

**Kenneth J. Collins and Jerry L. Walls. *Roman but Not Catholic: What Remains at Stake 500 Years after the Reformation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017. 432 pp. \$34.99 (paper).**

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Given the number of recent conversions to Catholicism in theological and philosophical circles,<sup>1</sup> it was high time for well-trained Evangelicals to push back. On the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, co-authors Collins and Walls (a church historian and philosopher, respectively) provide just such resistance. They cover so much ground that it is difficult to do the book justice in a single review. Over the course of twenty chapters, the authors unleash a barrage, arguing that the Catholic Church has deficient views of Scripture and tradition, the priesthood and papacy, the Eucharist, ecclesiology, baptism, Mary, justification, and more.

As with other Protestant attacks on Catholicism, it is incumbent for the authors to identify the advent of the Catholic Church, since they do not view it as aboriginal. Such narratives are often vague. Collins and Walls, however, are so specific as to provide a date: before the Third Synod of Toledo in 589 A.D. there was simply “the ancient ecumenical church” which was “marked by a considerable and broad unity” (23). With the introduction of the *filioque*, however, this unity was broken and the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches created (93). Given that Collins and Walls agree with the West rather than the East on the *filioque* (29-30), that much of Catholic doctrine they reject is pre-589 A.D., that the “first pope” was pre-589 A.D. (206), and that there were further Ecumenical Councils, dating the advent of the Catholic Church and the loss of Christian unity to 589 A.D. seems strained. Functionally, however, this date allows Collins and Walls to accept some Ecumenical Councils and distance themselves from those with which they disagree—despite their acceptance by both East and West.

The impression conveyed is that contemporary Evangelicals would feel at home with this ancient ecumenical church. Yet, as I have indicated, much that they reject about Catholicism was part of this “considerable and broad unity” of early Christianity. Well before 589 A.D. there existed a well-defined episcopacy (as they admit on 198), papacy (205-207), Marian devotion (282-287), Eucharistic sacrifice (160), and more. While they recoil (chapter 8) at the Catholic charge that “you are your own pope,” what is one to conclude when one selectively agrees and disagrees with this broad early church consensus at will? There are, of course, post-589 A.D. Catholic doctrines that they reject as well, claiming that they are

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Douglas M. Beaumont, *Evangelical Exodus: Evangelical Seminarians and their Paths to Rome* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2016) and Brian Besong and Jonathan Fuqua, eds., *Faith and Reason: Philosophers Explain their Turn to Catholicism* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2019).

illegitimate developments because of their late date and (to their mind) insufficient biblical warrant. Yet, because they fail to undertake the difficult work of developing, defending, and applying specific criteria for authentic development, the many claims of late, inauthentic development ring hollow.

The fact that they rely on what Newman called “private judgment” as the ultimate arbiter is seen not only in their disagreement with the early (and medieval) Church, but with the fact that they are out of step with a great many of the doctrines of the sixteenth-century Reformers. To pick only one issue, in rejecting Catholic views about Mary (chs. 15-16), Collins and Walls end up rejecting not just Catholic doctrine but several of the Reformer’s views about Mary’s immaculate conception, bodily assumption, perpetual virginity, and proper veneration.<sup>2</sup> Hence, something strange emerges throughout the book: in attacking individual Catholic doctrines, thoughtful non-Wesleyan Christian readers—especially from the Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, Reformed, and Lutheran traditions—will find a great deal of the book equally an attack on their views of ecclesiology, the sacraments, justification, and the saints.

One doctrine of the Reformers they attempt to defend, however, is the Protestant 66-book canon of Scripture. Regarding the Old Testament canon, Collins and Walls cite Church Fathers who question the deuterocanonicals in part or in whole (36). The misleading impression is that these Fathers support the Protestant canon over the Catholic one. Yet not one of the Fathers they list held to the Protestant 66-book canon. Jerome’s Vulgate submits to the judgment of the churches and includes the deuterocanonicals; Origen includes Baruch and the Epistle of Jeremiah (and seemingly I and II Maccabees, although there is debate about this);<sup>3</sup> Melito excludes Esther and includes Wisdom;<sup>4</sup> Athanasius accepts Baruch and excludes Esther, etc.<sup>5</sup> Especially problematic is the inconsistent trust in Athanasius and the late-fourth-century councils regarding the New Testament canon but not the Old (19, 21).

They also rely heavily on Michael Kruger’s defense of the Protestant canon. Developing John Calvin’s notion that Scripture is self-attesting, Kruger’s model claims that the correct books were apparent to the Christian community throughout history because they had the Holy Spirit. Yet on Kruger’s view, one has to think that early Christians flawlessly recognized the 27-book New Testament but not the correct Old Testament. After all, the councils of Rome (382 A.D.), Hippo (393 A.D.), and Carthage (in 397 A.D.) accepted the deuterocanonicals—during “the ancient ecumenical church,” no less. Kruger’s ahistorical criteria force him to the *ad hoc* position that Catholics (and, by implication, the Eastern Orthodox) have the wrong canon because they do not have the Holy Spirit or are badly blinded by sin.<sup>6</sup> Following Kruger would be to adopt both this *ad hoc* move as well as take back the ecumenical stance they wish to put forward. Failure to follow Kruger, however,

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<sup>2</sup> For the classic study, see Walter Tappolet, *Das Marienlob der Reformatoren* (Tübingen: Katzmann Verlag, 1962). Even their hero John Wesley would disagree with their negative assessment of Mary’s perpetual virginity. See John Wesley, “An Olive Branch to the Romans,” in A. C. Outler, ed., *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford, 1964), 495.

<sup>3</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, Book 6, Chapter 25. Origen also defends the additions to Daniel in his letter to Sextus Julius Africanus.

<sup>4</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, Book 4, Chapter 26.

<sup>5</sup> See his Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter.

<sup>6</sup> Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 200-201.

leaves them without a defense of the Protestant canon and without justification for thinking that several Catholic doctrines with some grounding in the larger canon are “unbiblical.”

The canon aside, perhaps the most surprising feature of this volume is the lack of serious engagement with Catholic biblical interpretation. They often fail to tackle obvious biblical passages that lend *prima facie* support to Catholic doctrines. For instance, it is incredible that they attack the Catholic view of the Eucharist at length (chs. 9-10) without giving any serious treatment of John 6. Collins and Walls seem fixated on the fact that one generally needs to be Catholic to receive Holy Communion in the Catholic Church (interestingly, they make no mention of the Orthodox and numerous Protestant groups that practice closed communion). Having indicated that they think the Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist idolatrous, however, why complain about their lack of access to it (168)? The real corporeal presence of Christ in the Eucharist is simply another example of the early Church consensus that they reject.

Beyond neglecting key Scriptural passages supporting Catholic views, Collins and Walls fail to consider standard Catholic treatments of the passages they do explore. Perhaps the most striking instance of this regards what they dub “the Petrine theory” (207-220). They are incredulous as to how anyone could possibly pry *Lumen Gentium’s* understanding of the papacy from Matthew 16:18-19. This section is pivotal to the overall success of the book, for they later dismiss several Catholic doctrines by pointing back to this treatment of the Petrine theory.

From their treatment, one would think that Catholics picked two meager verses to construct an entire ecclesiology. But they make no mention of the larger biblical context: that Peter is mentioned in the New Testament more than all the other apostles combined (around 200 times); that he is constantly listed first and Judas last (Mt. 10:2-4, Mk. 3:16-19, Lk. 6:14-16, and Acts 1:13); that he’s in the innermost circle of the disciples and listed first there as well (Mk. 5:37); that Peter is first to witness the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:5), first to receive Paul (Gal. 1:18), first to preach the gospel (Acts 2:14-41), and first to perform miracles (Acts 3:1-10); that Peter constantly speaks for all the apostles (e.g., Mt. 16:16, Mt. 17:1-8, Mk. 10:28, Jn. 6:68-69); that there is an Old Testament history of God changing names to signal important divine missions (e.g., Gen. 17:5); that the apostles believe Jesus instituted an apostolic “office” filled by multiple people over time (Acts 1:20); that Jesus not only here but elsewhere singles Peter out for leadership over his flock (Jn. 21:15-19); that Peter was singled out first in Mt. 16 and the others only later in Mt. 18; that whereas in Mt. 18 all the apostles were given the power to bind and loose (rabbinical terms regarding the power to interpret divine law) only Peter is given the power of the keys (something passed down by succession); the strong parallel of Isaiah 22 in which we see a royal and priestly chief steward given the keys of the kingdom, and hence the king’s full authority, while the king is away; etc. None of this proves the Petrine Theory true, of course. But this lack of due diligence indicates that the authors fail to establish the superiority of their interpretations. It is especially galling for Catholic readers, then, when Catholic positions are treated as radical accretions that go beyond the biblical text if not distort it.

One piece of biblical context they do raise is Peter’s many failings and need for correction (216). The authors seem to think that these failings count against the claim that Jesus has given Peter a papal office. Yet they never argue that one cannot simultaneously be a moral failure and legitimately hold an office of power. One might argue that Trump *should not* be president given his immorality; but it would be absurd to claim that his immorality

entails that he *is not* currently the president. It is precisely because of Peter's fallen humanity, of course, that it was not flesh and blood that revealed the truth to Peter but the Father in heaven (Mt. 16:17).

Still, perhaps papal moral failure (discussed at length in chapter 12) at least evidences against the claim that Jesus established the papacy. In chapter 13, Walls builds a probabilistic argument that turns on the claim that if God instituted the papacy to protect the Church from moral and doctrinal error, then "surely all popes down the ages would at the least be persons whose lives overall were marked by moral integrity and a sincere love for Christ and the gospel" (251). Indeed, he thinks this conditional probability "is somewhere in the neighborhood of 1" (251). But why think that? The Judeo-Christian God delights in using the broken to accomplish his purposes, so as to reveal that all power and authority is ultimately his. Think of the long history of failure of God's anointed leaders in the Old Testament, not to mention Judas and the squabbling disciples. As if this weren't enough, Jesus (Mt. 23:1-7) specifically admonishes his followers to submit to the proper authority of the Pharisees despite their moral state. Why? Because they sit on the seat (*cathedra*) of Moses. They have teaching authority and the ability to interpret divine law. The Son of God appears in no way threatened by this legitimate teaching office, nor does he see it as a threat to the Scriptures—the Pharisees' moral turpitude notwithstanding.

Throughout the work, the authors express indignation: what on earth do we need a "monarchical" episcopacy and papacy for, since the Bible is perspicuous (at least as regards mere Christianity)? But the fact that these two mainstream Protestants express substantial theological disagreement with the early Church, the medieval Church, contemporary Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and the Reformers answers the question. Collins and Walls even express moral and theological disagreement with each other—despite both coming from the same Wesleyan tradition—about purgatory, intercession of the saints, and divorce and remarriage (xx, 43, 397). Presumably, they're both familiar with the relevant Scriptures. What then serves as the principle to preserve a unified understanding of faith and morals? Walls argues in chapter 20 that Catholics are in no better position, since so many of them disagree with Church teaching. But this is a red herring. What we are looking for is a formal principle of unity for those who desire to know and live the truth of the Christian faith, not a body of teachings from which it would be psychologically impossible to dissent. Walls's reply would leave Jesus and the Reformers open to the same charge: what good is their teaching if so many people reject it?

Lastly, there are three other features that I believe detract from the work as a whole. First, the book contains misleading assertions about the papacy, the Church Fathers, and church history in general. For example, they write:

at the end of the sixth century, Gregory I, able liturgist and bishop of Rome, specifically rejected the title of "pope" itself! In a letter to Eulogius of Alexandria he exclaimed: "Here at the head of your letter I find the proud title of 'Universal Pope,' which I have refused.... Away with these words which inflate vanity and wound charity" (207).

Here Collins and Walls imply that their choice of Leo I (fifth century) as the first pope is generous since even Gregory I (sixth century) did not consider himself pope—or at least rejected the universal immediate jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome. Yet what Gregory I

rejected was not the institution of the papacy but (i) the concept of a universal bishop who abrogates the apostolically instituted authority of local bishops, and (ii) the egocentric lording of titles over others (hence his preferred papal title *servus servorum dei*). Far from denying universal immediate jurisdiction, that Gregory viewed even Constantinople as subject to the Holy See is seen in his epistles.<sup>7</sup> In fact, his letters constantly exercise authority over his fellow bishops (without denying their true authority). This is an instructive example, for in this case as well as many others, the authors fail to interact with the original texts. Worse, the secondary source from which the quotation of Gregory I is taken explains the context.<sup>8</sup> It would be impossible to read Duffy's *Saints and Sinners* and think that Gregory I rejects the papacy.

Second, it strikes me as unfitting for academic books to (i) cite Kindle locations that cannot be tracked down without buying Kindle editions, (ii) address the arguments of lay apologists at any length (all of chapter 14), and (iii) spend considerable time addressing blog posts—even if they are written by professional philosophers (all of chapter 8). These are minor flaws, of course. But this book need not have been so long, and the lengthy interaction with such sources would have been a natural place to cut.

Finally, one of my central concerns regards the audience. On the one hand, the authors are clear that this book is not aimed at converting Catholics (9). Rather, it is written primarily for Protestants who “are struggling with whether [they] need to cross the Tiber to practice [their] faith with full integrity” (10). So, the book is ostensibly for those who have encountered the claims of the Catholic Church, find them at least somewhat plausible, and are considering conversion. But given this, so much of the book seems unhelpful. In particular, Collins's chapters (two-thirds of the book) contain an assertion-to-argument ratio that philosophers and analytic theologians will find unacceptable. They are more devoted to *explicating* an (often Wesleyan) Evangelical understanding of history, tradition, sacraments, etc., than to *arguing* that the Catholic positions are mistaken. The target audience will no doubt find some arguments to give them pause. However, I suspect that they will also find much of the book question-begging—appealing to Protestant sources, doctrines, Scriptural interpretations, and intuitions. To the extent that this is the case, the book will likely not achieve its stated aim of keeping such persons Protestant.

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<sup>7</sup> E.g., Book IX, Letter 12.

<sup>8</sup> Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 65-67.