

**THE AUTHORITY DEBATE** [The following is a transcript of a taped debate between Scott Hahn, Catholic convert and former Presbyterian minister, and Dr. Robert Knudson of Westminster Seminary.

The original tape was distributed by Catholic Answers.]

MODERATOR: Vqpkj vly gøtgj cr r {"vqj" cxg"}{qw'cmj} gtg00 {"pco g'ku'Rcvtkem'O cf tkf 0Kø " from Catholic Answers, and we are a Roman Catholic apologetics organization based in San Diego, California. Our Lady of the Rosary parish and Catholic Answers are jointly sponsoring vj ku'f gdcvg'dgwy ggp'Rtqhguaqt"Ueqw'J cj p'cpf "Rtqhguaqt" Tqdgvt'Mpwf uqp."cpf 'y gøf "hke you all vq'r tgr ctg'hqt" c'b qo gpv'qh'r tc {gt'dghqtg'y g'dgi k0Køf "hng"vq"kpvtqf weg"}{qw'vq'yj g'r cuqt"qh'y ku' parish, Father Harry Romano.

FR. ROMANO: In the Middle Ages when they would engage in theological debate or discussion k/y c } i n

dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. So faith, hope and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is

MODERATOR: Here last night may have heard my colleague Mark say, we at Catholic Answers have become  
Just look probably a Catholic (laughter). The emphasis tonight will not be on quarreling or bickering, but on focusing on the serious differences that exist between Evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics with regard to the questions of authority and justification. Tonight we are privileged to have two eminent speakers.

On the Protestant side we have Dr. Robert Knudson, who is Professor of Apologetics (also holds the chair of that department) as well as Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological  
Knudson holds his Ph.M. from Westminster in apologetics. He received his S.T.M. from Union Theological Seminary in New York. He also holds a Ph.D. from the Free University in Amsterdam in philosophy.

St. Francis in Joliet, Illinois (\*\*editor note: Dr.Hahn now teaches Scripture and Theology at the Franciscan University of Steubenville, in Steubenville, Ohio). When Mr. Hahn received his B.A. with a triple major, actually, in theology, philosophy and economics from Grove City College in Pennsylvania. He went on to receive his M.Div. in theology at Gordon Cornwall University in Boston, and he is currently finishing up his Ph.D. program at Marquette University in systematic theology. So these two eminent men are here tonight to present the pros and cons of two very important topics.





Now we say that the Bible is the Word of God. The Bible as the scriptures say is God-breathed, the very breath of God. But now are we simply interested in the Bible alone? We are certainly interested in that. The way I put it in my classes is that the Bible gives us the key to knowledge, it gives us the key to understanding, it gives us the key to unlocking the mysteries of our lives.

Now, this Word also witnesses to our heart, and there it brings in our hearts an assurance that we are in Christ and that Christ is in us, that we have been taken up in the Body of Christ. Now, why is clear, it is understandable, it calls forth our personal response and as we express our personal response then we live forth that life Christ wants us to live. Now I think that one of the major issues is that we too will honor tradition, but the question is, where is the infallible rule of faith, where is the infallible canon of faith? The position we take is that even the simplest saint coming

I was a Presbyterian minister for a few years, a graduate of an Evangelical seminary, and a very great respecter of the Westminster Theological Seminary tradition, and I still am, but I have one question today as I have for several years since I left the ministry and I gave up teaching at a Presbyterian seminary. It was a question raised to me by a former Catholic in the seminary in the middle of a seminar on creeds and confessions in the church. He asked me, where does scripture

Fellowship who endorsed the old Westminster Confession which charged the Roman Catholic Church with being the Antichrist, and he opposed me vigorously when I was thinking about finishing his doctorate at Westminster seminary, ironically enough. I believe that the doctrine of anywhere in scripture God telling his people that the Bible alone is their sole authority. It would have been very convenient for me in terms of my career to find it, and I looked and I tried, but I dgecwug'vj g'Dkdrj'ku'kpur ktgf "cpf 'r tqhkcdrg. 'k'f qgupov' o gcp"that only the Bible is inspired and profitable. Matthew 15 condemns tradition which is merely human and which contradicts the Word of God, but 2 Thessalonians 2:15 speaks about a tradition through which the Word of God is conveyed authoritatively. How can that be? St. Paul also commends the Corinthians in 1 Eqtkvj kcpu'33-4'ht'j qrf kpi 'hcu'v'q'vj g'vcf kkp'vj cv'j g'j cf "j cpf gf "qp'v'vj go 0

So I rejected sola scriptura because it was unscriptural. I also came to the conclusion that sola scriptura is unhistorical. That is, the Church was spreading for decades, long before the New Testament books were written, gathered and officially canonized, or collected in an authoritative collection. I believe that historians who are objective will see that the Church saw itself bound top the Word of God as it was handed down from Christ to the apostles and their successors in their doctrine, in their worship and in their morals apart from New Testament books. The New Testament books were in a certain sense occasional documents written to help certain congregations or certain area churches with particular questions, but nowhere does the Bible say, or does the New Testament regard itself, as a compendium that is sufficient for everything we need to know to live the Christian life. I should say that I believe the Bible has a lot more than o quv'Ej tkukcpu'tgcrk g."cpf 'vj gtgou'c'iq'v'o qtg'v'dg'i ckpgf "vj cp'o cp{"Ecj qre'u'cpf "Rtqvgucpw" j cxg'cewcm' 'ces vktgf. "dw'Ky kpmkva'wpj kvqtkecn'v'tgi ctf "uqr'uetkr wtc'cu'twg'cpf "dkpding vr qp'vj g'dgkxgt'0Ky kpmkva'cnuq'eqpvct {"v'uqwpf 'tgcupkpi 0'ka'kmi kecr'0J qy 'f q'{"qwhpqy " what Scripture is? How do you know what books are inspired? Do we leave it up to each individual Christian to read all of the books that were possibly included or excluded? Have you read and studied The Shepherd of Hermas? The Epistle of Barnabas? The Book of Clement? The Epistles of Ignatius? All of these were circulated in such a way as that some regarded them as uetkr wtc'0Qvj gtu'f k f p0'Vj g'Ej wtej "j cf to decide and, thanks be to God, Jesus Christ gave to



his apostles his own authority to decide, and their successors carried on their authority so that we  
out "cwj qtkv{ 'y j gp'vj g'Dkdrng'cmppg'ecpø'i kxg'vq'wu'y j cv'dqqm'ctg'cpf "ctgpø'vq'dg'kpenw gf "kp"  
the Bible. How could it? If revelation included a list of every single book to be included we  
would only be able to trust that if we knew that revelation itself was inspired. But no book can  
confirm or authenticate its own inspired status.

Kyj kpnkø'cnuq'lo r tcevecri'Vj ku'ku'c'xgt { 'j ctf 'r qkø'vq'ur gcn'cdqw.'dw'Kyj kpn'vj cv'k'cro quv'  
results in a kind of anarchy within the church. Since the Protestant Reformation over four  
centuries ago we have literally thousands of denominations and splinter groups that are  
continually splintering over various interpretations of the Bible. Several Presbyterian  
denominations. We affectionately and somewhat complacently refer to qwtugrku'cu'vj g'ar rk'  
Røiø'dgecwug'y g'j cxg'uq'o cp { 'Rt gud { vgtkcp'i tqw u0Cpf 'vj gp'O gj qf kuw.'cpf "Nwj gtcpu'cpf "  
gxgp'Gr kueqr cirkpu."gur gekcm { 'kp'vj g'rcuv'gp"qt 'hkvggp" { gctu0K'j cupø'dtqwi j v'i tgcvt'wkv { 'kp'vq"  
vj g'Ej wtej . 'kø'dtqwi j v'c'xgt { 'tci k'f isunity to impose the Bible as the sole authority so that  
every individual is left up to himself or herself to decide what doctrines are true. Can every  
believer be expected to understand and articulate the hypostatic union of the two natures of  
Christ? The Council of Calcedon passed on to us a legacy that we need to hold fast to, but very  
few lay people dare say very few seminarians could give a very articulate, detailed defense of  
that doctrine, which everybody at Westminster Seminary upholds, but very few people have  
cewcm { 'i gpgtcv'gf "qp'vj gk'qy p'd { 'kp'vtr tgvpi 'vj g'Dkdrng'd { 'vj go ugrku0Kø'cpcfej kule0K'y qwr' "  
be like writing the U.S. Constitution only not establishing a judiciary or an executive or a  
legislative branch to apply that with authority. I would be like constitutionally investing  
individual citizens with the right to disagree with and rebel against judicial decisions handed  
down from any level of the court system. It would be up to them to interpret the Constitution  
with regard to any legislative decisions and executive enactments. You would have no nation;  
every man and woman would be a nation unto himself or unto herself.

Is that what Jesus Christ intended for the family of God that he died and was raised to build upon  
vj g'J qn { 'Ur ktkAKf qpø'vj kpnluq0Kf qpø'vj kpnluq0Kcnuq'vj kpnlk'gpeqwtci gu'c'uwdvrg'cpf "  
unconscious and unintentional presumption, or tyranny. As we enforce church discipline in  
Protestant churches, I recall the very funny feeling that I had as I would argue and articulate my

views and then face the prospect of disciplining members in the church just because I was able to get a consensus among my elders, or among the congregational members.

Is it really that way? No pastor presumes to be infallible in the Protestant tradition. No head of any denomination presumes such, but they all have to continually discipline people and in many cases excommunicate people on the basis of their own fallible and frequently erroneous interpretations. That seems somewhat dubious. I also believe that its inconsistent. The doctrine of sola scriptura is inconsistent. Everybody has some tradition. They might be Americans, or Westerners. They might think in an individualistic thought world. They might be Methodists; they might have come up in the Episcopal tradition or the Presbyterian tradition, but all of us have categories that we receive from our spiritual fathers and mothers, those who have nurtured us in the faith. They have transmitted to us thought categories about which we know little, and yet they influence our interpretation so much. The question is not whether or not an interpretation will be authoritative, the question is whether or not an interpretation has been passed through the apostles and maintains through the apostolic tradition in one holy Roman Catholic Church. Its also improbable. I believe that any doctrine without a single defender for the first thirteen centuries of the Church is questionable to say the least. The along came Wycliffe in the fourteenth century and he began to develop it rather defensively. Because he disagreed with the pope, he thought his interpretation of the Bible was sound, therefore, he concluded, the Bible alone must be authoritative. It wasnt until the Protestant Reformation that such an interpretation became widespread. In Wycliffe day his own university colleagues condemned the proposition. Is it really the case that for fourteen centuries the Holy Spirit could guide nobody to see what the Protestants regarded as the formal principle of the Reformation, the article on which the Church stands or falls, along with justification by faith? And finally I believe that practically speaking it becomes somewhat incoherent. We say, well, the Bible alone is our sole and exclusive authority, and we will accept with respect the words of Jesus and follow them when we hear him say that it will cause us to see the Apostolic Tradition that Jesus Christ handed down to his family through his apostles, his spiritual sons and through their successors, the grandsons and greatgrandsons. A binding, a divine, an authoritative tradition found in the liturgy of the Church, found in the Creeds, found in the writings of the Fathers, and exhibited in statements such as St.

Paul makes in 2 Thessalonians 2:15, 1 Corinthians 11:2 and other places as well. My reasons,  
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uetkr wtc="Kdgrg'g'ku'wpj kvqtkecn="Kdgrg'g'ku'knqi kecn="



Id like to also point out that when we are speaking about being centered on the Word, I say yea and amen. Youve got to remain centered in on the Word of God, but I dont see anywhere in Scripture proof that we should reduce the Word of God to the printed page. And I sense that thats

family of God. If the Holy Spirit alone is a sufficient guide to our reading of the bible, then Ill close with a question: Why do spirit-led Protestants continue to disagree so strongly over so many important issuesbaptism, worship, government, divorce, remarriage, the Second Coming, altars, pictures, statues, kneelers, alcohol, cigarettes, cards, Zionism, birth control, and the list could be extended almost indefinitely? Why is that led b

HAHN [Reply]: I thank you for the question because it gives me a chance to clarify a point insufficiently made clear. My point is not so much to question the size or propriety of one denomination or another, but rather the theological principle that gave rise to such an unbelievable proliferation of splinter groups and small denominations everywhere that sincerely but emphatically disagree on countless basic points of doctrine, worship and practice. I have still great respect for the orthodox Preud{ vgtkcp'Ej wtej 0Vj g{øtg'pqv'y kf-eyed, but I am pointing out the presence of hundreds of denominations that all point to sola scriptura and their own individual or group interpretations of the Bible, and I'm asking the question: Is this really the way God fathers His family?.

KNUDSON [Rebuttal]: As far as the way God fathers His family, Jesus Christ himself in his great high priestly prayer prayed that all Christians would be one. We must never forget that; we ought to be properly ecumenical. On the other hand there is one thing that animates us above all else, and that is fealty to the teaching of the Word of God, and we must struggle with that also within our own traditions. The tradition in which I stand I am a member of a very small denomination, that is true but we do stand within a Reformed tradition that is much bigger than we are, and I think, much more grand than we are. And I should only pray that the prayer of Jesus Christ might eventually be realized because he will do all things according to his will..

HAHN [Counter-rebuttal]: Once again, it might help to focus the question. The question as I see it and as I feel it is, where does Scripture teach that Scripture alone is the binding Word of God? When Scripture very easily refers in passing in many passages to a living Word and to an oral tradition transmitted by Christ through the apostles to their successors who in an unbroken line qh'uweeguukp'j cxg'o ckpckpgf 'd{ 'vj g'j gr "qh'vj g'J qn{ "Ur kkv'vj g'ho kn{ "qh'I qf 0Kø'vj cv."Kj kpm" more than any prodrgo "lp"cp{ "f gpqo kpcvkpy j kej 'tgcml "f qgupø'eqpegtp"o g'cv'cm'vqpk j v'ó køu" vj cv'y j kej "Khp f'f kuwtdlpi 0Uetkr wtg'kuh'f qgu'pqv'gcej "uqr'uetkr wt.c."j kxqt { "f qgupø'tghgev" it, practical common sense does not leave an organizational body with a document and no authoritative institutions to enforce it over time..

HAHN [Question]: I'd like to raise the question again that I referred to, and that is: Where does the Bible teach that it alone is the Word of God and that it alone is above the Church, when the Church is called the pillar and foundation of truth? Where does the Bible teach that it is taken by itself it is sufficient, clear and understandable, but especially sufficient and exclusive in its writings are difficult to understand which lawless and unstable men [presumably sincere] distort

KNUDSON [Reply]: There are laws on discipline and unwise people who distort things to their own destruction, that is quite true. On the other hand, that is certainly not the norm within Protestant circles and I would remind you even though you do have a tremendous unity centered in Rome in your church, there are a great number of different opinions and a great number of different movements within your own community. Now, Scott keeps on asking where does the Scriptures, where does the New Testament explicitly say that it is the sole authority, that it is the final authority, let us say even over the authority of the Church? I think that I can find that where I put it before, that once these epistles, once the writings were established, they were authoritative in the Church. They had the apostolic authority, as Paul, as apostle, had apostolic authority. Now, indeed, there was a time before these were written. That is true, but I drew an analogy between the writing in the New Testament and the writing in the Old Testament, and that Jesus Christ himself pointed to the Old Testament and referred to it constantly, and said,



the Church that had the hard task of deciding which books to include and exclude. Now, why do you trust their decision there but not with regard to their decisions with regard to the sacraments, church government. For instance, Irenaeu"uckf . "õCp{qpg'y j q'y kuj gu"vq" f uegtp"vj g"twj "o c {"  
ugg"lp"gxgt {"ej wtej "p"vj g'y j qrg"y qtrf "vj g"cr quvqre"uweeguukqp"ergct"cpf "o cplgu0Vj cv"ku"twg.ö"

passages that relate directly to your questions. Opg'rcu'r qk0Y g0g'i qkpi "v'cmqy "j g'r gtuq"

who did not receive the question to give a one minute rebuttal to the person who did receive it..

QUESTIONER 1:

KNUDSON [Rebuttal]: As far as the statement that Scott has made, that the revelations and prophecies do not continue, that is precisely the position that I would represent. Furthermore, that the hierarchy or whatever you want to say, the bishops or whatever, other than produce the Word are simply interpret the Word, that is exactly what I would say about any of our presbyters

means to bestow glory or honor. Everything that is done to Mary Christ initiates. He honors, he glorifies his mother more perfectly than anybody ever obeyed that law. The second principle is just simply that the Church imitates Christ, and from that all proper Marian devotion flows. Those are the scriptural planks on which this belief is grounded. [Outburst, commotion, shouts].

KNUDSON [Rebuttal]: This question raises another question, that is, has the Church been wrong sometimes, absolutely wrong? Now that is a point that John Calvin made, that the Church in its interpretation has been wrong, and has promulgated those as infallible. As far as Mary is concerned, certainly we honor Mary, but as soon as we get onto that question on was the Church

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KNUDSON [Rebuttal]: Yes, we believe that Christ said that his spirit would guide the Church to



QUESTIONER 6: Professor Hahn, in your remarks with sola scriptura breeding rebellion, schism, and so on, you pointed to larger Presbyterian denominations embracing homosexuality and abortion as somehow the product of sola scriptura.

HAHN: Yes.

QUESTIONER Now, you know, having graduated from Gordon and being familiar with Westminster (garbled) you know very well that the OPC and certain denominations in the PCA do not at all embrace homosexuality and abortion and certainly you can't say that the Catholic Church is immune from this being as (garbled) not one of John Paul's visits to a gay Catholic church in California.

HAHN: To urge them to repent and to embrace the full grace of the Gospel. I want to add though that the PCUS, the PCUSA, the UPCUSA, all of these denominations formerly condemned these things as sins too. My point is that these denominations have changed because all they had to go on was Scripture and the shifting sand of human opinions and cultural fad. My point is not that Protestant denominations. Were all hypocrites to some extent. My point is that in the official teachings of the Catholic Church we see a very painful but courageous holding fast to moral teaching which this century finds repugnant. And on a worldwide, universal basis. Whereas the only way Protestant denominations have been able to maintain that is by constantly splitting off from denominations whose moral stands are becoming increasingly decadent.

QUESTIONER: Do you equate sola scriptura with homosexuality?

KNUDSON [Rebuttal]: It is indeed the case, I was talking with one of my presbyters earlier today, and he said that he had been in a discussion and there was a Roman Catholic brother there

there, but he found that he was really very far off to the left. However, as Scott points out and as I pointed out in my earlier remarks at the very beginning, we appreciate the stand of the Catholic Church against abortion and against many of these evils. There are certainly Protestants and Catholics who go astray from the clear teaching of the Word of God. I want that understood, that I know that. However, I do believe that Scott is not quite being fair in that he suggests that

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minute.