

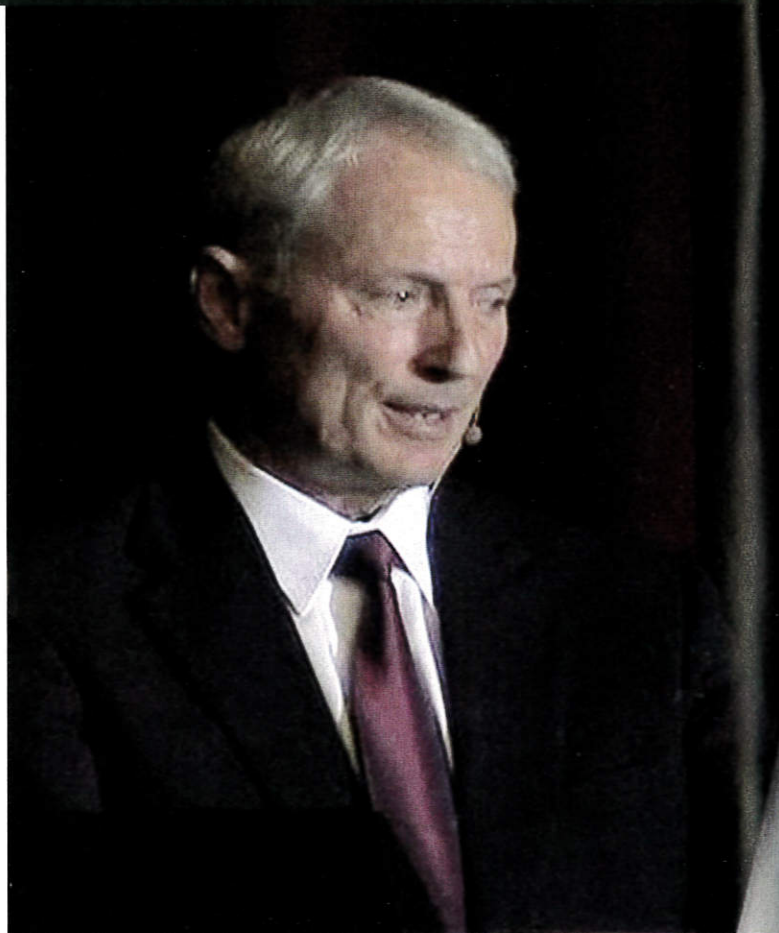
Preaching a Different Jesus

A Catholic takes on anti-Catholic Mike Gendron

By Robert Sullivan

Mike Gendron is a former Catholic who spends all of his time trying to “save” Catholics from the Catholic Church.

Mr. Gendron’s ministry is centered on growing Bible-only Christianity by coaxing Catholics away from the Catholic Church. He’s written anti-Catholic books, pamphlets and newsletters, recorded CDs, created videos, and traveled the country giving talks, all in an effort to persuade people that the Catholic Church is a false religion. If you attend one of his talks or read any of his materials, you will quickly see that Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Bible is, at best, a secondary concern for Mr. Gendron.



Mike Gendron speaks at VCY America Rally in 2012.

Recently I received word that Mr. Gendron was going to preside over a “Bible Conference” at a church in a nearby town. I asked a friend of mine, Tony, to accompany me to the conference so he could act as my wingman. (It’s always good to have at least one ally when entering into what could be hostile territory.) We arrived in the town with enough time to stop by the Catholic church pray the rosary. A temporal wingman is important, but evangelization is futile if you attempt it without prayer.

About forty people were in attendance when we arrived at the small Bible church. We found seats near the back, and the pastor and a few others graciously introduced themselves to us. Tony and I agreed that, if asked, we would tell them we were Catholic. As the talk progressed, it occurred to me that nobody asked us about our church because few of them felt that organized religion was of any relevance. In fact, we would soon learn that most of them appeared to hold significant disdain for organized religion.

Mr. Gendron began by saying that he would take questions at the end of the night, but if anyone had a question during his talk, he would gladly answer it, so it was okay to interrupt him. Apparently, it is not unusual for him to give talks without any

question-and-answer segments. Maybe he charges more for talks with Q&A.

A lack of facts

The talk was interesting—not for the facts and information but for the lack of them. Mr. Gendron did a good job of providing Bible citations for any scriptural references he had on his PowerPoint presentation, but he rarely supported his history-based claims by citing any source.

The lack of sources did not stop Mr. Gendron from making a great number of dishonest claims about the Catholic Church, individuals within the Church, and specific teachings of the Church. His greatest criticism of the Catholic Church was that it added things to the Bible. He explained that the Bible is the ultimate authority for truth regarding faith (this is known as *sola scriptura* or “Bible alone”) and that the Catholic Church adds all kinds of unbiblical traditions and heresies to Scripture. He was emphatic that to add or subtract anything from the written word is a sure sign of apostasy.

Throughout his presentation, in between badly misinformed claims about Catholic teachings, Mr. Gendron encouraged the attendees to be charitable to Catholics, because most of them are simply “deceived” and need someone to lead them to the truth.

At end of his talk, I raised my hand and said, “I want to talk a little bit about the traditions of men.” I could see him light up as he prepared to launch into an all-out assault on Catholic Tradition.

“When you say the true church receives divine revelation from Scripture alone,” I said, “I assume that by that you are referring to *sola scriptura*?” Mr. Gendron confirmed I was correct.

“Where in the Bible is the best argument for *sola scriptura*?” I asked.

Mr. Gendron didn’t even try to provide a verse. He said, “Well, probably the best argument is that Scripture is the supreme authority on matters of faith. And you see that throughout the Bible.” I was amazed that, on this issue most essential to his faith, he fell into generalized and circular reasoning. In a nutshell, he said that he believes in *sola scriptura* because of *sola scriptura*. In concluding his non-explanation, he said that the gospel is defined in Scripture alone.

I couldn’t let that go. I pointed out that the New Testament didn’t even exist when Christ and the apostles were walking around teaching. Their references to Scripture were all to the Old Testament, because the first books of the New Testament were just starting to be written about twenty years after Christ’s Resurrection and may have been incomplete until around A.D. 100. They were not even compiled in final form as the Bible until about A.D. 400.

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Mr. Gendron affirmed my explanation of the New Testament but claimed that the early Christians knew what the scriptures were because they had been sent to the local churches. Then he simply said, “Good questions,” and pointed at a friendlier raised hand.

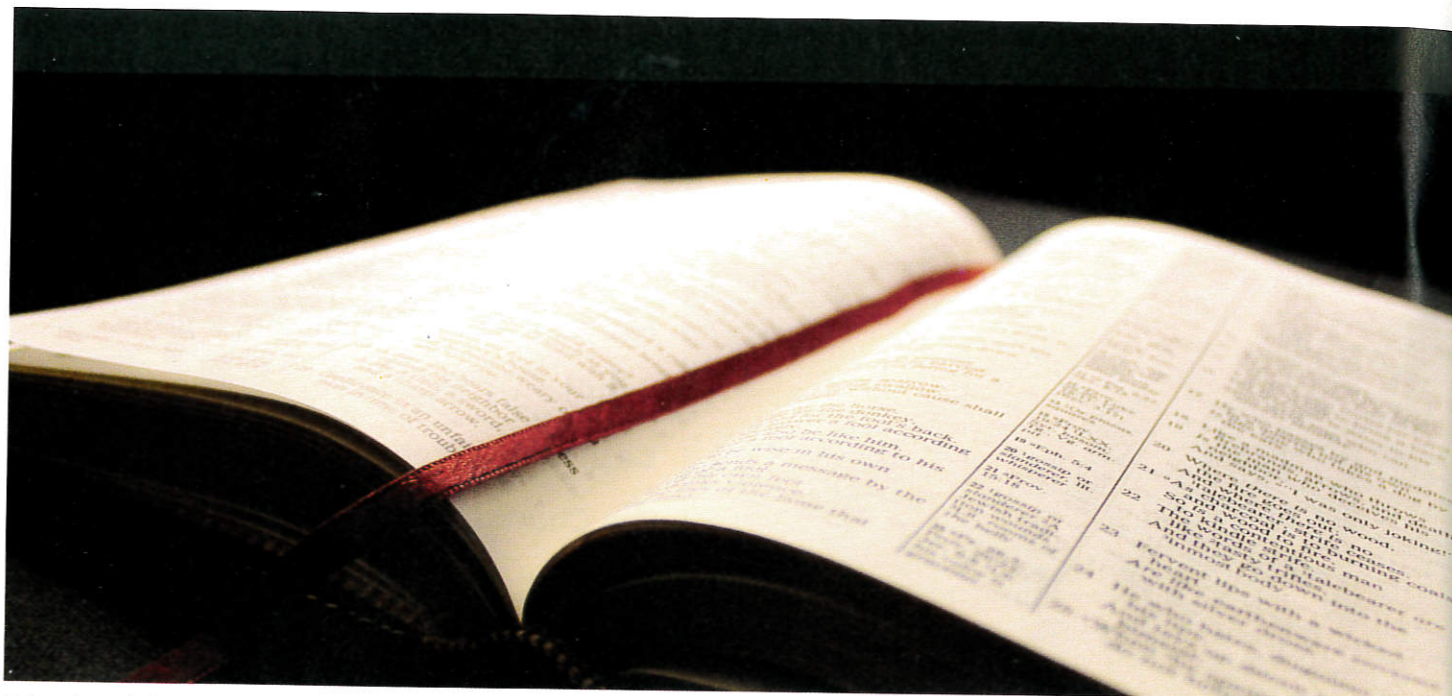
Salvation controversy

After a few questions from other attendees, I raised my hand again. In his talk, Mr. Gendron had cited paragraph 2027 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to claim that the Church teaches that Catholics merit their own salvation. Giving him an opportunity to back off of his misrepresentation, I said that I thought 2027 actually said that no one can merit the initial grace that leads to his salvation.

“No, I quoted that verbatim,” Mr. Gendron replied. “Catholics must merit the grace that’s necessary for salvation.” So I opened my *Catechism* and said that I would read the first sentence out loud. “Paragraph 2027 starts, ‘No one can merit the initial grace—’” he tried to interrupt me, but I kept reading, “—which is at the origin of conversion.” He ignored me and tried to divert the discussion by mentioning infant baptism, but I didn’t follow him. I said, “I was just curious about that section, because that leads me to believe that the Catholic Church believes you cannot merit the *initial* grace.” I suspect he was now certain that he was dealing with a Catholic, not just a Bible Christian who had questions.

Later, I asked him if he was familiar with the *Didache*, and he said, “Well, I’m familiar with the Bible.” Then he proceeded to talk about Scripture passages that had nothing to do with infant baptism.

The Q&A session dwindled quickly, so, as they passed around the money basket, I stepped to the back of the room and waited to see if anyone would approach me. I had two pamphlets with me. One was *Where We Really Got The Bible*; the other was *The Preaching Of Another Gospel*, which gives tips on how to spot false prophets.



Sola scriptura holds that the Bible is the sole source of God's revelation to man.

It wasn't long before the pastor approached me. I said, "Now that you know I'm Catholic, I'd love to address your congregation some time. How can we make that happen?"

He feigned not to know I was Catholic, but we started a cordial discussion of Scripture, my low opinion of Mr. Gendron's tactics, and the pastor's need to open his heart to the truth. I handed him my two pamphlets, which he folded up and placed in his pocket. As we chatted, Mr. Gendron was nearby, peddling his CDs, books, and pamphlets to curious attendees. Within a few minutes, my friend Tony joined the discussion, and when business slowed at Mr. Gendron's table, he came over to talk to us as well.

Face to face

We introduced ourselves, but Mr. Gendron was cold toward us. I handed him my two pamphlets, which he accepted. We were chatting about baptism when he walked up, so he asked me to turn to John 1:12-13 and read it. He said, "Let's see what your Catholic Bible says." It reads: "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

In Mr. Gendron's opinion, this refutes the sacrament of baptism. He said that the Catholic Church says we have to keep the whole law to be saved. Tony and I responded in unison, "Define what you mean by law." Something about our response caused him to lose his cool. He said angrily, "Why are you Catholics always like this?"

Tony and I remained calm. I offered to give him some perspective on what "law" typically meant in the New Testament. I explained that the law he was referencing was likely the old Mosaic law that included the necessity of circumcision, dietary restric-

tions, and a number of other things that are no longer observed by Christians because Christ has given us a New Covenant.

I then began to explain infant baptism to Mr. Gendron and the pastor using Steve Ray's excellent explanation. I asked them what Mary and Joseph did on the eighth day after Christ's birth. Mr. Gendron became even more agitated and, with a raised voice and evident exasperation, said, "You Catholics are all the same! Why do you always jump around like this? I ask a question, and then you jump to a different Scripture without answering my question!"

I explained that I was attempting to use Scripture to walk him through the answer, but before I could finish my sentence, he walked off visibly angry and began to pack up his things. He seemed to have forgotten his own advice he had given throughout his presentation to be charitable to Catholics.

Tony and I continued to have a discussion with the pastor, and the tone of the conversation returned to calm. I asked the pastor if he would be willing to sit down with me sometime to discuss Scripture and faith. He said he wasn't sure he would be interested in that. Within a few moments, someone came over and reminded him that they had an early morning the following day, so Tony and I took the hint and exited the building.

Mr. Gendron was waiting by the door with his bag. "I just want you to remember that the gospel you are rejecting is the true word of God and that, unless you accept the gospel, you will go to hell," he said.

"I believe in the gospel as it is written," I said. "What I reject is the word of Mike Gendron."

Take two

I hadn't planned to attend Mr. Gendron's talk the next night, but appointments fell out of my schedule as the day passed,

I opened my *Catechism*. “Paragraph 2027 starts, ‘No one can merit the initial grace—’” he tried to interrupt me, but I kept reading, “—which is at the origin of conversion.”

and I was able to fit the “conference” in. I arrived a few minutes early. The setting was the same, except this time I was alone. When I walked in, the pastor looked up from his conversation with one of his church members and forced a smile and a half-wave in my direction. Unlike the previous night, when Tony and I sat near the back of the room, I took a seat in the second row in front of Mr. Gendron and right behind the pastor.

After a bit, the pastor got up and had a brief chat with Mr. Gendron. He paused for a few minutes and then approached me and shook my hand. He leaned in and whispered, “I am going to make a request of you. Don’t hand out any of your pamphlets, and do not talk to anyone here except me and Mr. Gendron.” I agreed, with the clarification that if anyone approached me and wanted to talk, I would talk with that person. He agreed to that.

This time, Mr. Gendron did not invite questions during his talk, nor did he say he would be taking questions afterward. It is likely they had decided that there would be no questions if there were any Catholics in attendance. But about five minutes into his talk, Mr. Gendron held up a host and declared that the Catholic teaching about the Eucharist was nothing less than idol worship.

I immediately raised my hand, but Mr. Gendron ignored me as he set the host down and continued with his talk. I spoke up anyway. “Mr. Gendron, is that a consecrated host? Is that consecrated?” All he would say is, “No questions during my talk. I’ll take questions afterward.” I was highly doubtful it was consecrated, and since he had committed to taking questions at the end, I allowed the issue to rest until he was done.

Anti-Catholic tactics explained

As on the previous night, Mr. Gendron spoke passionately about his love for Catholics and his mission to save them from the errors of the Catholic Church. This time he explained some of his specific methods. One method is to stand outside a Catholic church on Christmas Eve in order to engage Catholics as they leave Christmas Mass, offering materials such as pamphlets and CDs to them and asking them questions about their salvation.

He also provided a list of questions Evangelicals could pose to their Catholic family members and co-workers in an effort to get them talking about their lack of knowledge of their faith and the Bible. He encouraged audience members to read and use his book in order to hone their skills of evangelizing Catholics. By the end of his talk, I had several pages of notes with Scripture citations and historical facts that would expose his dishonesty.

When he did open it up for questions, I raised my hand. “Mike,” I said, “I went to Mass this morning. I received the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Christ in the Eucharist. I prayed the rosary today. I read Scripture today. I prayed the Divine Mercy chaplet, and I visited Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament in a Catholic church this afternoon. If I die in the next five minutes believing in the truth of the Catholic Church and that you are a false prophet, do you, Mike Gendron, believe that I’m going to hell?”

“It doesn’t matter what I believe,” he said.

“But I want to know what you believe,” I said, “so it matters to me.”

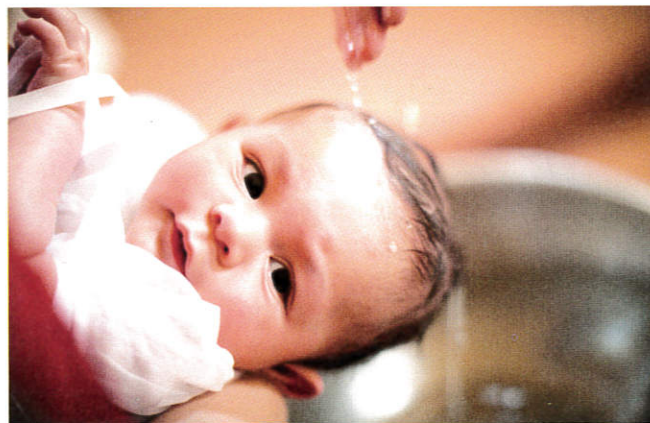
He danced around the question but finally said that, if I have rejected the gospel of Jesus Christ, I will go directly to hell.

“Does it seem to you that I’m rejecting the gospel?” I asked.

“Yes, it does.”

Denying the Eucharist

I asked him if the host he had been holding up was consecrated. He finally confirmed that it was not consecrated and launched into explaining his theory that the Bible has no mention of the Eucharist. I waited until he was done and asked him how he explains 1 Corinthians 11:27, in which St. Paul talks about the Eucharist:



Mr. Gendron didn’t stay around to hear the author’s explanation of infant baptism.

GETTY IMAGES



It was at the author's attempt to explain the Eucharist that he was cut off for good.

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself (1 Cor. 11:28-29).

Mr. Gendron avoided the question by explaining that Christ's Second Coming would not be in the form of the Eucharist. Since he was avoiding my question, I began to read 1 Corinthians 11:27 to him in order to figure out how he could fail to see that St. Paul was talking about the Eucharist and the Mass, right in the very Bible Mr. Gendron held out as the supreme authority of truth.

But before I read two words, the pastor interrupted the discussion and announced that Mr. Gendron was not to answer my question and that I was not allowed to ask anymore questions. The pastor said he would speak with me privately or that I could talk privately with Mr. Gendron after the talk was finished.

"We have been gracious enough and we're done," he said. "So you can leave if you want, but you are not allowed to ask anymore questions."

I asked Mr. Gendron if he would meet with me after his talk. "No I won't," he said. "I've shaken the dust off my feet. I will not cast my pearls before swine."

To the dismay of Mr. Gendron and the pastor, I didn't leave. I sat quietly as everyone else sat quietly. Nobody raised their hand for the next fifteen uncomfortable seconds as Mr. Gendron scanned the small audience looking for someone to break the silence. Finally, a few attendees were able to muster up some simple questions. Shortly thereafter, Mr. Gendron wrapped up the night by encouraging everyone to buy his materials.

Restroom evangelization

After the talk, as I was washing my hands in the restroom, an older gentleman entered, made eye contact with me, and said, "I just read the Scripture passage you were asking him to comment on."



The banner from Mike Gendron's website, Pro-gospel.org.

The man's name was Dan. He paused and I smiled and explained the importance of that passage, especially in light of Mr. Gendron's reliance on *sola scriptura*. I explained that there are many passages in the Bible that confirm the reality of the Eucharist and that, for 2,000 years, the Mass has been the center of Christian worship. I told him about Justin Martyr's *Second Apology* in order to let him know that the Mass is evident in the Bible, it is evident in the early Church, and it is still with us in that same form.

We had a ten-minute discussion in the men's room. He was a devoted non-Catholic Christian, but he was full of joy and charity, willing to discuss his faith without letting his pride or his emotions get in the way. As we talked, three or four others came and went, and one or more of them must have told the pastor that I was talking with one of the attendees. The pastor probably assumed I had violated our earlier agreement.

Of course, I had every right to do that, because the man approached me and did so in a very gracious way, but the pastor was already so unhappy with me, and I'm sure he assumed I was proselytizing. It wasn't long before the door to the restroom opened and the pastor and some other men of the church told me I had to leave.

Since I was on their property, I obeyed. I thanked the gentleman for his charitable discussion and said, "I guess I have to go."

"I guess so," he said.

As the men ushered me to the door, I told the pastor that Dan had started the conversation with me. "I don't care," he said.

As I walked across the parking lot to my car, I glanced back toward the entrance and saw a group of men standing in front of the door, glaring at me. All I could say was, "St. Michael, you defended me in battle. You protected me from the wickedness and snares of the devil."

I thought about standing on the street and offering pamphlets to people as they left, but that would have been inappropriate. I would have been no better than Mr. Gendron, and I had already agreed not to pass out any pamphlets. ■



Robert Sullivan lives in Hastings, Nebraska, with his wife, Carmen, and their five daughters. They are members of St. Cecilia parish.