




Written Work Cover Sheet

Please use a separate cover sheet for each piece of written work. This work should be submitted electronically to the Admissions Office at your college of preference no later than **10 November**. If you have made an open application we will email you by the end of October, to tell you which college is considering your application.

Please follow the precise guidance from your college when submitting work. If scanned and sent by email, your work should be sent as one multi-page PDF file for each piece of submitted work, together with its own cover sheet. The work must be original. Ideally, it should have been marked by a teacher and **must not have been re-written or corrected for this application to Oxford**. All work must be in English (except where otherwise required for Modern Languages) and each page must be numbered. If your college asks you to submit work by email, please copy in your UCAS referee.

To be completed by the applicant:

UCAS Personal ID:	1 6 4 4 0 9 8 6 0 0
Surname/family name: AMLAI	First/given name(s): CHRIST
College of preference: WADHAM	Proposed course: CHINESE
Current or most recent school: MATURE CANDIDATE	
Title of your written work: CAN HISTORY DIRECT ONE TO TRUE CHRISTIANITY?	
Subject for which this written work was done:	
Please explain the circumstances in which your work was produced. For example, was this completed as part of your school work, did you receive any guidance and if so, how much? Over what timeframe was it written? This was completed independently, outside of the time-frame I was enrolled in sixth-form, as I wish to provide a more accurate and clearer demonstration of my current abilities.	
<i>I certify that this is my own work, and that it has not been re-written or corrected for this application to Oxford and that I have acknowledged material taken from other works.</i> Please sign and date:  09.11/2023	

To be completed by a school/college representative (please specify your role):

Please confirm the circumstances under which this work was produced were as outlined above by the applicant.	
Name of school representative:	AKBAR ALI
Position and relationship to applicant:	PRIVATE SUBJECT TUTOR FOR A-LEVEL

College addresses and email addresses can be found at www.ox.ac.uk/ugcolls or in the University prospectus. Colleges are not always able to acknowledge receipt of written work, but will contact applicants before the deadline if the required work has not been received.

Please keep a copy of what you send, as tutors may refer to your work at interview.

Can history direct one to *true* Christianity?

"To be deep in history is to cease to be Protestant" thus spoke nineteenth century cardinal John Henry Newman. While Newman's assertion indeed fans flames over the debate between Orthodox/Catholics and Protestants, it raises a crucial question; if that were true; how then can we account for significant contributions by Protestant intellectuals such as C.S Lewis or R.C Sproul throughout Christian history? If Newman's claim is definitive, one may assume any dive into antiquity would inevitably result in the capitulation of the Protestant position. The defining principle of Protestantism's most notable doctrine, Sola Scriptura, acknowledges the Bible as the only source of authority for the Christian faith. Sola Scriptura's role in faith is hotly contested and its importance has indeed centuries old rifts within the Church. With this definition outlined, one can better understand Newman's point to mean history cannot verify that the principles of Protestantism existed in the early church, rather the Sola Scriptura position is not historically found and instead a misconception of the teachings of Jesus. This essay seeks to explore the relationship with reading and tradition, more specifically what can history teach regarding the apostolic Churches (Including but not exclusively Orthodox & Catholic) and Protestant attitude towards Sola Scriptura and the clarity it sheds regarding Church, tradition and scripture.

At the tip of the Protestant spearhead, any cursory reading of the N.T suggests Christ roundly condemns the use of tradition. Should we endorse this narrative as accurate, it inherently implies that Christ would also condemn the apostolic Church's for their use of tradition. Protestants, are quick to cite Christ's rebuking of the Pharisees (**Mark 7**), for "letting go of God's commands" and "holding onto human tradition" as Christ's recognition of an errant prioritisation of man's tradition over God's commands, a direct contradiction from the principles of Sola Scriptura. Moreover, Christ's accusation of the Pharisees "nullifying God's word by their tradition that they have handed down" can be read as the Pharisees making God's word void through their tradition overwriting God's commands. Adherents of the Sola Scriptura position further mention how (**2 Timothy 3:16-17**) "all Scripture [being] God breathed and profitable for teaching" encapsulates the infallibility of Scripture, as God's words are exclusive to Scripture not tradition. Christ also recognises a succession of tradition making reference to their "handing down" - to which the Protestant position extrapolates this to, Christ also admonishing the apostolic Churches for holding and handing oral tradition, not specifically located in text, therefore according to their view not qualifying as God-breathed and is therefore inferior and fallible. In the same vein, when Thomas Campbell famously said to the Christian Association of Washington of 1819, "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where [they are] silent, we are silent". To which the reply was heard "If we adapt that as a basis, then there is an end of infant baptism" whereby Campbell later recanted his position. Through these verses and Campbell's surrender of infant baptism as doctrine, Protestantism appears to gain a foothold in the debate revolving around Sola Scriptura. To which it becomes clearer as to why Protestants see issue with apostolic Churches holding oral tradition as equally infallible with Scripture, which is tantamount to "letting go of God's commands".

On the other hand, apostolic Churches argue that it does not follow that Christ's admonishing of the Pharisee's tradition is a blanket ban on all tradition. If this were to be the case, it would indeed be detrimental to the Protestant position as Christ numerous times makes reference to oral tradition. For example, Christ recognises Moses' authoritative seat

(Matt 23:2), which was passed from Moses to Joshua to the Sanhedrin and not recorded in Scripture. Similarly, the prophetic claim that the Messiah will be “born a Nazarene” (Matt 2:23) isn’t recorded, which Christ’s messiahship hinges on. Therefore, if we are to absolutize Christ’s rebuking of the Pharisees to all forms of non-written tradition, then neither the seat of Moses nor the Nazarene prophecy can be held as authentic for Christians or God-breathed according to **2 Timothy**.

Moreover, the apostolic Churches seek to establish that tradition itself is not to blame, rather the source of tradition itself. Indeed, Christ makes clear that the Pharisees source of tradition is manmade. On the other hand, apostolic Churches stake their traditions’ source as direct from the Lord. The Apostle Paul writes to those in Corinth that he “received from the Lord that which [he] delivered traditions to you” and earlier writes how the Corinthians must “hold fast to [these] traditions just as [he] delivered traditions [onto] them”. As inferred by these verses, tradition as according to the apostolic Church’s can still be considered on par with the written text, as their origin is not of those Pharisees but Christ Jesus himself, Christians ultimate source of authority. Furthermore, one could argue this viewpoint is further explicated when Paul instructs the Church in Thessaloniki to “hold fast to traditions taught either by oral statement or letter”. Therefore, the apostolic Churches argue the Protestants are guilty of committing a word-concept fallacy in their course of argumentation. This is due to the fact that words can encompass a totality (entire binding tradition) or a particular (specific instances of tradition) and even within those there exists context e.g. “Tradition’s sources”. Therefore, to better address Newman’s assertion, an insight into history and the early Church is needed as any line of argumentation from Scripture alone, can be deemed unreliable due to the multitude of interpretations that exist within Protestantism as how Christ and Paul’s attitudes towards scripture should be read, which at times conflict and gloss over how the early Christians would read such passages.

Yet, key Protestant apologists like John McArthur are key to point out that Protestantism doesn’t shy away from Christianity’s history, rather look to history to vindicate their position. McArthur finds no harm in tradition such as “pulpits or worship gathering” as these are not “theologically damaging”, rather he takes particular issue with practices such as prayers for the departed - which he deems as “later accretions to the faith”. Furthermore, those in McArthur’s camp accuse the apostolic Churches of venerating St. Irenaeus, who to Protestants at times advocates for Sola Scriptura. For example, in his work *Against heresies* Irenaeus accuses those who “gather their views from other sources than Scripture” as “abusing Scripture” through “supporting their own system out of them”. This implies that they are essentially moulding Christianity to conform to their own personal ideals of what they want the text to mean. Through this Protestants begin to build a case, such that the apostolic Churches, through their confirmation bias, piece together traditions arising external to Scripture and supported by “strained errant exegesis” of Scripture. Furthermore, Protestants voice their argument also through Irenaeus’ claim that Christians “received [their faith] from the apostles and their disciples” who through “[careful preservation]” ensured the “import of tradition is one and the same”. To which, Protestants argue that individual traditions can be labelled as foreign, particularly the tradition which arose in the apostolic see of Rome - Papal Supremacy, which they argue was not taught in Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Corinth or any other see.

On the other hand, should Newman’s assertion that one learned in “history [would cease to be Protestant]” be accurate, it would imply that we can simply look to history to disprove

Protestant claims of Sola Scriptura. Firstly, the apostolic Churches are quick to point out that Irenaeus' believed in baptismal regeneration and the real presence in the Eucharist, vastly differ from mainstream Protestant theology. Thus, positing the claim that Protestants selectively choose Irenaeus' saying to vindicate their position, accentuating their claim of a word-concept fallacy being committed. Such that, their claim Irenaeus' taught Sola Scriptura, is presupposed, while ignoring his other contradictory writings. Furthermore, another complexity arises as apostolic Churches and Protestantism diverge in regards to what are the canonised books of Scripture? While Protestants argue that certain practices, like prayers for the dead, lack specific scriptural support, the Book of Maccabees offers a counterexample where intercession for the dead is evident through Judas Maccabeus prayers and sacrifice for the fallen soldiers, found wearing pagan symbols. To further widen the theological gap Roman Catholics perceive the papacy to have precise Scriptural reference in Matthew 16, where they hold the view that Christ grants Peter primacy and the keys to the Church, ultimately establishing the doctrine of papacy. And of course, Protestants with their reliance on scripture alone, will contest this, and interpret this differently. Another question arises as to why Protestantism acknowledges some statements from Irenaeus and their acceptance in part of the 4th century council's decision on canonisation of Scripture but dismisses their teachings contrary to Protestant theology. This theological divergence is further exemplified by Protestantism's Nestorian ecclesiology, in which the Church holds no divine origin and is solely a human institution, devoid of laying infallible and binding rulings. To which the apostolic churches argue, this belief of theirs upends their theology as a solely human Church. This can be argued to challenge Christ's promise that the "gates of Hades will not prevail against the Church" being fulfilled in Protestantism as if the Church is purely human, questions are raised as to whether it can effectively withstand heresies or divisions. Moreover, the rise of numerous denominations and splintering theological viewpoints suggests the Church lacks divine-given authority, akin to the likes of Paul in his letters, to make infallible and binding rulings for matters of theology - which ultimately upends their theology as this suggests a lack of unity within the body of Christ.

To conclude, this essay has aimed to show how simply appealing to the "Scripture" leads to no resolve. Paul is pitted against Paul and Christ against Christ. Rather, a more promising approach lies in delving into history and studying the collective ethos held by the Early Church. While Protestantism's rallying cry for a return to Scripture alone is commendable, it seems there exists a misunderstanding concerning the inherent complexity of the text itself. To reiterate words can encompass a totality or a particular and even within those there's context. It is not coincidental that Southern Baptists generally share the same belief, nor followers of Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy. It seems improbable that every individual within these groups would independently arrive at their interpretative conclusion. Rather, it is more plausible to assert that each group was instructed in a particular exegesis of Scripture. For example, Baptists and Calvinists predominantly read Scripture in conjunction with extra-biblical sources like study Bibles, most famously the "*McArthur Study Bible*". Whereas, those belonging to apostolic Churches read Scripture through the collective ethos of the Church. Clearly, each group has an interpretive tradition, and their members are taught to view Scripture through the lenses of said tradition. Thus this essay has sought to demonstrate that while Newman's passing assertion may not encompass all the intricate factors that need to be considered when advocating for either Protestantism or an apostolic Church, it underscores the undeniable reality that history cannot be decoupled from

Christianity. In my outlined instances, it is evident that Protestantism has to a degree already decoupled itself from the Church's historicity.