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**PROTESTANTS AND THE CAMINO DE SANTIAGO:
WHAT HAS CHANGED - THE THEOLOGY,
THE PRACTICE, OR THE CAMINO ITSELF?**

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Protestants and the Camino de Santiago: what has changed - the theology, the practice, or the Camino itself?

In recent years the interest in the Camino de Santiago has grown exponentially. Surprisingly, some of the highest rates of increase are found in demographics outside of those practicing the Roman Catholic faith.

This article attempts to address the rise of interest in the Camino de Santiago among the Protestant churches. Using a literary review of the teachings from the early reformers, contemporary statistics, and current interviews, this article highlights the foundational literature and pertinent questions which must be addressed in order to understand these new developments.

While research is still being conducted in an attempt to move toward clear answers, this study suggests that there is more to consider than globalization and mass tourism when understanding the shift among Protestant pilgrims.

Keywords: Camino de Santiago. Protestant Theology. Reformation.
[Minimum 3, maximum 6]

1. Introduction:

Every day the world in which we live presents us with doubts and concerns. We need a place where we can share the questions that arise and the answers we find. The university offers us such a space to test our hypotheses and arguments.

On the road outside one of these spaces where we are able to address the pressing questions of life there is an arrow directing pilgrims towards Santiago. The Camino De Santiago is known throughout the world and it is no great surprise to find an arrow helping people on their Camino outside of any place of learning and discussion. But this specific arrow raises a question, or a whole host of questions, for the simple fact that it has been placed directly in front of one of the most important cathedrals and educational centers in all of Protestantism, Saint Pierre Cathedral in Geneva, Switzerland.

Before delving into the history and implications of the Camino de Santiago, it is essential to understand the concept of pilgrimages. Pilgrimages are not unique to any one religion, nor is there a universal definition which covers pilgrimage in every form: a rite of passage, a geographical journey, a spiritual exercise within oneself, a metaphor. While the everyday life of a pilgrim involves much walking, meandering, and sightseeing, pilgrimage is much more than any one, or all, of those (Bloechl & Brouillette 2022, p. 7). A pilgrimage is a

form of a religious journey.

The Camino de Santiago has a complex history, both in its physical manifestation and in its theological foundations. From the earliest days of this important pilgrimage of Christianity, to the global phenomenon it has become today, the primary motivation for engaging in this exercise of discipline and self-denial has evolved. There have been however, defining moments in this ongoing transition, and probably none greater than that which took place around the 16th century. It was at this time that the Roman Catholic Church's pilgrimages came under attack.

Right at the center of the upheaval was a professor of theology in Wittenberg, Germany who disagreed with what had been happening under the authority and direction of Pope Leo X. With Martin Luther's writings, the Protestant Reformation was about to begin. Soon other early Reformers would take up arms against the apparent abuses of the Roman Catholic Church, namely those they believed they saw in the sale of indulgences, the authorization of relics, and the official teachings concerning penance. The Roman Catholic rite of pilgrimage relied on each of these means of grace at one level or another.

Clearly the Reformers did not believe that the foundations for this Christian pilgrimage coincided with the united teachings of the Church over the centuries. It would be logical to conclude that this put an end to the use of pilgrimage in the growing Protestant community. It did...for a time. However, considering the current situation five hundred years after Martin Luther's first arguments concerning indulgences, there is a new trajectory which has come to light. The present involvement of Protestants on the Camino demonstrates that not only is there a steadily increasing number of Protestants going on pilgrimage, but also a rapidly growing number of Protestants who are dedicating their life to serving on the Camino de Santiago, within their Protestant faith.

So pilgrims from two distinct worlds, the Roman Catholic and the Protestant, still question how the Camino de Santiago can thrive in both. Some believe that this Catholic rite and its purifying effect, once denounced by Protestant reformers, has been made more acceptable to Protestants by a change of Roman Catholic theology following the critique of men such as Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin. On the other side, some believe that Protestantism as a whole has modified its theological beliefs from the time of the Reformers so as to accommodate a Roman Catholic concept of pilgrimage. Alternatively, it could be that the everyday practitioners of Protestantism feel little need to live in accordance to their founding principles. Finally, it could be that the Camino itself has changed. Perhaps the multitude of irreligious pilgrims, Roman Catholics, Protestants, and adherents to nearly every other religion, has changed the

Camino de Santiago in such a way that there is no need to think in religious terms and still enjoy a spiritual experience.

The importance of this ongoing study, however, is not limited to the religious sphere, but also reaches to the culture and accessibility of the Camino de Santiago. Through reviewing the pertinent writings of the early Reformers, contemporary interviews of those who have adopted the pilgrim life, and the statistical data for the growing popularity of the Camino, this study seeks to answer crucial questions about the ongoing formation of the Camino. This in turn will open the door for hundreds of thousands of pilgrims each year to better evaluate their own desire to embark on a pilgrimage and experience even greater personal transformation while on this pilgrimage, regardless of their religious views.

2. Definition of a pilgrimage

There is no official definition for the concept of pilgrimage. Because the actions and attitudes of the pilgrim are found throughout such a wide variety of religious groups, and because they can be found throughout the course of human history, it would be impossible to summarize and consolidate every nuance. However, the working definition used in this study is that a pilgrimage is an intentional journey to a religiously significant site for spiritual reasons. This does not preclude the idea that a pilgrimage has an immaterial aspect to it, far from it (Harper 2016, pp. 6-7). Rather it is meant to communicate that a pilgrimage in its essence is one which physically manifests an internal journey (Turner & Turner 2011, p. 7).

The presence of individuals going on specific pilgrimages can be found in manuscripts written thousands of years ago. Pilgrimage sites continue to be discovered which go back even before written history. Alternatively, pilgrim sites continue to develop and evolve, with pilgrimages taking place to sites made famous even during the last century. While there are many aspects concerning pilgrimage that can be debated, one thing that is certain is that there is a draw within the pilgrim soul to find their place in this cosmos through participating in pilgrimage.

Pilgrimage is about belonging. Ancients followed the stars or walked to the ends of the earth in order to find where they belong in this universe. Whole peoples participated in pilgrimage to remind themselves of who they were and to whom they belonged (v.s. Psalms 120-134 in the Hebrew Bible). When on pilgrimage, one steps into a river of history and meaning. A stream, sometimes thousands of years long, has flowed over the same stones. Perhaps a thousand more will flow afterwards. But here in this moment a pilgrim walks, surrounded by others who are different but the same. They have found their place in this

world, at least during this journey. They are a pilgrim with other pilgrims in the long line of pilgrims. They are part of something greater than themselves.

But pilgrimage cannot rightfully be separated from the divine, regardless of an individual's current theological beliefs. Pilgrimage is just as much of understanding "the other" as understanding oneself. This is one explanation why the practice of pilgrimage is found in so many religions which otherwise share relatively few things in common. Inside each human being is a desire, an absolute need, to know and be known. Pilgrimage is one means to that end.

3. The Roman Catholic Church and the Camino De Santiago

In the early 16th century, the Roman Catholic Church was not interested in pilgrimage for its ability to reveal the internal realities of a pilgrim. They were interested in addressing the question, "How am I made right with God?" Holy sites rose up and were publicized by the Roman Catholic Church in an effort to direct those with a guilty conscience to make pilgrimage. They taught that the individual could find relief from their guilt through this physical journey.

In the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church the concept of pilgrimage has evolved. Building upon the teaching of pilgrimage throughout the Old Testament Scriptures, certain benefit was discovered, or assigned, to the act of walking to a holy site. The intent was to place oneself in the path of grace. A certain site could be an intersection of grace because of the saints which once occupied that space, or remain buried there (Brown 2014, p. 3). However there was grace, not only in the site or relics, but also in the walking. God, and his representatives in the Roman Catholic Church, could see the real contrition in the sinner's life while engaging in this physical act of pilgrimage. A pilgrim accessed the incalculable riches of grace in Christ, Mary, and the saints by going on pilgrimage as well as arriving at the holy site. One could view the concepts of guilt, penance, indulgences, relics, and pilgrimages as working together toward grace by forming the why (guilt), the what (penance and indulgences), the where (relics), and the how (pilgrimages).

3.1. Penance and Indulgences

By the time of the Middle Ages, indulgences were being offered to pilgrims who had gone on pilgrimage. These indulgences were sanctioned by the Pope, or other church leaders, and delineated the necessary works in order to purify the penitent person from the sin they had committed. After confessing to a priest, an individual in good standing with the Roman Catholic Church received the remission of the eternal punishment for their sin, but there remained an outstanding debt to pay. A temporal punishment for their sin had to be paid for personal holiness and for the harm done to the Church. For those sins which

did not have their temporal punishment exacted, purgatory awaited in order to cleanse the sinner from their final vestiges of sin and make them holy in order to live in the presence of God. Indulgences were means by which the temporal punishment for sin could be eliminated, whether on earth for the one who earned the indulgence, or on behalf of someone in purgatory.

This popular and lucrative aspect of the Roman Catholic Church was soon to be challenged (George 2013, pp. 24-25). Luther, in his 95 Theses which he nailed to the door of All Saints' Church in Wittenberg, Germany on October 31, 1517, argued that the Roman Catholic understanding of penance was incorrect.

Jerome, in his Latin translation of the New Testament in the late 4th century, had translated the Greek verb, Μετανοεῖτε as “Pœnitentiam agite”. Upon this, the Roman Catholic Church had built its understanding of penance. If one were to have a restored relationship with God the Father, and obey the commands of Jesus Christ, one must “do penance,” and these actions were clearly outlined by the Roman Catholic Church. However, according to Luther, and others such as Erasmus, the Roman Catholics had misunderstood Jesus’ command in Matthew 4:17 (cf. Matthew 3:2). His first thesis was that Jesus “willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance” (Luther, 1517/1999 vol. 31, p. 25). It could not mean “sacramental penance” according to the Roman Catholic Church (thesis 2), but had to refer to “inward repentance” (thesis 3). Luther went on to argue that “the pope neither desires nor is able to remit any penalties except those imposed by his own authority or that of the canons” (Luther, 1517/1999 vol. 31, p. 26). It is God alone who remits guilt (thesis 7).

These initial challenges to the authority of the teachers in the church, the Roman Catholic Church as a whole, and ultimately the Pope himself, stoked the fires which had been burning elsewhere in Europe for some time (*vd.* Barrett 2023). Soon all of Christendom would feel the effect of these ideas and would have to choose one path or another. They would have to decide to follow the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church or Scripture. They could not do both.

The Roman Catholic Church had delineated the appropriate means of gaining pardon of sin through the sacrament of penance, which included contrition, confession, and absolution, resulting in satisfaction. Luther’s principle issue came from the misuse and abuse of indulgences being sold. An itinerant preacher, Tetzl, had been selling these indulgences in order to raise money for the construction of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, and Luther was writing to confront him and his teaching. “They preach only human doctrines who say that as soon as the money clinks into the money chest, the soul flies out of purgatory” (Luther 1517/1999 vol. 31, pp. 27-28).

Luther argued that one could not buy someone out of purgatory (theses 33-37), nor would it be a benefit to the soul in purgatory (thesis 29). At this point

Luther was not interested in setting ablaze all of Rome, but merely correcting issues he was seeing firsthand. In the years to come, only after the Roman Catholic Church had hardened their stance against Luther, would his full theology emerge. In a later writing, Luther stated it as clearly as he could. “Let this be your one sure guide: Whatever you have to buy from the pope is neither good nor from God. For what God gives is not only given without charge, but the whole world is punished and damned for not being willing to receive it as a free gift. I mean the gospel and God’s work” (Luther 1520/1999 vol. 44, pp. 185-89).

3.2. Relics

While one of the initial issues, indulgences were not unique in the Reformers’ confrontation of the Roman Catholic Church. Two other related issues soon rose to the surface of the conflict revolving around indulgences, namely relics and pilgrimages. John Calvin, while agreeing with Luther on the true meaning of repentance, also wrote a tract concerning relics and their place in the church. Calvin had grown up in a home where veneration of relics was accepted and taught (Calvin, Beza & Beveridge 1543/1844 vol. 1, p. 329), yet as he grew in his understanding of the faith, he called for the reform of the Roman Catholic Church’s use of relics. For while they often produce what appears to be zeal, “a longing for relics is never free from superstition, nay, what is worse, it is the parent of idolatry, with which it is very generally conjoined” (Calvin, Beza & Beveridge 1543/1844 vol. 1, p. 290).

Not only did the Reformer take issue with the dangerous trajectory which the adoration of relics often leads, but also in the confusion they produce. The number of churches who claimed to have the bodies, or parts of bodies, of the same saint had reached an embarrassing level by the time of the 16th century. Calvin even sites the conflicting reports concerning the body of St. James the Apostle, as he “has a hand in the church of St. Peter, an arm in that of Grisgon, and another in that of the Holy Apostles” (Calvin, Beza & Beveridge 1543/1844 vol. 1, p. 328).

Calvin wrote in order to convince Christendom to set to work in making an inventory of the relics which the Church possessed, for in doing so, “it would be manifest that all men have hitherto been blind, that great darkness has brooded over the whole globe, and the greatest stupidity been universally displayed” (Calvin, Beza & Beveridge 1543/1844 vol.1, p. 295). And in so doing, this “heathenish custom were abolished, whether they be relics of Christ or of the saints. In as much as they do degenerate into idols, the pollution and defilement which they occasion ought not on any account to be tolerated in the Church” (Calvin, Beza & Beveridge 1543/1844 vol. 1, p. 339).

3.3. The Protestant Reaction

When one connects the teaching of the early Reformers concerning indulgences and relics, it is no wonder that the act of pilgrimage lost much of its popularity in Protestant lands. When asked “What do you say, then, about those who make pilgrimages to Rome, Jerusalem, St. James, Aachen, Trier, and many other regions and places to obtain indulgences?” Luther’s answer was, “Those who make pilgrimages do so for many reasons, very seldom for legitimate ones” (Luther 1518/1999 vol. 31, pp. 198-99) Some of the illegitimate ones he goes on to mention include curiosity for the strange and unknown, loathing and boredom with the worship services at home, indulgences, “longing for affliction and labor for one’s sin,” (but this, he argues, rarely occurs), and finally a singular devotion for the honor of the saints (Luther 1518/1999 vol. 31, pp. 198-99). At another time he claims that sex and lust were a motivation for pilgrimage (Luther 1542/1999 vol. 54, pp. 27-28).

In other writings, Luther attempted to dissuade individuals from rejecting their household duties in lieu of going on pilgrimage. He argued that for married people there is nothing more valuable to God and Christendom, the whole world, themselves, and their children than that they raise their children well. This is greater than “pilgrimages to Rome, Jerusalem, or Compostella” (Luther 1520/1999 vol. 44, pp. 12-13). In another discussion he contradicts those who believe going on pilgrimage is a “precious good work. “This is not true,” Luther claims. “It is a very small good work—frequently it is evil and misleading, for God has not commanded it. But God has commanded that a man should care for his wife and children, perform the duties of a husband, and serve and help his neighbor” (Luther 1520/1999 vol. 44, pp. 169-72). In another place he argues that certain chapels and churches which had become the goals of pilgrimages should be leveled to the ground because of the deception behind it all (Luther 1520/1999 vol. 44, pp. 185-89). For Luther, true pilgrimage is from the heart. “In former times saints made many pilgrimages to Rome, Jerusalem, and Compostella in order to make satisfaction for sins. Now, however, we can go on true pilgrimages in faith, namely, when we diligently read the psalms, prophets, gospels, etc. Rather than walk about holy places we can thus pause at our thoughts, examine our heart, and visit the real promised land and paradise of eternal life” (Luther 1542/1999 vol. 54, p. 238).

4. The Reformers teaching on the Justification by Faith alone as delineated by the 5 Solas

Up to this point, this study has sought to give a general overview of the Reformers’ critique of Rome’s teaching concerning penance, indulgences, relics, and pilgrimages. There is, however, a second side to the Reformers’ reaction. If the early Protestants were going to reject the Roman Catholic Church’s teaching of indulgences, relics, and the overarching theology of penance, they needed to provide a biblical response for those who sought pardon for sin and the

application of salvation. Personal guilt needed to be addressed.

Throughout the early years of the Reformation, the dialogues, arguments, councils, and defenses spurred the theologians and pastors to write more clearly, respond to critiques, and learn from their interactions. As the lines were slowly drawn through preaching, teaching, writing, and responding, five core beliefs emerged as those which unified the Reformers and those who would follow in their path. These five core beliefs became known as the Five Solas: *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Fide*, *Sola Gratia*, *Solus Christus*, and *Soli Deo gloria*.

From these Five Solas an entirely different view of salvation arose. If the Reformers were correct in their understanding of God's divine revelation, two immediate changes would take place. First, individuals would see that the doctrine of the penitentiary process of the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages was a means to manipulate the masses, wielding their "keys of the kingdom" in order to produce fear in the populace. It would be clear that from this place of fear they would have been in the position to exact any price from those who feared for their souls, and the souls of those they loved. But second, there would be hope, not in a vague sense that eventually one might be able to loose their bonds of sin and punishment, but a very real hope and assurance of God's grace toward, and restored communion with, the repentant sinner.

4.1. Sola Scriptura

The first Sola is considered the foundation to all the rest. It addresses the question of what is the final authority of Truth. *Sola Scriptura* explains the Reformers' view that the Bible is the highest source of authority in a Christian's life, as it is the inspired and inerrant Word of God (Barrett 2016, p.23). There is no authority higher, nor need there be, for it is sufficient for the believer. Therefore all doctrine must be based in the teaching of Scripture. Paul, in his second letter to Timothy, made this very point. He said, "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work (New Revised Standard Version, 1989, 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

This foundational understanding for the Reformers flew in the face of the Roman Catholic Church. Their Magisterium had taken on a position of equality with the Scripture, an idea which the Reformers firmly rejected. It did not matter what the Pope said if it was not found in Scripture. Martin Luther's quote before the Diet of Worms of 1521 is the quintessential application of this understanding:

"Since your most serene Majesty, and your high Mightinesses, call upon me for a simple, clear, and definite answer, I will give it; and it is this: I cannot

subject my faith either to the pope or to councils, because it is clear as day that they have often fallen into error, and even into great self-contradiction. If, then, I am not disproved by passages of Scripture, or by clear arguments; if I am not convinced by the very passages which I have quoted, and so bound in conscience to submit to the word of God, I neither can nor will retract any thing, for it is not safe for a Christian to speak against his conscience.” Then, looking around on the assembly before which he was standing, and which held his life in its hands, “HERE I AM,” says he, “I CANNOT DO OTHERWISE: GOD HELP ME. AMEN” (D’Aubigné 1862 vol. 2, p. 182).

Scripture was the basis and rule for all of life. No one, not even the Pope himself, could contradict what God had revealed. With this understanding, the Reformers then turned to what Scripture said about salvation.

4.2. Sola fide

From the base of Scripture’s authority, the Reformers could do nothing else but accept God’s revelation on how salvation was applied to the soul of the sinner. If Scripture said that grace was applied through the works of the individual, then so be it. However, if God had revealed something else through Scripture, then even the highest authority within the church must accept that. And that is what the Reformers claimed. They believed that God had claimed that grace was applied through faith alone. The making right of the broken relationship between God and man rests in the sinner accepting by faith the gracious work of God in justification. *Sola fide* to Reformers meant that justification comes only through faith in the proper person, namely Jesus (Schreiner 2015, p. 15).

Those in the Protestant Reformation had been studying the New Testament and read what the Apostle Paul had written over fourteen hundred years earlier: “Yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law” (New Revised Standard Version, 1989, [Galatians 2:16](#)).

And again in his letter to the Ephesians Paul wrote, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast” (New Revised Standard Version, 1989, [Ephesians 2:8–9](#)). It is no wonder that the Reformers clung so tenaciously to this core tenant. John Calvin, in his Institutes of the Christian Religion put it as plainly as one can:

“Christ was given to us by God’s generosity, to be grasped and possessed by us in faith. By partaking of him, we principally receive a double

grace: namely, that being reconciled to God through Christ's blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a Judge a gracious Father; and secondly, that sanctified by Christ's spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life. Of regeneration, indeed, the second of these gifts, I have said what seemed sufficient. The theme of justification was therefore more lightly touched upon because it was more to the point to understand first how little devoid of good works is the faith, through which alone we obtain free righteousness by the mercy of God; and what is the nature of the good works of the saints, with which part of this question is concerned. Therefore we must now discuss these matters thoroughly. And we must so discuss them as to bear in mind that this is the main hinge on which religion turns, so that we devote the greater attention and care to it. For unless you first of all grasp what your relationship to God is, and the nature of his judgment concerning you, you have neither a foundation on which to establish your salvation nor one on which to build piety toward God. But the need to know this will better appear from the knowledge itself" (Calvin 1559/2011, pp. 725-26).

Faith, not works, according to the Reformer's understanding of Scripture, was at the heart of the salvation story. How was one to understand then this grace which the Roman Catholic Church seemed to be able to dispense, or direct sinners toward?

4.3. Sola gratia

Following close behind **Sola fide** comes **Sola gratia**. If faith alone is the requirement for salvation, then grace alone is what that salvation is based upon. There is nothing else one may do which can make them more or less acceptable to God, for it is all his grace showered upon us. **Sola gratia** was the Reformers' cry that sinners are saved by God's grace, unearned yet freely given (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The Apostle Paul, writing to Titus, reminded him "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (New Revised Standard Version, 1989, Titus 2:11-13).

The idea of **Sola gratia** is not controversial within any segment of Christianity (Trueman 2017 p. 17). What is controversial is how that grace is defined. The Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages believed that sinners were saved by grace as well, but the means of achieving that grace was distinct from what the Reformers were reading in Scripture. Zwingli wrote to His Highness, Philip of Hesse, expressing the fact that God chooses, not based on

merit or works, but by his grace alone. And apart from that grace there is no access to salvation. He both begins, sustains, and brings to fruition his work of salvation.

“How, therefore, can we give the credit for anything to ourselves, who do not even exist, much less live or act without Him? Since, therefore, nothing is or exists by its own power, nor lives, nor acts, nor understands, nor deliberates, but the present power of the Deity does all these things, how could human will be free? To be and to live undoubtedly precede the power and act of understanding. Since, then, even the poets of the heathen recognize that they depend upon the Deity alone, why, alas, do not the cultivators of true piety rise to the height of seeing that all the activity of all their faculties and powers is from the same source whence the whole universe flows?...For it is alone the Spirit that draws the mind to that fountain by which the soul, that has pined away through despair over its sins, is refreshed and renewed in youth” (Zwingli 1530/1922, p. 189).

The Reformers, in their study and teaching of the Scriptures were led to affirm that grace is administered to the sinner, not based on anything within the sinner himself, but completely based upon the graciousness of God.

4.4. Solus Christus

If Scripture teaches that the sinner is justified through faith, by grace, through whom does that grace come? According to the Roman Catholic Church during the Middle Ages, there was a wealth of grace accessible if received through the proper channels. Christ was full of grace, as well as the Virgin Mary. Alongside these two inexhaustible fountains of grace stands the multitude of saints through which grace can be distributed.

The Reformers disagreed. They believed that Scripture clearly taught *Solus Christus*, namely that Jesus is the unique mediator of salvation (Wellum 2017, p. 13). Jesus himself said he was the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6).

John Calvin, commenting on this passage said, “The statement amounts to this, that whoever obtains Christ is in want of nothing; and, therefore, that whoever is not satisfied with Christ alone, strives after something beyond absolute perfection. The way, the truth, and the life. He lays down three degrees, as if he had said, that he is the beginning, and the middle, and the end; and hence it follows that we ought to begin with him, to continue in him, and to end in him” (Calvin 2010a, p. 84).

Later on in New Testament development, the Apostle Paul referred to Jesus as the “one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all (New Revised Standard Version,

1989, 1 Timothy 2:5-6).

John Calvin in his commentary on 1 Timothy 2:5 said:

“Some person will perhaps think, that it will, therefore, be easy for us to come to an agreement with the Papists, if they place below the only intercession of Christ, all that they ascribe to the saints. This is not the case; for the reason why they transfer to the saints the office of interceding is, that they imagine that otherwise we are destitute of an advocate. It is a common opinion among them, that we need intercessors, because in ourselves we are unworthy of appearing in the presence of God. By speaking in this manner, they deprive Christ of his honour. Besides, it is a shocking blasphemy, to ascribe to saints such excellence as would procure for us the favour of God: and all the prophets, and apostles, and martyrs, and even the angels themselves—are so far from making any pretension to this, that they too have need of the same intercession as ourselves.¶ Again, it is a mere dream, originating in their own brain, that the dead intercede for us; and, therefore, to found our prayers on this is altogether to withdraw our trust from calling upon God. But Paul lays down, as the rule for calling on God in a proper manner, faith grounded on the word of God. (Rom. 10:17.) Justly, therefore, everything that men contrive, in the exercise of their own thoughts, without the authority of the word of God, is rejected by us. ¶ But not to dwell on this subject longer than the exposition of the passage demands, let it be summed up in this manner; that they who have actually learned the office of Christ will be satisfied with having him alone, and that none will make mediators at their own pleasure but those who neither know God nor Christ. Hence I conclude, that the doctrine of the Papists—which darkens, and almost buries, the intercession of Christ, and introduces pretended intercessors without any support from Scripture—is full of wicked distrust, and also of wicked rashness.” (Calvin 2010b, p. 59-60)

Christ alone is the one mediator between God and Man. To teach otherwise, even in the face of the Pope himself, would be denying what God had said. Denying God’s clear revelation is something that the Reformers could not do.

4.5. Soli Deo gloria

The final capstone of the Reformers’ core beliefs is one which functions to hold the rest together (VanDrunen 2015, p. 15). *Soli Deo gloria* communicates the idea that the purpose of all things, including salvation, is the glory of God (1 Corinthians 15:28). By itself, this seems like a common belief among all of Christendom, however the Reformers, especially Luther, emphasized the difference between this stated belief and the actions of the Roman Catholic Church.

Luther was virulent in his attack on the Papacy. He saw the Pope as the “Real Antichrist” (Tappert 1959, p. 300). The level at which the Roman Catholic Church had exalted the Pope was contrary to Scripture and therefore a denial of *Soli Deo Gloria*.

Luther had been taught from his earliest years that the Pope occupied a special place, between God and his Church. Jesus Christ himself had told Peter that Jesus would build his church upon Peter (Matthew 16). The long succession of Popes was evidence that Jesus was building his Church, and that the Pope held the Keys of Christ’s kingdom. However, after his study of Scripture, Luther changed his mind and wrote this concerning Matthew 16:

“As to the statement, ‘On this rock I will build my church’ (Matt. 16:18), it is certain that the church is not built on the authority of a man but on the ministry of the confession which Peter made when he declared Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God. Therefore Christ addresses Peter as a minister and says, ‘On this rock,’ that is, on this ministry” (Tappert 1959, p. 324).

“The pope is not the head of all Christendom by divine right or according to God’s Word, for this position belongs only to one, namely, to Jesus Christ” (Tappert 1959, p. 298). Therefore, any attempt to exalt the Pope to a position over the Church, and the application of salvation to a sinner, was transferring to a mere human the work of Christ and the glory that was due to God alone. “This is actually what St. Paul calls exalting oneself over and against God” (Tappert 1959, p. 300).

For Luther, and the other Reformers, *Soli Deo gloria* could not coexist with Roman Catholic Church’s exaltation of the Pope. The glory belonged to God alone, and how the Reformers saw the other church leaders living and teaching, they would have nothing to do with it.

4.6. Conclusion of the Five Solas

A cursory review of the Five Solas reveals that it is clear that the Roman Catholic understanding of penance, indulgences, relics, and pilgrimage does not coincide with the explicit teaching of the early Reformers in the Christian Church. Men such as Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin taught that one’s right standing with God is completely separate from any good works which a sinner may do, for themselves or on behalf of another. The sinner is made right (δικαιόω in the Apostle Paul’s terminology) “by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (New Revised Standard Version, 1989, Romans 3:24). The Reformers could teach no other because they believed that is what Scripture plainly taught.

5. State of the Current Protestant Church

These beliefs are not trivial. Based on current statistics of world religions, these foundation beliefs are some of the most important in the world in relation to the number of people they affect. Christianity as a whole comprises 32.5% of the world's population, or just over 2.5 billion people (Zurlo, Johnson & Crossing 2024). Of those, the Roman Catholic Church comprises roughly 50.9% and the Orthodox Church 11.7%. Those who have some level of affiliation with the Protestant movement would comprise roughly 25% of the Christian population. If the Five Solas are truly what the leaders of the Protestant Reformation taught, and what Protestants have continued to believe and teach, then it affects a massive amount of people.

5.1. The amount of pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago from Protestant countries

When these numbers are viewed through the lens of the Camino de Santiago, their importance is magnified even more. If the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant churches are divergent in these ideas so central to pilgrimage, we must consider why the Camino de Santiago continue to draw Protestant individuals in such numbers.

Because of the global impact of the Camino de Santiago, it is of no surprise that pilgrims come from all over the world. Countries with vastly different belief systems are represented in the yearly statistics gathered and published by the Oficina de Acogida al Peregrino. Among those countries is a stable and growing number represented by those countries which were affected by, and continue to view themselves in light of, the Protestant Reformation. The United States, with 43% registering as Protestant (Pew Research Center 2019), continues to send more and more pilgrims. Current statistics reveal that in 2023 there were 32,069 pilgrims from the United States who collected their Compostelas (Fundación Jacobea 2024). South Korea, with 20% of the population identifying as Protestant (이동한 2023), is rapidly growing in the ranks of countries sending pilgrims (Fundación Jacobea 2024).

One common suggestion is that this is to be accounted for by the rise of globalism and the touristification of the Camino. Of course these elements play a large role in the ability of individuals to travel and participate in the Camino de Santiago. However it does not completely account for the reasons why people walk the Camino. In fact, pilgrims who walk for religious reasons continue to outrank any other category. In 2023, 42.61% of all the pilgrims who received their Compostela, did so for religious purposes. An additional 34.7% registered for religious and other purposes. Specifically, the United States registered an even higher number with 51.34% for religious purposes, and an additional 28.41% as religious and other purposes (Oficina del Acogida al Peregrino 2024).

5.2. The amount of practicing Protestants serving on the Camino

General statistics of pilgrims who arrive in Santiago are not sufficient in themselves to prove any one hypothesis, however they do demonstrate that the question is valid. Other ongoing research is demonstrating that the question is even more interesting, namely the growing number of practicing Protestants who are dedicating their lives to serving on the Camino and ministering to the pilgrims in different ways, in accord with their own Protestant faith (Garrick 2015). While there are many individuals, or associations that are doing so in their own way, there is also a network of ministries (Soy el Camino) and individuals located along the various routes of the Camino de Santiago, serving pilgrims. They do so through private albergues (OasisTrails; Casa Camino Antiguo; Gîte Etape Espalion La Halte Saint Jacques;), chapels (Hope House n.d.), tea house and food truck (Pilgrim's Oasis), pilgrim centers (La Fuente del Peregrino; O Refugio; Pilgrim House), and spiritual communities (Casa de Pan; El Olivo; Oasis Trails Monastery; Puntos de Luz) growing along the Camino with an effort to address the pilgrims' physical and spiritual needs. Research is currently underway in order to determine the beliefs and practices of this growing number of practicing Protestants and their interest in the Camino de Santiago.

6. Conclusion

Many questions arise from one small arrow directing pilgrims towards Santiago, placed in front of a cathedral in Geneva, but the central question remains, how does the Camino de Santiago thrive in two distinct worlds, the Roman Catholic and the Protestant? Has this Catholic rite and its purifying effect, once denounced by Protestant reformers, been made more acceptable to Protestants by a change of Roman Catholic theology following the critique of men such as Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin? Or perhaps Protestantism as a whole has modified its theological beliefs from the time of the Reformers so as to accommodate a Roman Catholic concept of pilgrimage? Alternatively, it could be that the everyday practitioners of Protestantism feel little need to live in accordance to their founding principles. Finally, it could be that the Camino itself has changed. Perhaps the multitude of irreligious pilgrims, Roman Catholics, Protestants, and adherents to nearly every other religion, has changed the Camino de Santiago in such a way that there is no need to think in religious terms and still enjoy a spiritual experience? Whatever the final answer is, it is clear to see that the Camino de Santiago has a universal appeal, and is being used by individuals from varied belief structures to address the foundational questions of the heart.

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