '5 Solas' of the reformation....

i.

ii.

iii.

7. Was the reformation worth people dying for? Why / Why not?

8. 'The Church needs to be in a continual process of reformation'. Do you agree? If so, how can this occur?

9. Roman Catholic World Youth Day (Sydney, July 15-20 2008) is almost with us.

- What should we pray for during this period?
- How Should we Act?

*PRAY*

# Testimonies of discovering truth...

## Jasper Lee

I was born in the inner west of Sydney and from a young age attended a large Asian Catholic Church in Sydney. I was baptised into the Catholic Church and remember my first experiences of going to church surrounded by kind and generous family friends. In the mid 80's our family moved to the suburbs and we started attending church at our local parish. My experience here was mixed. I was profoundly unhappy at my Catholic primary school and as I grew older found church increasingly dry and ritualistic, I knew who God was but even at a young age I found him remote and unattainable. Like every 'good Catholic' boy I did the sacraments hoping that this would change my relationship with God, but somehow I didn't find the answers I was looking for.

In 1994 my parents switched to a Baptist Church. They were dissatisfied with the traditional form of church and wanted me and my sister to meet more young people.

At this new church I was introduced to the Bible in a meaningful way. I was in a Bible Study with people my age and for the first time I was introduced to the Jesus of the Bible, Until then, for me Jesus had been a good teacher and a way to follow, but I had not seen him as Lord of my life and saviour of the whole world. Gradually, over a few years (influenced by some very patient youth group teachers), I became a Christian.

What had changed? Looking back I realise that growing up I did not have an understanding of God's grace. My religion revolved around obeying the commandments and 'doing' things in order to attempt to be right by God. In many ways I understood the areas of my life where I wasn't perfect and struggled with guilt. I tried to deal with my sin by either trying to do better, or simply downplaying what was wrong with my life.

Now I see that I along with everyone else can not meet the standards of God. But God in his grace provided Jesus, who died on the cross, so I could have a relationship with Him.



## Christine Desira

Growing up in a Roman Catholic family in country NSW I think I always believed that God existed yet Jesus had no real place in my life. To me, God was real but was someone I only prayed to when I needed help. I used to think that if I was good enough then God would be pleased with me. In order to please God I used to do things like help people or give to charities, The first time I was challenged to think seriously about what I believed was when I moved to Sydney and met some Protestant Christians, These people took the Bible seriously and (astonishingly) wanted to live out what the Bible said. They encouraged me to read the Bible and I soon realised that the things I thought about God weren't right. I had trusted in being a good person as the right way to go, whereas the Bible said that it wasn't about works, but rather trusting that Jesus' death and resurrection were enough to save me. This was a challenge for me as I had always been a person who had believed in working for your reward. As a Catholic, grace was a concept that I didn't understand. But when I read the Bible I learnt that grace is God's free gift of life - it is His way of saving us. This was a big change for me as I was learning that salvation wasn't because of anything I had done, Faith was a strange concept to me as a Catholic, I thought of faith as a tangible thing - something that I needed to do, I thought that if I worked hard enough, then I would earn a faith which I could lean on. I read a passage in the Bible which said 'For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is a gift from God — not by works, so that no one can boast'(Ephesians 2:8-9). This was amazing for someone like me who had always thought that the onus was on me to do enough good things to be right with God. This was a new concept that said that there was nothing I could do, but that it was purely God's gift and that all I needed to do was trust in Him, Faith suddenly became about trust in what Jesus had done. I understood that I could have a relationship with God personally through trusting in the person of Jesus. This changed faith to being a trust in God. I discovered that it wasn't all about what I was doing but it was all about Jesus.



### Mark Gilbert

I grew up going to a Catholic school and had a generally positive experience in the Catholic Church. I didn't know many people outside the Catholic Church growing up, but this changed when I went to university. When I



started university I became friends with many people who called themselves 'Christians. When they asked why I believed what I did, I always answered 'because the priest says...'. But I knew that wasn't a satisfying answer.

I was impressed that these people had reasons for why they believed based on their knowledge of the Bible. What they said was somewhat different to what I knew about God, so I wanted to know the Bible more. Over the next six months of reading the Bible I became convinced of a key belief that I had not learnt in the Catholic Church. This was that I was right with God through faith alone in what Jesus Christ had done for me. This concept kept on coming up again and again over my six months of reading and I came to trust in what the Bible said.

I started to date a girl (who is now my wife) and went to visit her church — my first time at a Protestant Church. I was really impressed that the Bible was taught clearly and powerfully and I was impressed that what people learned from the Bible changed their lives. People would hang around after church to discuss how the Word was changing their lives.

I met with a mate from Uni who was training to be a minister. We sat down with Vatican II documents and the book of Galatians. By looking at those two documents I became convinced that the Catholic Church wasn't merely misguided but was actually teaching a different message. I realised that Roman Catholicism was putting the historical traditions of the church on the same level as the Bible. However, in my reading of the Bible, I'd seen that traditions and the authority of the Pope are not a substitute for the Word of God — the Bible sits above any church traditions. Once I realised that the Catholic Church was teaching something different I knew it meant I couldn't keep going to the Catholic Church anymore. While it disappointed my parents, it was great to be starting to go to a church where the Bible was explained really well. From that point I really started growing in knowledge of what God is like.

### Cora Groenewegen

My experience growing up in the Catholic Church was very negative. It seemed everything revolved around rules with no questions asked. I have very early memories of sitting in the pew,



swinging my legs and waiting anxiously for the service to finish. I never heard the message of Jesus or the glory of God. There was no joy attached to my experience of church, only obligation. There were lists of rules which 'ye had to follow and I was always frightened of genuflecting on the wrong knee or of speaking in church. We had 'act hooks' which recorded our good works during 'the time of Lent.

From an early age I internally questioned these rules and obligations, however we were not allowed to openly question the priest and the nuns. By the time I became a teenager, I just didn't buy it anymore.

I didn't buy how the rules of Catholicism always seemed to change. I remember when I was 14 and the rules changed to allow people to eat meat on Fridays. I thought, 'If I had eaten this chop last Friday then I would have gone straight to hell, but this Friday I can have a chop and a sausage and be alright. So I also began to question the key teachings of the Catholic Church such as 'the infallibility of the Pope and transubstantiation. Transubstantiation is the belief that the bread of Communion becomes Christ's flesh and that the wine becomes Christ's blood. I wasn't too sure about that; it sounded a bit like magic. I believed that Jesus could do miracles but I certainly didn't have confidence in the priest to do that kind of miracle.

Years later some friends invited me along to church and I was invited to a course which aimed to introduce people to God. When I was there I was asked, 'Will you go to heaven?' I answered, 'absolutely! I do this ... and I do that...'. The Christian I was 'talking to said, 'No. Your answer must be that I can only get to heaven because Jesus has done these things for me.' I realised at that point that there was nothing I could do to get myself to heaven. It was by Jesus Christ alone — by his sacrifice — that I could go to heaven.

