

"Understanding Roman Catholicism" (23rd Nov '06)

Introduction

Important to think on Roman Catholicism because....

- (a) Perception of non-Christian world
- (b) History of Anglican Church
- (c) Understanding ourselves and / or others

Distinguishing Roman Catholicism [teaching] from Roman Catholics [people]

Irenaeus' motives for defining doctrine...

- (a) To protect / safeguard the Church from error
- (b) To preserve the Church's pure witness to world
- (c) For love of straying teachers

A: The Movement of History

Knowing our personal and shared history

Acts 1:8 – from Jerusalem to Rome

1-5th century: spread of Catholic Church [Irenaeus, Athanasius, Augustine]

6-15th century: 'Dark ages', growing link to politics, accumulation of teachings

16th century: experience of Luther & Reformers

[who faithful to apostolic gospel & early church?]

B: Reformers' Objections

2Corinthians 1:19-20: Roman Catholicism as a 'yes & no' religion

1. Scripture alone

The Lord exercises authority in the Church through His written Word

2Timothy 3:14-16

2Peter 1:19-21

Rome: authority within Church comes from Scripture AND [interpreted] tradition

A dual authority in Church, mediated by Papacy and priests

2. Christ alone

Jesus Christ the only and sufficient means by which we are saved (**Matt 11:28**)

Note: Talk accessed through St James website: www.st-james.org.uk/misc-resources

There are short gaps in the talk where questions were asked.

Rome: the Church as *extension* of Christ's incarnation, mediating Him to world

The world therefore accesses the one Saviour through the Roman Church

3. Grace alone

'Justified / righteous' as legal verdict passed onto us (**Romans 3:23-4**)

Rome: grace of God co-operates with our freewill to work moral change [justified]

An ongoing 'progressive' justification, leaving no real security

4. Faith alone

The way to access the grace found in Christ is only by faith (**Ephesians 2:8-9**)

Rome: way to live in grace of Christ is faith in Him and good works for Him

Martin Luther and **Romans 1:17**

C: Rome's Response

Council of Trent (1545-63) – the official doctrinal position of Roman Catholicism

Other developments in doctrine over centuries

Vatican I (1870) and Vatican II (1962-5)

D: The Current Climate

Post-Vatican II the Roman Catholic Church has changed in outward appearance

Our ecumenical age promotes discussion with Rome

Change in language towards non-Roman believers and those of other faiths

'Cum Petro' & 'sub Petro' – an attempted integration of all Christianity under Rome

E: Implications

1. *Appreciating the importance of doctrine*

2. *Not to be convinced by apparent change
[being guarded against common misconceptions...]*

3. *To be ready to tease out the differences lovingly*

4. *To be serious about mission in Roman Catholic countries*