



## Introduction: A Modern Crossroads

In a world where every individual claims the right to interpret truth according to their own judgment, the Catholic Church stands as a voice proclaiming an objective, unchanging, and divinely revealed truth. This clash between **the magisterial authority of the Church** and **Protestant private judgment** is not just a theological dispute of the past but a crucial debate for our times.

Can each person interpret Sacred Scripture on their own, without any guidance? Or is there an authority established by Christ to safeguard and faithfully transmit Revelation? These questions define not only faith but also the stability of society.

In this article, we will explore the historical origins of both positions, their theological development, and why the Catholic Church—founded by Christ on Peter—remains the sole guarantor of revealed truth.

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## I. The Origin of Private Judgment: The Protestant Revolution

### 1. Martin Luther and the “Universal Priesthood”

**Private judgment**—the idea that every believer can interpret the Bible independently, without ecclesiastical authority—was formally born with the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century. Martin Luther, in his rebellion against the Church, proclaimed the principles of “**Sola Scriptura**” (Scripture alone) and the “**Universal Priesthood**,” denying the need for an infallible magisterium.

By translating the Bible into German, Luther encouraged the faithful to read it according to their own understanding. However, this principle led to unprecedented fragmentation: each personal interpretation spawned new denominations, contradicting the unity Christ prayed for: “*That they may all be one*” (John 17:21).

### 2. Immediate Consequences: Doctrinal Chaos

If the Bible can be freely interpreted, who determines which interpretation is correct? This problem quickly became evident:



- **Zwingli and Luther**, both reformers, clashed at the **Marburg Colloquy (1529)** over differences on the Eucharist.
- **Calvin** established a distinct theology, including a radical doctrine of predestination.
- The **Anabaptists** emerged with even more extreme ideas, such as rejecting infant baptism.

Within decades, Protestantism splintered into hundreds of sects, proving that **private judgment does not preserve truth but relativizes it**.

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## II. The Authority of the Church: Established by Christ

### 1. Christ Instituted a Church with Authority

Against the subjectivity of private judgment, the Catholic Church affirms that **Christ established a visible, hierarchical authority**:

- *“You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church”* (Matthew 16:18).
- *“Whoever listens to you listens to me”* (Luke 10:16).
- *“Go and teach all nations”* (Matthew 28:19).

Jesus did not write a book and leave it to personal interpretation; **He founded a Church with apostles and successors**, ensuring that faith would be transmitted without error.

### 2. The Church Fathers and Apostolic Tradition

The early Christians never practiced private judgment. Instead, they followed **oral teaching (Tradition) and the magisterium of the bishops**:

- **St. Irenaeus of Lyons (2nd century)** wrote that true faith is found **“in that Church which possesses apostolic succession.”**
- **St. Vincent of Lérins (5th century)** established the principle: *“What has been believed everywhere, always, and by all.”*

The Church, guided by the Holy Spirit (John 16:13), safeguards Revelation **without alteration**, whereas private judgment distorts it according to human opinions.



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## III. Private Judgment in the Modern World: Relativism and Confusion

### 1. From Luther to the Postmodern “Spiritual Self”

Private judgment did not end with classical Protestantism; it evolved into more radical forms:

- **18th-century rationalism** (Kant, Voltaire) declared human reason superior to Revelation.
- **19th-century liberal theology** denied miracles and Christ’s divinity.
- **New Age and modern spirituality** claim that “*everyone has their own truth*,” reducing religion to personal experience without dogma.

Today, private judgment has led to a **crisis of authority**, not just in religion but in society: if there is no objective truth, everything becomes a matter of opinion.

### 2. Catholicism: The Bulwark Against Subjectivism

Amid this chaos, the Catholic Church maintains:

1. **Scripture must be read within Tradition**, not in isolation.
2. **The Magisterium (the Pope and bishops in communion) is the authentic interpreter.**
3. **Faith is not a private feeling but a revealed and transmitted truth.**

As **St. Paul** said: “*The Church is the pillar and foundation of the truth*” (1 Timothy 3:15).

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## IV. Conclusion: Who Has Historical Reason on Their Side?

History proves that:

□ **Private judgment causes division**, as seen in thousands of Protestant denominations.



□ **The Catholic Church has preserved the same faith for 2,000 years**, despite persecutions and crises.

□ **Christ did not promise that Scripture would interpret itself**—He founded a Church to guide us.

In a world of shifting opinions, the Church remains **the beacon of truth**, not by human merit but by **divine promise**.

**Whom will you follow? The voice of Christ in His Church, or the changing echo of human opinions?**

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□ **Further Reading:**

- *“Controversies”*, by St. Robert Bellarmine.
- *“Protestantism and the Church”*, by Mons. Félix Sarda y Salvany.
- *“Religion Demonstrated”*, by Fr. François Lémann.

*“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).*