**The Catholic Argument from History**

1. **At One Point, The Global Church Held Catholic Beliefs**

To see this is an historical fact, take four common Protestant doctrines:

1. **Baptism is just symbolic** (that is, it's not regenerative, and the Holy Spirit doesn't actually cleanse us through it);
2. **The Eucharist is just symbolic** (it's not actually the Body and Blood of Christ);
3. **Justification is just forensic** (we're *declared* righteous by God, but we're not actually made righteous through the Holy Spirit); and
4. **The Bible is composed of the 66-Book Protestant canon.**

To my knowledge, every Protestant denomination holds to at least one of these four doctrines, and many denominations hold to all four.  Now contrast these views with history.

Forget whatever you happen to think about Baptism, the Eucharist, justification, and the canon of Scripture.  At this point, we're just determining **what** the whole of Christianity used to teach, rather than whether these teachings **were right or wrong** (we'll turn to that, next). To my knowledge, even Protestants will concede that the visible Christian Church was Catholic during a long period prior to the Reformation.  And although it's true that there were eventually Coptics and Orthodox as well, on all four of the above doctrines, none of them take the Protestant view, either.

So *at a bare minimum*, we can say that the historic visible Christian Church universally denied all four of the Protestant doctrines above.  In fact, the evidence suggests much more than that – it suggests that there are centuries of Christianity in which a Protestant would be hard-pressed to find to find a single orthodox Christian who held to any or all four of the above doctrines.  Let’s look at each, very briefly:

1. **On Baptism,** the Protestant history Philip Schaff, in his [*History of the Christian Church, Volume II: Ante-Nicene Christianity. A.D. 100-325*](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/hcc2)*,* writes in the section on “[The Doctrine of Baptism](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/hcc2.v.vii.xiii.html)” that “This ordinance was regarded in the ancient church as the sacrament of the new birth or regeneration,” and that its “effect consists in the forgiveness of sins and the communication of the Holy Spirit.” Again, this is A.D. 100 – 325.  The situation remains the same for centuries more, until after the Reformation in the 1500s.
2. **On the Eucharist**, the Protestant historian J.N.D. Kelly [concedes](http://books.google.com/books?id=cfY-UCywuD4C&printsec=frontcover&dq=Early+Christian+Doctrines&hl=en&ei=KLulTfWzNtS5tgeU4tC_Ag&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCwQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=Eucharistic%20teaching%2C%20it%20should%20be%20understood%20at%20the%20outset%2C%20was%20in%20general%20unquestioningly%20realist&f=false) that during the early Church period, “Eucharistic teaching, it should be understood at the outset, was in general unquestioningly realist, i.e., the consecrated bread and wine were taken to be, and were treated and designated as, the Savior’s body and blood.” (Early Christian Doctrines, 440).  Again, this didn’t change for centuries afterward.
3. **On forensic justification**, the Calvinist scholar Alister McGrath [concedes](http://books.google.com/books?id=StoH0ievalIC&pg=PA217&lpg=PA217&dq=theological+novum&source=bl&ots=q4xYVANnY-&sig=zWi2KPJTtlu9Ith497VEuDgMXuI&hl=en&ei=WzjRTYiMOoSugQf2p-HEDA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=9&ved=0CFIQ6AEwCA#v=onepage&q=theological%20novum&f=false) that the “Reformation understanding of the *nature* of justification – as opposed to its *mode* – must therefore be regarded as a genuine theological *novum*.”  Francis Beckwith, in [*Return to Rome*](http://www.amazon.com/Return-Rome-Confessions-Evangelical-Catholic/dp/1587432471), does a good job of handling the early Church Fathers who are sometimes used to defend forensic justification – he shows quotes from each proving that their views weren’t the Protestant one at all.
4. **On the canon of Scripture,** I’ve addressed it [here](http://catholicdefense.blogspot.com/2009/10/protestantism-and-early-church-fathers.html) in greater depth. So far, no one’s been able to find *a single early Christian* who owned or used a 66-book Protestant Bible.

You’ll be hard-pressed to find any early orthodox Christian who doubted or denied that (1) Baptism actually regenerated you and made you a Christian, (2) the Eucharist was truly the Body and Blood of Christ, and (3) in justification, God declares us “holy” by actually *making us holy*, just as you’ll be hard-pressed to find an early Christian who (4) ever owned or used a 66-book Bible.

1. **This Leaves Only Four Possibilities**

Given the above, what should we make of it?  Well, it's *theoretically* possible:

1. That the issues of Baptism, the Eucharist, justification, and the canon of Scripture aren't "essential" doctrines;
2. That the above **are** essential doctrines, so for long periods of time, no Christian got any of these issues right;
3. That the above **are** essential doctrines, so the only true Christians were the dissenters;
4. That the Catholic Church was, and is, right on these four issues.

The first three of these are very problematic:

1. The issues of Baptism and justification go to the very heart of how we're saved, and how we become Christians. For Protestants, the canon of Scripture determines where **all other doctrines come from**, so it's the single most important doctrine.  And on the Eucharist, it's either truly God or an idol Catholics worship.  These seem to be some of the *most* central questions of Christianity. If these aren't "essentials," it's hard to see what is.  So this produces a theological relativism.  Furthermore, if these aren't essentials, the Reformation was over non-essential issues, and is a wound that should be healed by a return to the Church.
2. If **all** of Christianity could get these core doctrines wrong, we're faced with two problems.  First, Christ appears to promise in Scripture that He and the Holy Spirit will perpetually guide and guard the Church (see the lists of Scripture references [here](http://catholicdefense.blogspot.com/2010/09/middle-church-argument.html) and [here](http://catholicdefense.blogspot.com/2010/09/kings-messenger-thought-experiment.html)).  It's hard to rectify the notion that the Holy Spirit will guard the Church, and the notion that the Holy Spirit would allow the *entire* Church to fall into apostasy. But the second problem is just as ominous: if a Protestant claims that the entire global Church fell into heresy without knowing it, how can we say that's not the case today?  So this produces theological agnosticism, where no one can even say if the Christianity Christ founded exists on Earth.
3. This is essentially the argument that the only good Catholic is a bad Catholic. There are a number of problems.  Of those who denied the claims of Catholic Christianity *but stayed in the Church*, we're dealing with people who lived a lie. That's not just being a bad Catholic, but a bad Christian. As Christ says in [Matthew 5:37](http://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Matthew%205.37), let your "yes" be a "yes," and your "no" be a "no."  Those who declare "yes," while believing "no" are *lying*.  Of those who denied the claims of Catholic Christianity *and left the Church*, we know who these people were, historically speaking. Most importantly, they **didn't** affirm the four doctrines above. (The third approach, that there was an unknown group of true Christians living in the mountains somewhere, is handled [here](http://catholicdefense.blogspot.com/2009/09/invisible-remnant-theory-of-church.html)).  So this produces theologically self-refutation, because you would have to claim that the only true Christians were either those people Protestants denounce as heretics or those people who lived their lives denying their religion.

The remaining choice is that the Catholic Church is right.

**Conclusion**

To state it positively:

* Christ promised that He and the Holy Spirit would preserve the Church;
* Historically, the Church has been incredibly clear (1) that Baptism is regenerative, (2) that the Eucharist is the true Body and Blood of Christ, (3) that the Holy Spirit makes us truly justified, and (4) that there are more than 66 Books of the Bible;
* Even if we don't understand how these things are true from Scripture, we can know that they're true, because the Church said so, and God protects the Church, and we believe in God.