

The Faith of Our Fathers

A Consideration of Catholic Doctrines—Sections 1-111

Introduction

Purpose of Article

THIS article is being written in the spirit of good will to our many Catholic friends everywhere. It has occurred to us that some who listen to the “Frank and Ernest” radio programs and view “The Bible Answers” television series are Catholic in their religious affiliation, and may have wondered how the views presented compare with those of their own church.

In our rapidly changing world, and especially in these unprecedented times of trouble and distress, men have been probing as never before for answers to their vital questions: Will there be an end to war? Is there life beyond the grave? What is God doing for mankind?

These questions and related ones have been pondered by Christians throughout the centuries. They are reasonable questions, and demand satisfying answers. The truth respecting them was known to the Early Church, and has not changed to our day. Where shall we turn to learn the nature of the faith of our fathers, and to find the assurances we now need? These are some of the basic issues to be covered in this discussion.

We are thankful that the enlightenment of our day has broadened our viewpoint, and compels us to seek out the best solutions from various sources. No longer are we content to permit anyone to hinder us in searching out the truth and in making our inquiries, even across traditional denominational lines. We believe that God is pleased when his creatures begin to inquire about him and his relationship to their individual lives, and that he rewards every effort that is made to determine his will for them. We further believe that God has designed a master plan of salvation which will benefit all people of every religious denomination. Catholics and Protestants alike will enjoy the blessings of life, happiness, and peace which will accrue from the final establishment of God’s kingdom upon the earth. The specific reasons for these beliefs, and their relationship especially to Catholic doctrine, will be set forth in all sincerity and kindness toward our readers. It is hoped that this presentation will thus magnify the greatness of our God, who is the Father of us all.

Catholic Achievements

FIRST of all, let us take a brief glance at some of the distinctive marks of the Catholic Church, to fill in our general background picture. The Catholic Church, we find, is by far the largest single Christian church in the world. Its membership now surpasses 500 million, more than double the combined total of all Protestant denominations. Distributed throughout all the countries of the world are nearly 417,000 Catholic churches and 157,000 schools. Its 32,000 hospitals, orphanages, homes for the aged and other institutions are caring for 16 million people every year.

Despite the complexity of its worldwide organization, the Catholic Church offers a unanimity of faith and practice which stands in open contrast to the many competing religious groups and the varying articles of faith held by them. Further, it claims an apostolic succession, and infallibility of its leaders which few other churches care to affirm. And finally, it is the only church which can look back upon an historical past which reached such an influential peak in western civilization that it had control over the destinies of nations, including the crowning and deposing of kings.

This is surely an impressive record. Statistically and historically, we are given a picture of a powerful church indeed. Undoubtedly many Catholics are proud of this record, and quite puzzled why anyone, in the face of these facts, would deliberately choose any other church affiliation. To such it would probably appear a more reasonable course to join forces with Catholicism, mutually endeavoring to resist godless ideologies.

The reason that any group should choose to remain separate from the "Mother Church" thus becomes a subject of considerable interest to both Catholics and Protestants. To develop this theme, we propose to investigate some major aspects of Catholicism and related areas, such as the Early Church, the role of the Bible, the influence of tradition, characteristics of the true church, and the origin of various doctrines and practices.

It is intended that this presentation will be on a fair and impartial basis, giving the historical and scriptural references whenever possible. We trust that this analysis may serve to enlighten those who have pondered this question of church separation, and provide material to assist them in reaching their own decisions.

Section II

Comparison of Catholic and Protestant Beliefs

Background of Agreement

WE ARE glad to begin by touching upon the fundamental areas of agreement, for we may then use these to build upon. It may be surprising to learn that there are many areas of faith that are shared by Catholics and Protestants alike. First and foremost, there is a vital belief in the existence of an all-powerful and intelligent God, The Infinite One, who is acknowledged as Creator and Sustainer of the universe. It is recognized that the essential attributes of this great God are revealed and detailed in the Bible, especially highlighting the great love of the Heavenly Father toward all his creatures. Next may be cited the belief in the original perfection of the human race represented by the first pair in the Garden of Eden. This happy condition of perfect health and intimate fellowship with God was lost by deliberate disobedience to God's requirements. The unhappy consequences of disease, degradation, and alienation from God were inherited by the whole human family. Thus did mankind find itself in the deplorable state of condemnation, with no means of restoring itself to the original privileged condition without special help from an all-merciful God.

There is also agreement that God promised in due time to send a Deliverer and Redeemer who would save the human family from their sins. When in the course of time the various tribes and peoples forgot the one true God who created them, the patriarch Abraham was chosen by God to become the father of a very special people, the Israelites. These people were destined to become a great nation, and if faithful to God would be peculiarly his own people. To them was entrusted the true worship of the one God, Jehovah, which separated them from all others. Through them was to come the Messiah and, eventually, blessing and salvation to all the Gentiles.

Finally the Messiah, in the person of Jesus Christ, appeared upon the earth. His greatness, not evidenced by outward riches and military might, was unrecognized by the Jewish nation. His lowly mission of subjection to the Father's will, and of redeeming the world through ignominious sacrifice, was misunderstood by most of his contemporaries. Yet, nevertheless, Christ's mission was accomplished; he was miraculously resurrected from the dead, and he ascended unto his Father in heaven. And left behind to carry on his work was a handful of men, the nucleus of a church that was to grow and spread the Gospel message among all the nations of earth.

Fundamental Difference

THUS far there is complete accord in this brief expression of basic Christian belief. But to go any farther than this, to elaborate on what constitutes the church, or acceptable forms of worship, or specific doctrinal beliefs, or the nature of the Gospel message to be given the world, would entail a host of difficulties. There would be raised insurmountable barriers of conflicting concepts and beliefs. The question then presents itself, why should these differences arise, based as they are upon the background of similar Christian beliefs?

A very simple solution may be offered, at least when comparing Catholicism with Protestantism. The reason for the harmony of views as outlined above is their inclusion in the Bible, and a mutual acceptance by faith of these historical events. A wide extension of the areas of general agreement could be obtained if the Bible were accepted as the sole basis of faith and practice. But here is where a sharp line is drawn. Catholics maintain that the Bible is not the sole religious guide. They consider the tradition of their church—the writings and teachings of its leaders through the centuries—to be equally as necessary as the Bible. In fact, they believe that the church is the mother of the Bible, and in this sense precedes it in importance.

When the writings of various personalities within a church are given equal weight with those of Holy Scripture, it is evident that divergent beliefs and practices arise. Wherever the word of the Bible is accepted as the rule, there tends to be unanimity in belief. Though the matter of interpretation must still be settled, there is much closer accord when the Bible is accepted as the sole common ground, than when it is not. And herein lies the most fundamental difference between Catholics and Protestants.

Stated another way, this fundamental difference of view concerns the relationship of the authority of the church to that of the Bible. The most vital question becomes, Is the Bible alone a sufficient guide for salvation, or is the authority of the church the most reliable guide? It may be seen that this matter should first be settled, as it will provide the natural basis for other discussion areas to follow. For this reason, let us begin by considering this point in more detail.

Section III

Highest — Church or the Bible?

AS ALREADY stated, Catholics believe that the tradition of their church supersedes the Bible in importance. Tradition in this usage is defined as the mind of the church throughout the ages, including writings of doctors, fathers, theologians, decrees of councils, liturgical books, and decisions of popes.¹ They further believe that this tradition does not conflict with the Bible, but is supplementary to it.

In this section it is intended to study the reasons which are advanced to justify the emphasis placed upon tradition. We will save for subsequent examination some of the forms of worship to which reliance upon tradition has led.

Regarding the Bible, we are glad to point out that Catholics as well as Protestants believe that it was written under divine inspiration, and that it is the Word of God. Whereas Catholics also consider the voice of the Church as the Word of God, they just as strongly affirm that the tradition of the Church is harmonious with the written Scriptures. Therefore, since the Bible is wholly acceptable to all, everyone will profit from an examination of what it teaches regarding tradition, and its own purpose and usefulness for Christians.

Church Precedes New Testament

TAKING a backward glance now to the very beginning of the church, we find it is an historical fact that Christ established the church as such before even a word of the New Testament was written. Likewise, the work of teaching within the church and of witnessing the Gospel to the unconverted was carried on for many years before the New Testament writings were completed. These facts have been seized upon to de-emphasize the importance of the Bible for us today, and conversely, to magnify the authority of the church. Let us see if such conclusions are warranted.

First of all, the early Christians always had the Old Testament Scriptures from which to benefit, which actually constitute over three-fourths of the entire Bible. These Scriptures were freely available in the synagogues, and frequently were used in discussions with the Jews. As a matter of fact, we are

¹Donald Attwater (ed.), "Tradition," *A Catholic Dictionary*, p. 498.

told that the more noble of the Jews “searched the Scriptures daily” to determine for themselves whether the Christian teachings could be justified. (Acts 17:11) They reasoned that if Christianity were truly of God, there must be evidences of it in the Jewish writings. And, of course, the early Christians already realized that many of the Old Testament prophecies, symbolisms, and other teachings had come to pass, and that the inspired utterances of the apostles harmonized fully with them. Thus it could hardly be said that the early followers of Christ were left without Scriptures to guide them.

Of course there are many teachings of the New Testament which are peculiarly Christian, and which cannot readily be ascertained from the Old Testament, though present in hidden sayings and types. But the early Christians were not at a loss for the absence of these writings, for Jesus and the apostles were in their midst, and personally ministering to them. The apostles were either eyewitnesses of the important events which transpired during this period, or were given special revelations which helped them in their ministry. From statements made by St. Paul, it is very evident that he frequently spoke under the direct inspiration of God.

In I Corinthians 2:7, 10, he said: “We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew. . . . But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit.” And again, “We thank God without ceasing, because, when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God.”—I Thess. 2:13

In addition, the Early Church was given the advantage of supernatural gifts, including wisdom, the working of miracles, prophesying, etc., to make up for their lack of the specific instructions of the New Testament. (I Cor. 12:4-11) As the writings of the apostles gradually became available, these special gifts became unnecessary and therefore ceased. Thus is woven a picture of God’s concern for the spiritual growth and welfare of the early followers of the Master and the remarkable way he overruled their affairs prior to the time that the New Testament became generally available. But certainly nowhere in this picture is there even a hint that the written testimony of God’s Word was not to become all-important.

Value of Written Testimony

BUT then, another line of approach is offered. It is suggested that the apostles in their writings made little distinction between the spoken word, which later developed into church tradition, and the written Word, which became the New Testament. If anything, they seemed to be emphasizing the importance of the form of words which they spoke. Hence, if the apostles did not stress the written testimony, what right do we have today to do so? Examining the Scriptures on this subject, we find several texts that could appear to be supporting this contention: “Therefore, brethren, stand fast,

and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.” (II Thess. 2:15) “Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love.” (II Tim. 1:13) “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”—II Tim. 2:2

As we read the words of these texts, all by the Apostle Paul, we begin to realize that there are certain implied qualifications. First of all, in every case cited Paul was referring to his own words—the words of one who was specially selected to become an apostle of Christ. Thus any emphasis placed upon his admonition to hold fast to these words apply only to the Apostle Paul’s words. No indication is given that they would be applicable to any other individual.

Since it is evident that other apostles besides Paul were also used by the Lord to teach important truths, it would be possible to extend the admonition of holding fast sound doctrine to their words also, without doing injustice to the original intent of the text. Beyond this, however, there would be no authority to apply these texts to the words of those who followed after—those who were not of the twelve apostles. By the time the apostles passed away, their writings had become generally available in the churches, making it no longer necessary to rely upon the spoken word.

On the other hand, there is an abundance of scriptural evidence highlighting the importance of the written Word, both the Old and New Testaments. It appears that the Lord did not want his followers to be in doubt concerning what should be regarded as the highest spiritual authority, as shown by the harmonious testimony of the prophets, the apostles, and Christ himself.

Let us begin with Paul’s words, supplementing his previous testimony, to bring out the complete range of his thoughts. In I Corinthians 14:37 he wrote: “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.” Certainly this reveals his conviction that his writings were of divine origin. Realizing this to be true, he specifically urged his brethren to have his writings read in the various churches which had been established. “I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren.” (I Thess. 5:27) “And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans.”—Col. 4:16

If it were true, as is suggested, that the spoken words of the Early Church leaders were foremost in importance, we should not expect to find them questioned among the ranks of the faithful. Certainly when these words were uttered by the Apostle Paul, who was used so greatly by the Lord in evangelistic work, we would expect to find wholehearted acceptance of his message. Contrary to this expectation, we read the following account of how

the spoken word was received by a Jewish congregation in Berea: "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so."—Acts 17:10, 11

Nowhere are we told that Paul was offended if a congregation first compared his oral words with the written Old Testament Scriptures before accepting them as valid. On the contrary, these Jews were specially commended and spoken of as more noble than others for this very reason—using the written Word of God as a standard to measure the spoken word, even that of the great Apostle Paul.

The use of this same method of evaluating the spoken word with the written Holy Scriptures was encouraged by the Apostle John. He wrote: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." (I John 4:1) This principle is also found recorded in the Old Testament: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." (Isa. 8:20) Notice how well this compares with Paul's statement in Ephesians 2:19, 20: "Ye . . . are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone." Since the foundation of the prophets stems from their written testimony in the Old Testament Scriptures, that of the apostles likewise comes from their recorded words in the New Testament Scriptures.

What does the Apostle Peter have to say on this question? In his second epistle we find him much concerned for the welfare of the brethren after his departure. As long as he was in their midst, he could stir up their pure minds to recall the important doctrines and to establish them in the truth. (II Pet. 1:12-14) But he also wanted to keep the brethren in remembrance of these things after his death: "Moreover I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance." (verse 15) How could this best be done?

Did Peter suggest recalling from memory the stirring sermons which he had uttered? Did he intend his teachings to be passed on by word of mouth from generation to generation? No. The method he chose to use is set forth in II Peter 3:1, 2: "This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior." Thus, by the written Scripture, Peter guarded against the possibility of his words either being forgotten or unintentionally distorted, for he wanted the message to be preserved in its original purity.

Now let us turn to the example and teaching of Christ, for surely they must be given the greatest consideration of all. Throughout his ministry,

he was found appealing to the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures, quoting from them, discussing them with his own disciples and with the religious leaders of the day, and urging others to follow the divine counsel found therein.

On the occasion of his temptation by the Adversary during his forty days' isolation in the wilderness, we find Jesus resisting his opponent with the simple but forceful words, "It is written," followed by a quotation from the Old Testament. (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10; Deut. 8:3; 6:16, 13) Not once did he attempt a defense by his own logic or reasoning, which surely would have been masterful; instead, no less than three times in succession, he chose to repeat the same procedure with the very effective "It is written." Coming from the very Son of God himself, the one destined to rule the world, what a powerful demonstration this was for respecting and heeding the written testimony of God! Many other instances could be cited where Jesus was found upholding the standard of God's written Word. In Mark 12:24 he is recorded as saying: "Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God?" In Luke 4:17-21 he is shown preaching in the synagogue, using the 61st chapter of the Book of Isaiah as his basis, explaining how this prophecy was being fulfilled in him.

In Luke 24:27, 44-46 Jesus again is found reasoning from the Old Testament Scriptures, emphasizing to his followers the importance of the written Word and explaining its meaning:

And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. . . . All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the Law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. . . . Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written. . . .

Oral Tradition in the Church

ON ANOTHER occasion, Jesus stated categorically, "The scripture cannot be broken." (or "annulled," John 10:35, *Weymouth*) Yes, the testimony of the Holy Scriptures is always sure and can be depended upon, for God is their inspired Author. But when it comes to the words of men, with the exception of the apostles as already noted, we are given no such assurances. To the contrary, the Scriptures explicitly state that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God, . . . there is none righteous, no, not one." (Rom. 3:23, 10) Thus painfully are we made aware of the frailties and shortcomings of all men, even of our leaders in the church.

For this reason, Protestants are deeply concerned that their Catholic friends are taught to accept without reservation the oral words and traditions

of their church hierarchy. Do the pronouncements of these leaders always represent the Word of God, or could the full truth of God's Word be obscured when interwoven with the traditions of men? Again let us turn to the life and teaching of Jesus for an answer to this searching question.

During Jesus' ministry, not once was he found appealing to the established rabbinical schools of teaching with their traditions and precepts of men. It is evident that the reason he did not was that he knew they were not in harmony with the written Word of God which they claimed to teach. In John 5:46, 47 Jesus stated flatly that the religious authorities did not believe the writings of Moses. On another occasion he addressed the scribes and Pharisees thus: "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaiah [Isaiah] prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."—Matt. 15:7-9

Jesus went on to point out the dire consequences which could result from a continued course of reliance upon oral tradition: "Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition." (Matt. 15:6) Yes, by not heeding the written counsel of God, the Jewish leaders had cut themselves off from the real source of truth. How appropriate are the words of the Prophet Jeremiah: "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." (Jer. 2:13) The Jewish tradition had wandered so far from God's original truth that it was described as man-made cisterns which could hold no water (truth).

Is an undue reliance upon the traditions of men limited to the rabbinical schools of Jesus' day? We think not. The note of urgency and stress in the writings of the apostles is too great to be limited in this way. Unquestionably their admonitions have been preserved to guide Christians throughout the centuries in selecting and recognizing eternal truths. No group or organization, regardless of its size or strength, can enjoy the full favor of God if it replaces the divine fountain of waters with the broken cisterns of human tradition.

The apostles Paul and Peter both set forth warnings of what Christians should avoid, and outlined the proper course which they were to follow. The Apostle Paul wrote: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." (Col. 2:8) The Apostle Peter wrote: "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto you do well that ye take heed."—II Pet. 1:19

We have now come to what we consider to be the climax in this discussion of identifying the highest spiritual authority. In addition to all of the testimonies already cited, there is a clear-cut statement pointing out the supreme position maintained by the Bible, and by it alone. We refer to

Paul's admonition to Timothy regarding the purpose and usefulness of the Holy Scriptures:

Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.—II Tim. 3: 14-17

We believe a careful study of this text gives ample evidence of the Bible's claim to the highest authority in all spiritual matters. According to Paul's words, the Bible alone is sufficient to instruct and equip the Christian to gain salvation through Christ. No secondary source of truth is needed, nor may it be properly placed on an equal level with the Bible. Any church claim to the contrary would necessarily do violence to all of the aforementioned Scripture texts.

We are thankful, then, that the testimony of these sacred writings has been preserved for us today. We have seen the many clear evidences that the Bible was designed to be supreme in developing the faith and enlightening the mind of the Christian. We believe that it should be used today in the same manner as was commended in the Early Church—as a guide and yardstick against which all other teachings and beliefs must be measured. And, may we ever remember the wonderful example set by our Master in his simple statement, "It is written."

Section IV

Composition of the Bible

Compiling the New Testament Canon

IN HARMONY with her view that the church is the mother and preserver of the Bible, the Roman Catholic Church teaches that she alone was responsible for determining which of the early Christian writings were inspired by God: "The determination of what the Bible should contain could never have been achieved except by the living voice of the authoritative Church."² "It was the Catholic Church and no other which selected and listed the inspired books of both the Old Testament and the New Testament.. . . If you can accept the Bible or any part of it as the inspired Word of God, you can do so only because the Catholic Church says it is."³

Specifically, it is stated that the church, through the efforts of a council of Catholic bishops assembled at Carthage in A. D. 397, was responsible for the selection and adoption of the New Testament Canon as it exists today. It is thus firmly believed that the intervention of the living authority of the Roman Catholic Church was necessary to finally settle this momentous matter.⁴ To test the accuracy of this claim, we will need to examine the historical evidence regarding developments in the early Christian church.

To begin with, it is interesting to note the origin of the word "canon," for it gives an insight into how these inspired books were viewed by those adopting the term. "Canon" comes originally from the Hebrew word **quaneh**, meaning "reed"; the corresponding Greek word is **kanon**, also meaning "reed, measuring rod, or straight edge." In other words, the canon of the Bible became the written rule of faith, or straight edge, against which all doctrines were to be compared.

As already mentioned, the writings of the apostles were immediately recognized as inspired Scriptures and were specially honored to be read in all the churches. (Col. 4:16; I Thess. 5:27) However, soon other writings appeared, purporting to be additional epistles or gospels of apostolic authorship. Some of these works were obvious forgeries; others were

²Knights of Columbus Religious Information Bureau, *The Bible Is Not Our Sole Guide*, p. 43.

³Knights of Columbus Religious Information Bureau, *The Bible Is a Catholic Book*, p. 4.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 2.

highly esteemed, and it was not at once apparent whether or not they were of genuine apostolic authority.

There were other difficulties facing the Early Church as it endeavored to obtain a complete collection of the Holy Scriptures. In contrast to the Old Testament, the New Testament books were originally written in widely separated places: Palestine, Asia Minor, Greece, Rome, etc. Travel in those days was slow and dangerous. Rapid communication was not possible. Printing had not been invented.

Moreover, it was an age of persecution, when Christian meetings could not be held openly, and their writings had to be kept under cover. It was difficult for Christians in widely separated places to get together to share notes on what sacred writings they possessed. For these reasons, the earliest collections of New Testament books did vary from place to place for a considerable time before it was possible to agree on their exact contents.

Now then, at what point in time did the church decide upon the contents of the New Testament Canon? Were the early Christians continually in doubt until the Council of Carthage was convened in A. D. 397? Actually, the church grew as individual congregations or ecclesias in the various cities where they were founded, so that it was not just one decision that was made, but numerous ones, arrived at independently and coming into general acceptance. We believe the providential hand of God was especially present in those early times, overruling the activities of the faithful in selecting and preserving the true Bible Canon.

Already in the second century the various books of Scripture were widely known, quoted with authority, and given a place beside the Old Testament as sacred Scripture. In the third century these writings were collected into one whole, were spoken of as the New Testament, and by a sifting process were separated from other Christian literature. By the fourth century all doubts had been dispelled, and the conclusions reached in earlier years regarding the contents of the New Testament Canon were universally accepted.⁵

Fortunately, in pursuing this historical search for facts, we need not rely merely upon oral traditions. There are still in existence writings of the early Christians who were contemporaneous with the apostles, or who lived shortly thereafter. Because of the perishable nature of the writing materials and because of the efforts of persecutors to destroy Christian works, relatively few of these writings are extant. Nevertheless, there is a sufficiency of these to bear unimpeachable testimony to the existence of a group of authoritative writings regarded as the sacred canon of New Testament Scriptures at least a century and a half prior to the Council of Carthage.

⁵Dr. James Hastings (ed.), "Canon of the New Testament," *Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 115.

The writings of these early Christian fathers, as they are fondly called, are replete with references to the Holy Scriptures; so much so that it is believed the entire New Testament could be reconstructed just from a careful analysis of their writings. Here is found abundant testimony to the sacred place that the written Scriptures were given in the communications and dissertations of those who lived closest to the time of the apostles. But not only do these writings abound with multitudinous quotations, they also set forth personal catalogues of the inspired New Testament Canon.

There are at least ten of these ancient catalogues of the inspired books still extant. Of these, six agree exactly with our canon today; three of them omit only Revelation (Greek: Apocalypse); and one of them omits Hebrews as well as Revelation. Among those corresponding exactly to the canon as we know it, and predating the Council of Carthage, are: Origen's Hexapla (third century), Eusebius' Bible (fourth century), and Athanasius' Festal Letter (A. D. 365).⁶

Thus, when the Council of Carthage was finally convened in A. D. 397, it merely gave its formal ratification to the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. It did not make the New Testament Canon, as Catholics are taught to believe, but merely expressed what had already become the unanimous judgment of the various churches. Can there be any doubt that the same God who originally inspired these writings was also fully capable of overruling their compilation, working through natural means and the instrumentality of human hands?

And it is indeed a cause for gratitude that the Scriptures are authoritative, not because any body of men has made them so, but because they already bore the stamp of their divine origin, which was capable of being recognized by the earliest followers of Christ.

Are Apocryphal Books Genuine?

NOW let us shift our attention to the Old Testament Canon. When Catholics carefully examine any modern Protestant Bible, they notice certain discrepancies in the contents of the Old Testament. Most conspicuous is the absence of seven books which are always found in Catholic Bibles. These books have been designated the "Apocrypha," which means "hidden." This meaning stems from the Jewish custom of keeping these books hidden or separate from the inspired canonical books of the Hebrew Scriptures which were openly displayed for reference on the library shelves of the Jewish scribes. These apocryphal books include Tobias, Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, two books of Machabees, and portions of the books of Esther and Daniel.

⁶ Dr. James Hastings (ed.), "Canon of the New Testament," *Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 114.

Why should this difference exist in the makeup of Catholic and Protestant Bibles? Do Protestants leave out seven books which are vital to the complete Old Testament Canon, or have Catholics intermingled with the genuinely inspired Scriptures some books which are of merely human origin? It will be readily apparent that, whichever of these views is correct, it could seriously affect the quality of the divine message that is obtained from the Scriptures. Again, let us fall back upon the voice of history to help us in settling this issue.

The apocryphal books seem to have originated in the first two centuries B. C. and the first century A. D. They were of uncertain authorship and appeared at a time when Old Testament prophecy, oracles, and direct revelation had ceased. It is worthy of note that none of the apocryphal writers claimed inspiration for themselves, and some actually disclaimed it.⁷

From the very start, the Jews never recognized them as a part of their inspired Old Testament Canon. They believed that this canon had been completed in the days of Ezra, from two to three hundred years prior to the appearance of the Apocrypha. Josephus, the celebrated Jewish historian of Jesus' day and an expert in Jewish and Greek culture, also rejected the Apocrypha as a whole.

Tracing the background of these books, we begin in the third century B.C. At that time a Greek translation of the Old Testament was started, which was completed in the first century B. C., for the benefit of Greek-speaking Jews in Alexandria and elsewhere. This was the well-known Septuagint in common use in Jesus' day. It is not clear whether the apocryphal books were included in this version from the very start, but they formed a definite part of the later editions, being inserted in places that seemed appropriate. Here, then, is the first instance where the Apocrypha was added to the Old Testament writings.

Perhaps the most vital question that can be raised pertaining to the Apocrypha is, how was it regarded by Jesus and the apostles? Although there is no direct written testimony on this point, there is an answer. Jesus and the apostles were constantly quoting from the Old Testament Scriptures, such that multitudinous references were made to every Hebrew book in the Bible, with the exception of Ruth, Ezra, Song of Solomon, and Ecclesiastes. If they felt the apocryphal books were inspired, we surely would expect some references to them to dispel any possibility of doubt. Yet the fact that not even one quotation from the Apocrypha can be found in the entire New Testament seems extremely significant and speaks volumes of testimony.

What about the attitude of the Early Church toward the Apocrypha? In surveying the reference material which is available on this subject, we must

⁷Dr. James Hastings (ed.), "Apocrypha," *Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 42.

be careful in identifying the facts. From some literature the impression is given that many of the Early Church fathers gave almost equal weight to the Apocrypha in their writings, since they quoted from them so freely. Actually, the profuse references and allusions to the apocryphal writings were based on the common belief that they were a valuable supplementary source of instruction to the Holy Scriptures, though not to be placed on an equality with them.⁸

Thus, whenever mention was made of the sacred Canon of Scripture, the Apocrypha was consistently excluded. Only the Hebrew Canon was accepted as the genuine Old Testament Scriptures. Mileto and Origen were two of the church fathers who made this position very clear, echoing the sentiment of the group in disapproving the Apocrypha as of canonical authority. This view predominated during the first four centuries of the Christian era.

How, then, did these questionable books become a part of the Catholic Bible? About the third century A. D. the Bible was translated into Latin. Instead of basing it upon the original Hebrew Canon of the Old Testament, the translators used the Greek Septuagint, which itself was only a Greek translation of the original and to which by that time had been added the apocryphal books. Thus the Apocrypha was carried over into the early Latin translation, which eventually grew in favor with the church.

It was not until the Council of Carthage convened in A. D. 397 that the apocryphal books gained any measure of strong acceptance. This council officially approved an enlarged canon which included these books. Thus, by the decree of these men, the Apocrypha came to be considered of equal inspiration to the other Old Testament books. However, none of the Eastern Churches accepted this decree, and even in the West many prominent spokesmen refused to thus add to the original Hebrew Canon.

Then in the fourth and fifth centuries followed the Latin Vulgate, the great version of St. Jerome. As the most capable biblical scholar of his day, he was asked by Pope Damasus to undertake a revision of the Latin Bible. The Old Testament part which he produced was unique in that it represented not merely a revision of the Old Latin translation, but an entirely new translation based directly on the original Hebrew. "He appears to have felt no doubt as to the superiority of the Hebrew text over the Greek, and in all cases of divergence regarded the Hebrew as alone correct."⁹

St. Jerome adopted a very stern attitude toward the Apocrypha: "The apocryphal books he wished to reject entirely, because they found no place in the current Hebrew Bible. He did indeed consent reluctantly to make a

⁸Dr. James Hastings (ed.), "Apocrypha," *Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 42.

⁹Sir Frederic Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, pp. 142, 143.

very hurried translation of the books of Judith and Tobit; but the remaining books he left untouched.”¹⁰ His distinction between the canonical writings and the Apocrypha was very clear: he considered the latter useful for private perusal and “for example of life and instruction of manners,” but which ought not to be used to “establish any doctrine.”¹¹

Despite St. Jerome’s valiant efforts to have the Apocrypha banished, the Catholic Church added these books to the Latin Vulgate, retaining them in the same form in which they had stood in the Old Latin version before St. Jerome’s day. This brings us to the Douay version, the classical and most popular Catholic Bible, which basically is a translation of the Latin Vulgate, and hence includes the apocryphal books. But we are glad to point out that even in Catholic circles until the Council of Trent (A. D. 1546) there were eminent scholars who followed St. Jerome’s lead in recognizing the error that had been made and who refused to give the Apocrypha equal veneration with the inspired Word of God.

These are the facts as recorded upon the pages of history. Let the reader inquire for himself for further confirmation of them, using the standard reference works available in the public libraries. Armed with this information, we are brought to the realization that God’s hand is still working in the affairs of his people, leading them to recognize the true authority and to distinguish it from all others.

¹⁰Sir Frederic Kenyon, *Op. Cit.* pp. 143, 144.

¹¹Dr. W. M. Clow (ed), “The Apocrypha,” *Bible Reader’s Encyclopedia and Concordance*, p. 23.

Section V

Interpreting the Bible

HERE is a subject which lies at the very heart of most Catholic-Protestant differences. In focusing his attention upon the teachings of the Bible and the divine message portrayed therein, how can the sincere student understand what he reads?

Unlike other books, the Bible is unique in treating vast fields of knowledge and conduct, including history, prophecy, revelation, and moral guidance, all as the inspired Word of God. There are hundreds of details in the form of parables, maxims, symbolisms, types, and figurative sayings. To make the matter more difficult, there are peculiarities and special idioms of the original languages in which the Bible was written, which complicate its translation and interpretation. And many expressions and allusions found in the Scriptures belong to ages and countries vastly different from our own.

Admittedly, there are many passages of Scripture which are straightforwardly written and their lesson relatively obvious to all. Yet there are many others, such as parts of Paul's epistles, which Peter says are "hard to be understood, which the unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, to their own destruction."—II Pet. 3:16

Here, then, is a paradoxical situation which confronts the earnest inquirer for truth. On the one hand he is admonished to study the Bible (II Tim. 2:15), and yet on the other he finds he needs help to gain a true understanding of it. How shall he proceed? Where shall he turn to obtain the correct interpretation?

Who Can Understand?

THE Catholic Church states that it is the only authoritative interpreter of the Bible. Here, we are told, is where the individual may turn with confidence and accept its interpretation of Scripture without reservation. It alleges it has a divine appointment to this position of final authority in matters pertaining to the truths revealed in the Bible. It proposes to dispel the confusion found in the religious world by inviting all others to accept the Catholic Church as the sole existing and divinely empowered interpreter of the Bible.

This is what we have in the Catholic Church—an authority to decide finally and forever all questions concerning the correct meaning, the exact

force and value of the Bible which Christ committed to her keeping. The church interprets the law of God much as the Supreme Court interprets the law of the nation.¹²

This, however, is a premise that is all too familiar to many honest inquirers for truth, and one that has had to be dismissed in the past. One group, one organization, one church, is laying claim to a exclusive access to the Holy Spirit of God, and believes that it alone may function as the divine channel of blessing and salvation. It is difficult to see how a view such as this, tenaciously clung to even in our day of great enlightenment and advanced Bible study, can be regarded other than as a very narrow and selfish one.

Can the great Creator of the universe be limited by man-made denominational ties and human creeds? We believe not. We believe that the Bible teaches that God deals directly with his people through the true channel—the Holy Scriptures—and grants them the guidance of his Holy Spirit to lead them into all truth.

But who are God's people to whom he is pleased to give an understanding of the deep spiritual truths contained in the Bible, and just how is this accomplished? We believe it is they who are of a pure and honest heart, who are diligently seeking to know more of their Creator and the mysteries of their own existence and future life. Purity of heart and the desire to know God are fundamental requirements to being drawn closer to God by the operation of the Holy Spirit:

“Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart.” (Ps. 24:3, 4) “I dwell . . . with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit.” (Isa. 57:15) “My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.”—Prov. 23:26

As the sincere and earnest inquirer for truth searches along the various avenues of life, God will eventually bring him in contact with the divine revelation to mankind contained in the Holy Scriptures. The means may be a book, a sermon, a tract, or the Bible itself. As the truth seeker examines and studies further, it will soon become evident that he is in need of assistance to understand the deep things of God. It was so with the Ethiopian eunuch to whom Philip preached the Word: “

And Philip ran thither to him [the Ethiopian], and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? and he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.
—Acts 8:30, 31

¹²Knights of Columbus Religious Information Bureau, *The Bible is a Catholic Book*, p. 24.

Yes, God will arrange the circumstances to bring one who has already been enlightened by the Holy Spirit into the pathway of the sincere inquirer. And thus God himself will be speaking to such a one through this human, but divinely anointed, instrumentality, who is competent in interpreting the Bible and presenting the truths of the divine plan. "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?"—Rom. 10: 13, 14

As the inquirer receives the Word of God, which is now made understandable, and accepts for himself the gracious provisions for forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ, he is drawn yet closer to the Father and will grow in grace and in knowledge. God's divine plan for the salvation and blessing of the human race will unfold before him and he will manifest an intense desire to dedicate his life to the doing of the Father's will. When this step is taken by the believer, accepting the Lord Jesus Christ as his own Redeemer and consecrating his all to God, a vital turning point in his life is reached.

Now the believer has become a new creature, and will be endeavoring to walk closely in the footsteps of his Master. A new life has been opened up, one of dedication to God and sacrifice in his service. All such become recipients of the promise to be led into all truth by the Holy Spirit of God: "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth." (John 16:13) Now even the deep things of God will be revealed and the Scriptures made very plain: "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant."—Ps. 25:14

To this class of consecrated believers, another very special promise of spiritual understanding will be fulfilled:

But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. . . . We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.—I Cor. 2:9-12

Yes, this is the special class of people to whom God is pleased to reveal his truth. Those who compose it are not limited to any single human organization or religious denomination. However, the knowledge they receive is not gained without concerted efforts and diligent study on their part. Let us now glance briefly at the methods which are employed by the modern student of the Bible in his endeavors to comprehend the plans and purposes of God.

A Suggested Method of Study

THE very first step is in recognizing God as the source of all wisdom and in asking him to enlighten our minds through the guidance of his Holy Spirit. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, . . . and it shall be given him.” (James 1:5) Through such an attitude of meditation and prayer, we may enjoy the confident expectation that the Heavenly Father will grant this wish. “Trust in the Lord. . . and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.”—Ps. 37:3, 4

As the Word of God is approached, it is well to keep in mind several rules of study brought to our attention in the Scriptures. In II Timothy 2:15 Paul wrote: “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” His first thought emphasizes the need for making a concentrated study of the Bible, rather than a mere surface reading; his second, the need for classifying Scriptures according to appropriate divisions.

One of the most important of these divisions is the element of time—recognizing the great dispensational features in the plan of God. Sometimes Scriptures may appear conflicting or contradictory when considered applicable in the same time period. Quite frequently it is possible to harmonize these by doing no more than “rightly dividing” them according to the time features of God’s plan; that is, separating them into their appropriate dispensations, such as the Jewish Age, the Gospel Age or dispensation, and the Millennial Age. As each age has been appointed for accomplishing particular purposes, it is only to be expected that God’s dealings with the people of those ages will vary accordingly.

Another important way of “rightly dividing the Word of truth” is to pursue Bible study along topical lines. In this approach the various scriptures from the Old and New Testaments on a particular subject are brought together. The words of the prophets and the teachings of Jesus and the apostles are analyzed and compared. The point is to limit the study to the one subject under consideration, and to bring together all possible Scripture texts to bear upon it. This method is based upon the assumption that, when properly understood, all Scriptures will harmonize with each other, though taken from sixty-six different books written at various times and by different hands, in the knowledge that God is their true Author.

In relation to this subject of studying the Scriptures, some of our readers may instinctively recall a text which is supposed to teach that none but a particular church has the right to interpret the Bible. If this understanding were correct, then it would become a fearful and forbidden act to attempt any interpretation of Scripture on an independent basis apart from that church. The text in question is found in II Peter 1:20, 21: “No prophecy of

scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."—R. V.

The Greek word in this text which is usually rendered "interpretation" actually means "unloosing,"¹³ which could change the thought of the entire verse. Thus, instead of speaking of interpreting or understanding Scripture, Peter here evidently refers to the origin of these prophecies. The simplest thought would then be that no prophecy of Scripture is of human unloosing or origin, but rather of divine.

Nonetheless, even if this text were made applicable to the interpretation of Scripture, there is yet a beautiful and simple way that it may be understood. It is that no interpretation of Scripture should be held that is not consistent with the original intent of God who is the true Author, working through the instrumentality of men. What better way to determine this true meaning of a text than to gather together for comparison the utterances of various of the prophets (and, indeed, the New Testament writers as well) relating to the subject at hand? Only thus may we be assured that we have the counsel of the Lord on the matter, rather than merely a private interpretation or thought suggested by an isolated text.

In analyzing those portions of Scripture that contain difficult and obscure passages, in addition to private study, it may be necessary to turn to those teachers and leaders who have been appointed by God to minister to his people. The symbolisms, types, parables, and prophecies which will be encountered in studying the Bible may require the helpful explanation of those especially chosen by God for this service. "He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."—Eph. 4:11, 12

In pursuing this deeper study, there are various Bible helps which have become available in our day. There are exhaustive concordances, which may be used to locate instantly a Scripture or group of Scriptures under a particular heading. The more complete concordances include the original meanings of the Greek and Hebrew words used in the Bible text. Then, too, there are Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias, commentaries, a variety of modern translations, and even interlineary word-for-word translations of the Greek and Hebrew texts. Readings from many of the ancient manuscripts which were more recently discovered in Bible lands are now also available and very helpful in clarifying the meaning of certain passages.

Many of these valuable helps to Bible study have become available only in relatively recent years. Apparently this has been permitted by God as an encouragement to stimulate profitable Bible study at a time when the

¹³Dr. Robert Young, "Interpretation," *Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, p. 519.

forces of error and outright unbelief are assailing the Christian believer as never before. May all of us demonstrate our appreciation for these helps by making use of them to enrich our knowledge of God and to learn more of his plans and purposes.

Section VI

Was the Early Church Catholic?

“CATHOLIC” is being used here in the sense of “Roman Catholic,” a name which has become somewhat less popular in recent years among officials of that church. The question of whether the Early Church was Catholic in this sense of the word is an appropriate one in view of Catholic teaching regarding her origin. We refer here to the widely heralded assertion that the Catholic Church was instituted by Christ, that her teaching authority began with the twelve apostles, and that she alone has been divinely empowered to teach men the way of salvation.¹⁴

This teaching constitutes the boldest and most sweeping claim that can be found throughout all of Christendom. If it were true, it would necessarily place all other churches in the position of being false, spurious, and heretical. It presents an occasion for serious reflection upon the part of every inquirer seeking the way of salvation, and upon every believer desiring an assurance of his standing before the Lord. It certainly calls for a thorough investigation of its basis to determine if it can be substantiated. This is just what we propose to do, by examining both the teachings of the Bible and the evidences of history regarding the origin and development of the Christian Church.

The Early Christian Church

LET us start right at the beginning in the history of the church, noting what it was like, who composed it, and what it believed. Such an inquiry would best be pursued in detail, but for the sake of brevity we will have to confine ourselves to the highlights. Our purpose will be to sketch an outline sufficiently complete to enable us intelligently to compare the Early Church with the Catholic Church of today and to draw our conclusions accordingly.

At the outset, it is very clear that Jesus Christ established just one church, and that this church was given all the spiritual truths necessary for salvation. As the faith spread into various towns and cities, the early followers of Jesus became loosely organized into groups or congregations in these different areas, each group maintaining its own sovereignty.

“There was but one organization within the limits of a town. The church ‘in the house’ of this or that individual was simply a religious

¹⁴Knights of Columbus Religious Information Bureau, *The Way to Everlasting Life*. . . *The Catholic Church*, p. 20.

meeting held there as a matter of convenience, the term 'church' being used in its ordinary sense of 'assembly.'"¹⁵

None of these local churches attempted to govern the others, but confined their activities to exhorting, counseling, and comforting one another.¹⁶

"The basis of ecclesiastical organization was the fraternal equality of believers. . . . Instead of a sacerdotal order there was a universal priesthood. (I Pet. 2:5, 9)"¹⁷

Each congregation elected its own servants, designated by the general terms "elders" and "deacons." (I Tim. 3:1-13) As Jesus Christ was considered the only Head of the church (Eph. 1:22, 23), and all of its members as brethren (Matt. 23:8), there was no thought of giving one of the elders greater respect or authority than the others. For this reason clerical dress was wholly unknown in the early centuries of the church.¹⁸ Here was found a rare display of democracy at work within the church, with each member sharing in the responsibilities and privileges of service to the extent of his ability.

The early Christians believed in the imminent return of their Lord and the establishment of God's kingdom upon the earth. (Matt. 6:10; Luke 19:11-15)^{19 20} They prepared for this climactic event by living pure and virtuous lives, seeking to do good to all as they had opportunity. (Gal. 6:10) They were so enthusiastic and zealous in proclaiming the good news of the coming kingdom to all around them that the hardships and difficulties which they encountered were considered of little consequence. (Acts 5:40-42) Living in complete dedication to God, they avoided worldly pleasures and entertainments, refused to attend the public spectacles so popular in their day, declined to enter politics, and refused to participate in military service.^{21 22}

The fundamental doctrines of the Early Church were centered around its founder, Jesus Christ: acknowledging him as the Messiah of Old Testament prophecy (Matt. 16:16; Acts 3:18); recognizing that in his death and ransom sacrifice were found the basis of divine forgiveness and reconciliation (Rom. 5:8-11; I Tim. 2:3-6); and believing that the great blessings of restitution to

¹⁵Dr. George P. Fisher, *History of the Christian Church*, p. 36.

¹⁶John P. McKnight, *The Papacy*, p. 170.

¹⁷Fisher, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

¹⁸Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The First Five Centuries, A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, p. 326.

¹⁹*Ibid.* pp. 52, 64.

²⁰"Millennium," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, XV, 495.

²¹Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, II, 344-345.

²²Latourette, *op. cit.*, pp. 130-131.

all the world would be ushered in upon his return and the establishment of his kingdom.—Acts 3:19-21

The principal rites were limited to baptism, which was carried out by complete water immersion, and the Lord's supper. Prayer was wholly extemporaneous. And the believers fondly designated each other by the names "brother" and "sister."^{23 24}

The fellowship and bond of mutual love between the believers was a predominant feature of the new faith.²⁵ Meeting together for worship in little groups in their own homes served to enhance the closeness of their new relationship. Here discourses were delivered by the more talented of the brethren, reminding one another of the words and deeds of Jesus, and providing instruction from the Old Testament Scriptures.

But fellowship to these early Christians meant much more than just close companionship in study and devotional worship—it implied an active cooperation in the work of the ministry in which all were privileged to share. Thus, at their meetings, plans were also discussed concerning ways and means to spread their new faith in accordance with the wishes of their Master.—Matt. 28:19, 20

"In the first century not many wise or noble were called. No great names have been handed down to us. . . . They had no great men in their ranks, either for learning, or talents, or wealth, or social position. Nothing in history is more barren than the annals of the church in the first century, so far as great names are concerned. Yet in this century converts were multiplied in every city."²⁶

It is clear that the Early Church consisted of a small body of pure and blameless men who had no aspirations for controlling society. These men held no earthly rank, and were famous only for their sanctity of character, their faith, and their willingness to suffer for it. In the eyes of the fashionable, they were a disgrace, misfits in their environment, and fanatics who sought to undermine reverence for the existing institutions and social order.

Perhaps to some of our readers this description of the early Christians will seem very strange. After all, where are the impressive ceremonies, the creeds and the catechisms, the magnificent church edifices, and the colorful clergy which to many have become synonymous with Christianity? Compared to this, the foregoing picture of early Christianity might seem to be very crude, primitive, and dull indeed.

²³Dr. George P. Fisher, *Beginnings of Christianity*.

²⁴Latourette, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

²⁵Paul Hutchinson and Winfred E. Garrison, *Twenty Centuries of Christianity*, p. 20.

²⁶John Lord, *The Old Roman World*.

Nonetheless we firmly believe that the early Christians were basing their beliefs and practices upon the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, and that there has been no valid reason for departing from them. We believe, in fact, that the changes which were introduced and reached their full fruition in the fourth century were corruptions of the original faith, and detrimental to the interests of true Christianity.

The Church of the Fourth Century

WITH this brief sketch of early Christianity still before us, let us glance now at some of the developments which occurred, leading us into the later church of the fourth century. During this period the changes which were wrought in the simple beliefs and practices of early Christianity became very marked. Toward its close the changes became so pronounced, and pervaded so many areas of the faith, that they are attested to by all historians, regardless of their reaction to them.

Very early in the history of the church, even before the last of the apostles had passed away, various factions sprang up, each seeking to modify the original truths. This rise of conflicting opinions and heresies was due in part to a misunderstanding of certain Bible teachings and a desire to harmonize Christianity with some of the traditional concepts of pagan philosophy. Slowly but steadily orthodox Christianity incorporated many of these new ideas and in the process many aspects of the original faith were lost or de-emphasized.

As schools of theology were opened, there was a marked tendency to elaborate the simplicity of the Christian doctrine and to formulate creeds of faith. In so doing, more and more weight was given to human logic and reasoning and to oral tradition respecting the beliefs of the apostolic church. Whereas the authority of Scripture was still considered final and conclusive, it was also held that not all were capable of discerning its true meaning and inner sense. More and more the matter of interpretation was left to a few individuals, who came to be regarded more highly than the others.

In the organization of the church may be seen some of the sweeping changes which were typical of the kind that were introduced. We recall that the Early Church had established groups or ecclesias in the various cities, each governed by its own board of elders and deacons, and each independent of the other. Gradually precedence was given to one called a bishop, and to others called presbyters. The jurisdiction of the bishop slowly increased to include neighboring towns, then whole provinces.

Finally, the church took to itself a form of government like the political world in which it existed, and became a vast autocratic organization. It was dominated from the five great centers of Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Alexandria. The bishops of each of these cities came to be

greatly respected, were termed patriarchs, and were considered of equal authority in the church, each having full control in his own province²⁷

Christianity had now become the state religion of the Roman Empire. Emperor Constantine's Edict of Toleration in A. D. 313 had ended the official persecution of Christians, and granted to all full liberty in following the religion of their choice. However, a later emperor, Theodosius, made membership in the Christian Church compulsory for everyone. His act filled the churches with throngs of people, but their conversion was forced upon them against their will. No longer was the church conquering by moral and spiritual means, but by force and the authority of the state. No wonder that many haughty, unregenerate, and debased people entered the church. No wonder that character development and the spirit of Christ were lost sight of. No wonder that the spirit of the church (nominal) became the spirit of the world.²⁸

“The adoption of Christianity by the Roman government worked alterations. The church now was largely controlled by the state. It became necessary, for example, for the church to reverse its attitude towards military service and office-holding and to permit what it had once frowned upon. Matters of church doctrine now became the concern of the state, which was interested, for its own sake, in preserving unity.”²⁹

Christian worship, which at first had been so simple, now had developed into elaborate and stately ceremonies, rivaling the heathen practices which it had been forced to supplant. To simplify the forced conversion of the hordes of non-Christians in the Empire, the church adopted many pagan practices and celebrations which had a popular appeal.³⁰ Some historians view this as an inevitable process of amalgamation which Christianity underwent with the Greek and Oriental philosophies which had prevailed so long. But nonetheless it was a process which entailed very serious compromise with the purity of the original Christian faith. The result was a brand of Christianity which was polluted with heathen thought and practice, and represented a most unpalatable mixture of truth and error.

How did the pagan influence manifest itself in the church? The church edifices became as imposing and magnificent as the old temples of idolatry. The emphasis was placed on form, ritual, and ceremony. Festivals and holidays became frequent, and were designed to catch the interest of the common people. Banquets were instituted in honor of the martyrs, and their veneration was encouraged. Relics of the martyrs were preserved and cherished as sacred possessions. Images of the saints were introduced.

²⁷Dr. George P. Fisher, *History of the Christian Church*, p. 105.

²⁸Latourette, *op. cit.*, p. 368.

²⁹*Ibid.* p. 332.

³⁰McKnight, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

Lamps and flowers were offered to these saints, and food placed before the dead. Great stress was laid upon the worship of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Services became more elaborate and colorful. And sculpture and paintings were enlisted in the work of providing aids to devotion.^{31 32}

The prevalent unspiritual views of the Gospel made it possible for multitudes of heathen to pass from the old religion to the new by no other conversion than a mere change of name. To them the Christian life seemed nothing deeper than a round of ceremonies and perfunctory duties. . . . The belief of the Early Church, that all of life was consecrated to God, gave way before a spirit akin to that of Old Testament legalism. . . . Worship was resolved into forms and ceremonies which received the sanction of ecclesiastical authority. Instead of being recognized as the spontaneous expression of Christian feeling, it appeared to many to be a round of arbitrarily imposed observances.³³

Ironically, as the inward purity and holiness of the original faith was lost, outwardly the churches became rich and splendid. The clergy was honored and respected and given ranks of distinction.

The bishop became a grand personage who controlled and appointed his clergy. The church was allied with the state. . . . Politics and dogmatics went hand in hand, and emperors enforced the decrees of (church) councils. . . . The mission of the church was lost sight of in a degrading alliance with the state. Christianity (now) was a pageant, a ritualism, an arm of the state, a vain philosophy, a superstition, a formula.³⁴

This, then, is the contrast between the true church established by Christ and the nominal church which succeeded it within the short span of four centuries. The corruptions and defilements which were introduced were gradual but complete. As we shall see in succeeding sections, these changes were wholly unwarranted. The only justification that can be found for them is based upon the multiplied errors of false tradition, spurious books claimed to be of divine inspiration, and the prevailing theories and teachings of men. They are clearly out of harmony with the simplicity of the Christian doctrine as it is found outlined in the Bible and as practiced by the Early Church.

Now we have come to the place of evaluation. May we always place intellectual honesty and the desire for truth above every other consideration. Let us face the issue squarely as the question is raised: Which of the two churches described above best fits the picture of the Catholic Church today?

³¹Fisher, *Outlines of Universal History*, p. 193.

³²Latourette, *op. cit.*, pp. 319-321.

³³Fisher, *History of the Christian Church*, pp. 110, 116.

³⁴Lord, *op. cit.*

Perhaps there are some who feel that this question is unfair, since they cannot conceive of any branch of modern Christianity fitting the pattern of the Early Church. But, surprising as it may be, there are in existence today many groups of Bible students who are still holding high the banner of truth as exemplified in the Early Church. These Christians are still organized into ecclesias or congregations that cooperate with each other and yet maintain their individual sovereignty. They still exercise the same democratic procedures by having the entire congregation elect their leaders—the “elders” and “deacons.” These specially selected ones are still considered the servants of the congregation, and dedicate themselves to serving the flock.

Yes, these Bible students are still “searching the Scriptures daily” and endeavoring to keep the “faith which was once delivered unto the saints” in its original purity. (Acts 17:11; Jude 3) They have kept themselves free from the corrupting influences of the world which have all but choked the true spirit of Christ in the nominal churches. (James 1:27) In the next section we will consider these matters in greater detail, as our study is expanded to include the characteristics of the modern Christian church.

We believe, then, that even this brief sketch of the Early Church which has been presented here has been sufficient to make its point felt. The more we study the Early Church, the clearer it becomes that any claims which are made that it was Catholic in nature fall grossly short of the truth. Not until the fourth century, when Christianity had been saturated with heathen practices and corrupted with worldly influences, do we recognize the basic characteristics which developed into the Catholic system of worship as it is known today. This explains, therefore, why Protestants are not impressed with the sweeping assertions regarding the divine origin of that church.

Apostolic Succession of the Popes

LET us now examine more particularly another aspect of Catholic belief which purports to emanate from the Early Christian Church. We refer to the Catholic Church’s teaching that the line of its popes can be traced back historically to St. Peter himself.³⁵ This is considered one of the four basic tenets of Catholic faith, and is always found prominently displayed in the forefront of Catholic affirmations. For this reason the subject is of sufficient importance to merit separate consideration. Again we shall turn to the records of history to furnish us with the needed facts.

The official listing of popes maintained by the Catholic Church begins with St. Peter, and extends in unbroken succession to the present pope, Benedict XVI. Disregarding Peter for the time being, we would call attention to the fact that all the names offered for the first five centuries were in reality merely bishops of Rome.

³⁵Knights of Columbus Religious Information Bureau, *The Early Years of the Catholic Church*, pp. 17-20.

Immediately the question presents itself, did these early bishops of Rome qualify for the title "pope," which means "papa" or "father"? That is, were the bishops of Rome always recognized as being the "universal father" over the whole Christian church? The resounding answer of history is "no." The process by which the Roman bishop gained authority over the entire church was a very slow one, bitterly contested every step of the way. And the very concept that the Roman bishop should exercise this authority has never, at any time, been universally recognized by the church.³⁶

During the first century there is no suggestion or hint shown in any of the letters and communications sent by the early bishops of Rome that they considered themselves to be the ruling heads of the church. It was not until well into the second century that the early beginnings of Rome's domineering policy could be noticed.

During this period there were recorded certain instances in which the Roman bishops attempted to exert undue influence upon other bishops in connection with the observance of Easter. Anicetus (A. D. 154-168) endeavored to dictate in this regard to Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, but was firmly opposed. Victor I (190-202) likewise was refuted by Polycrates, Bishop of Ephesus, when he attempted to dictate to the Eastern Churches. He was further rebuked by Iranaeus, a fellow western bishop, for trying to overextend his authority in this way. Thus, in every case where the Roman bishop tried unduly to extend his influence into another province, he was kept in check by the bishop of that area, who clearly stated his own independent authority.

In the third century, Tertullian of Carthage, one of the foremost of the Early Church fathers, called Calixtus I (218-223) a usurper because he had called himself "bishop of bishops"—the first to base his claim on Matthew 16:18. The authority of Stephen I (253-257) was contended by Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, who maintained that each bishop was supreme in his own diocese.

Even as late as the fourth century there is indisputable evidence that no pope was recognized as the head of the church. Constantine, the converted Roman emperor, regarded himself as the head, and recognized no other. He was responsible for convening the first world council of the church, the Council of Nicaea, in A. D. 325, and he presided over it. One of the acts of this council was to grant full jurisdiction over their provinces to the

³⁶McKnight, *op. cit.*, pg. 179-183. For additional accounts of the gradual ascendancy of Papacy, the reader is referred to:

Dr. Samuel M. Jackson (ed.), "Pope, Papacy, Papal System," *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, IX, p. 126.

"Papacy," *The Encyclopedia Americana*, XXI, 251, 252.

Fisher, *History of the Christian Church*, pp. 105-108.

bishops of Alexandria and Antioch, with no intimation whatever that they were subject to Rome.

By the end of the fourth century the church was largely dominated by the bishops (or patriarchs) of the five great cities of Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Alexandria. These bishops all had equal authority with each other, and complete control in their own provinces. Gradually, however, concurrent with the division of the Roman Empire, Constantinople came to be recognized as the leader of the Eastern Church, and Rome the corresponding leader in the West.

Let us move along now to the middle of the fifth century and to Leo I (440-461), called by some historians the first pope. Truly he was the first to obtain imperial recognition for his claim of being primate of all bishops, from Emperor Valentinian III. Nonetheless, the Fourth World Council of Churches, assembled at Chalcedon in A. D. 451, accorded the Patriarch of Constantinople equal authority with the Roman Patriarch and thus did not recognize Leo's claim of lordship over the entire church.

Gregory I (590-604), appearing at the end of the sixth century, is generally regarded by most historians as the first real Catholic pope. His control of all the churches in Italy, Spain, Gaul, and England was unchallenged. Although he did not claim jurisdiction over the Eastern Church, his influence there was also strongly felt.

Here, in brief outline fashion, we have traced the rise of papal power as it is unerringly portrayed on the pages of history. We have seen that more than four hundred years of the Christian era elapsed before the Roman bishop was given any real recognition as head of the church. This places the first bona fide Catholic pope at least four hundred years later in time than the authorities of that church would have us believe. It demonstrates again why Protestants cannot agree with the assertion that the Early Church was "Catholic," even in the area of church rulership.

Here we let the matter rest. The evidence presented thus far has been mounting steadily, and now its momentum has reached sizable proportions. We would ask our reader to weigh these matters very carefully, with Bible in hand. He should also further this historical search on his own, to be fully persuaded in his own mind. Why not undertake to verify or disprove this presentation by reference to the complete church histories that are available in the larger public libraries? We feel confident that all will be well rewarded for the efforts put forth.

Section VII

Development of the True Church

WE HAVE already glanced at the origin of the church and noted some of its very early characteristics. All agree that Christ founded just one church. The Apostle Paul's teaching that "there is one body, and one Spirit, . . . one hope, . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:4, 5) certainly indicates that the church was not meant to be divided. This brings us to grips with the question of which is the true church and how it can be identified—a subject about which obviously there exists a considerable difference of opinion.

Catholic teaching regarding the true church and its identity is very pointed and clear. It states that the Catholic faith differs from all others in that it alone is the true religion. Pope Pius IX wrote: "It is to be held as of faith that none can be saved outside the Apostolic Roman Church."³⁷

We have already noted the inconsistency of this claim with the character of the Early Christian Church, which was so completely non-Catholic in its doctrine and practice. Now we desire to pursue this study further by examining some additional aspects of the true church as it developed through the centuries and especially in the present day. Our aim will be to compare the scriptural descriptions and characteristics with those of the Catholic Church in order to properly evaluate its claims.

Identifying the True Church

WE BELIEVE that the true church today is no different from the true church which Christ founded. The term "church" as found in the Bible does not refer to a building or edifice; neither does it describe a particular denomination. Rather, it refers to the actual people who compose the church, those who are specially selected and called out of the world. In Scripture, the word "church" is a translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means "that which is called out."³⁸ And so we understand that God is selecting or calling out those of the proper heart condition to be associated with his own dear Son as members of his body, together constituting the church class.

Jesus explained that the Father initiates the inviting and drawing of those who are obedient to his words. (John 6:44) Thereafter, Jesus also has a part in selecting these individuals "out of the world." (John 15:19) Commencing with his earthly ministry, the "high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14) has continued to our day. Daily, as in the days of the apostles, the Lord is adding to the true church "such as should be saved." —Acts 2:47

³⁷ John Cogley, "What Is a Catholic," *A Guide to the Religions of America*, pg. 9.

³⁸ Robert Young, "Church," *Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, p. 166.

The true church, then, is that company of people who have accepted the call of God, believe the teachings of Christ, and thus become separated from the world and its spirit. Such separation is not a physical one, such as extended seclusion in a monastery. The church remains in the world to be a light to those groping in darkness, yet separated from it by her adherence to the faith and standards of the Christian way. (Matt. 5:14) Recall Jesus' words on this point: "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil."—John 17:15

Can this church, which is described in the New Testament, be identified by a name? There are many Bible names which are used, each depicting a particular aspect of the church. Some of these are: The bride of Christ, the body of Christ, the royal priesthood, the saints, the elect, the little flock, sons of God, the church of the living God, Christians, overcomers, and new creatures. It is interesting to note that the term "Catholic" is not to be found at all in this list. For that matter, neither are other denominational names, such as Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, etc.

These names and others are of human origin, and tend to divide the church. While serving their purpose in identifying various groups of people who are endeavoring to follow Christ, they do not necessarily represent the true church. No, the denominational name is not as important as the doctrines which that group upholds, and the standing before the Lord of the individuals who comprise it.

Only God has the ability to determine which individuals comprise the true church. Membership in good standing in a particular denomination does not automatically insure our salvation. Even if our group adopted one of the scriptural names applied to the church, this in itself would not necessarily make us part of the true church. What really matters is whether our individual names "are written in heaven" with those of "the general assembly and church of the firstborn." (Heb. 12:23) And this is dependent upon the degree of our love for God and the extent of our willingness to serve him above all else.

At this point we shall divide the remaining discussion of outstanding traits of the true church into two parts, according to time features. The first will cover some highlights during the present dispensation, from the inception of the church to its completion at the end of the Gospel Age. The second part will feature the work of the church during the next age, termed the Millennial Age, when the kingdom of God will be established upon the earth. This twofold presentation will be seen to be helpful in providing an appreciation of the present mission of the church.

The Persecuted Church

CONTRARY to commonly held expectations, the Bible teaches that the church is not destined to become popular in the world. Its greatness

is not to be measured by the size of its membership or by the extent of its influence, but by its faithful adherence to the truths and the commission given by Jesus. This commission was not to convert the world and thus transform the kingdom of man into the kingdom of God, as so many have believed. Rather, it was to proclaim God's plan of salvation for the human race, centering in Jesus' ransom sacrifice and culminating in the establishment of his kingdom upon the earth in due time. This was the Gospel which was to be witnessed to all nations.—Matt. 24:14

Nowhere do the Scriptures indicate that this message would be overwhelmingly received by the masses of humanity. Actually, its acceptance entails things difficult of performance which would almost certainly limit the number responding. How many would have the faith to believe the promises and prophecies of God's Word? How many would be willing to trust the wisdom of God's method of helping the world, in first permitting the difficult and trying experiences with evil and sin? How many would have the patience to wait for the manifestation of God's power in the future setting up of his kingdom upon the earth? In the meantime, how many would be content to live the sacrificial life of true followers of the Master, emulating him in all of their conduct?

The result has been that the church's message, like that of Jesus, has been misunderstood, ignored, despised and rejected of men. This has not dismayed true Christians, however, as the Bible clearly indicated this was to occur. In II Timothy 3:12 we read: "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Jesus said: "They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." (John 16:2) And again, "The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you."—John 15:20

The Christian was given very definite instructions regarding the course of his life during the present Gospel Age. He was told not to dabble in the affairs of this world or to become imbued with its spirit of selfishness or frivolity. (Rom. 12:2) He was to consider himself a pilgrim and a stranger upon the earth. (Heb. 11:13) He was not to love the things of this world, for "know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" (James 4:4) His affections were to be fixed upon "things above, not on things on the earth."—Col. 3:2

The Christian was also admonished not to fall into the error of accepting honors from the world, because the due time for the Church's triumph and glorious reign was future. Some made this mistake in the Early Church, prompting the Apostle Paul's rebuke:

Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you. . . . We are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honorable, but we

are despised. . . . we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place. . . . Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things.—I Cor. 4:8-13

The true Christian's pathway, then, as seen in the light of Scripture, has been and still is a narrow and rugged one. Consequently, very few indeed have been attracted to it, for only the few are willing to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Jesus. (Matt. 16:24) But again, this has not taken students of the Bible unawares, for the Scriptures foretold that the true church would always remain a small group, relatively few in number. Jesus said plainly, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." (Matt. 7:14) And again, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32) Also, "Many are called, but few are chosen."—Matt. 22:14

In the providences of God, all things work together for good to them that love him. (Rom. 8:28-30) Even the bitter experiences and persecutions which befall the church and limit its growth produce a beneficial effect. Only through suffering can true character be developed and perfected. Only through suffering can a sympathetic nature be produced which is mindful of the difficulties of others. It is God's will that every member of the body of Christ should be touched with a feeling of the world's infirmities and difficulties. Only by this means can they become tender, sympathetic, and generous toward the members of the fallen race whom they shall be privileged to judge and bless as part of their future work as kings and priests with Christ.—I Cor. 6:2; Acts 17:30, 31; Rev. 20:6

In addition, we note that a hostile and unfriendly world acts as a very effective proving ground for the church, testing the fidelity and loyalty of its members to the fullest. This is also seen to be quite reasonable from the overall perspective, since only the church is invited to the heavenly calling and the exceedingly great reward of glory, honor, and immortality, even the divine nature. (Rom. 2:7; II Pet. 1:4) Each individual must be thoroughly tested for worthiness to attain to this highest of all stations among the various creations of God, and the unbelieving, hostile world becomes the ready field for this testing work.

With this background, it becomes increasingly clear why students of the Bible are not impressed with the claims of the Catholic Church—or any church, for that matter—respecting its popularity, wealth, extent of membership, size of organization, influence among nations, or number of prominent members. The Scriptures expressly inform us that none of these factors are of any merit in God's sight. To the contrary, we are told that these things would not be marks of the true church.

The Apostle Paul wrote: "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that

not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen.”—I Cor. 1:26-28

God’s ways truly are different from man’s. Why does God seem to specialize in selecting the poor, the unlearned, and the simple, instead of choosing from among the more elite classes of mankind—the noble, the educated, and the well-to-do? Evidently, he feels he can better use these lowly ones, unspoiled with pride of accomplishment or vanity of earthly learning and riches, to effect a transforming work in their hearts. The Spirit of God finds a much more ready entrance into the lives of the simple ones, and can start to reform and transform their minds from earthly to spiritual things.

Those who fully surrender themselves to the will of God and who are successful in laying down their lives in Christian service are then ready to be elevated to positions of honor in the kingdom of God. Then they will be used as God’s agents, developed and perfected through adversity and persecution in this life, qualified to restore peace and prosperity to a very troubled world. These will be joint-heirs with Christ, who are destined to receive the kingdom, that is, to participate in the rulership of that kingdom for the purpose of assisting the groaning and travailing masses of humanity. (Luke 12:32; Rom. 8: 16-22) God’s plan has made provision for the blessing of all the families of the earth, to be accomplished through the glorious reign of Christ and his church.—Gen. 12:3; 22:16-18

The Reigning Church

FOR centuries the Catholic Church has taught that she herself was the reigning kingdom of Christ upon the earth. She claimed for herself the fulfilment of all the prophecies pertaining to the glorious reign of Christ and the church, called the millennial reign, since the Scriptures indicate it is to last a thousand years. (Rev. 20:6) “Augustine was the first who ventured to teach that the Catholic Church . . . was the kingdom of Christ, that the millennial kingdom had commenced with the appearing of Christ, and was therefore an accomplished fact.³⁹

To the student of the Bible, this view raises immediate problems and inconsistencies. How could the kingdom of Christ become operative upon the earth without the presence of the King himself? How could the church be reigning at the same time that she was supposed to be learning the lessons of faithfulness and obedience through suffering, as already shown? How could any human organization usher in the blessings of universal peace among the

³⁹“Millennium,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, XV, p. 496.

nations, resurrect all who sleep in the grave (John 5:28, 29, R. V.), and bring to the people everlasting life and health, all of which God has promised to accomplish during the millennial reign of Christ?

This much certainly appears to be self-evident—that the foretold blessings of restitution which are held out to all the families of the earth as a result of the return of Christ and the establishment of his kingdom upon the earth have not yet been realized. (Acts 3:19-21) If we believe in the Bible as God's inspired Word, we may also believe in simple faith that there will be a due time in God's plan when these purposes will be accomplished. It is our conviction, based upon the teachings of Scripture, that this future time, when God shall assert his sovereignty over the whole world and restore the perfection that was lost in Adam, is now close at hand. Then the church will be exalted to positions of rulership in the kingdom, after having patiently waited for the return of her Lord and after developing the necessary graces of character through the fiery testings of this life. —I Pet. 1:7; Rev. 2:25-27; 3:21

A correct understanding of the reign of the church is difficult to grasp unless one appreciates also the concept of the two phases of the kingdom of God. The church, together with Christ, will constitute the spiritual ruling class. They will direct the affairs of the kingdom in a manner similar to that of a president and his cabinet. But rulership implies a subject class which, in this case, will be the world of mankind. (Rev. 5:10) Unlike the case of so many of earth's despots, Christ and the church will reign with equity and justice for all the people. (Ps. 72:1-19) Indeed, what other ruler actually gave his life for his subjects, to cancel the debt of condemnation against them, that they might enjoy the perfect and abundant life of the kingdom age?

The church, as the ruling class in the kingdom, will be given spiritual life on the very highest plane of existence, that of the divine nature. (Rom. 2:7; II Pet. 1:4) These spiritual powers will be necessary to properly carry out her function in the executive branch of the kingdom government.

The world of mankind, when brought back in the resurrection, will be given the opportunity to attain to the perfection of human life upon the earth, by obedience to the just laws of the kingdom then in force. (Rev. 22:17) This will amount to a restoration of that edenic bliss which was enjoyed by our first parents, a condition of absolute perfection of the mental, moral, and physical powers of human life. Pain, sorrow, fear, and even death itself will then pass away and will no longer be permitted to blight man's life upon the earth.—Rev. 21:4, 5; Isa. 35:10

As we study the reign of the church, we see before us a picture of the method that God will use to accomplish the world's blessings. It represents the final fulfilment of an early prophetic promise made to father Abraham: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." (Gen. 22:18)

Christ, indeed, was the natural seed of Abraham and, as the Apostle Paul tells us, the church will become a joint-heir with Christ as his spiritual seed: "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."—Gal. 3:29

Thus the church's reward for faithfulness does not become the exclusive enjoyment of heavenly bliss, but takes on a much grander purpose. The Scriptures present us with the concept of the church being used as an instrument of blessing in the hands of Almighty God. The exaltation of a few, specially selected and developed from among earth's billions, will be for the purpose of assisting the remainder, non-elect humanity, to achieve the measure of human life and perfection which God originally intended that they enjoy.

During the church's reign, by the process of instruction and correction in righteousness, all selfish and sinful tendencies will be removed from the hearts of men. (Isa. 26:9; 35:8; Ezek. 11:19, 20) The true knowledge of God shall abound and none will lack understanding. (Jer. 31:33, 34; Isa. 11:9) Then also will be accomplished that great undertaking which has eluded all man's efforts through the centuries—the full conversion of the world to Christianity.

The final results of the church's reign will far surpass man's most cherished hopes and dreams of utopia. The earth and all of its inhabitants will have been restored to the peace and harmony of the original creation. Words of praise and joy and thanksgiving will issue forth continuously from the lips of the redeemed ones of every kindred, race, and tongue, in appreciation of the great love of God manifested in his plan of salvation. And as we now receive this foreknowledge of the world's blessing by looking into the precious promises of God's Word, let us also rejoice and offer our prayer of gratitude to the divine Author of such a magnificent plan as this!

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Sections VIII and IX

Introduction - Part II

WE HAVE now come to the heart of this presentation—a careful consideration of Catholic doctrine. The background setting has been provided; it should now be profitable to proceed with some of the details.

In developing this second part we shall endeavor to be fair in presenting the Catholic viewpoint, using clear, documented statements or exact quotations whenever possible. Particular attention will be given to locating the origin of specific beliefs by investigating the traditions of the church, the teachings of Holy Scripture, the writings of the early church fathers, and related areas.

At this point our readers will not be surprised if we state that great emphasis will be placed upon searching the Scriptures in our examination of the various beliefs and practices which are to follow. We are glad to reiterate the Catholic position on this; that the teaching of their church “is never completely independent of the Bible or in any way opposed to it.” Further, it is also stated, “The better acquainted a Catholic is with the Scriptures, the better will he understand the teachings of his church.”

Catholics are confident that their beliefs can be substantiated and found to be perfectly harmonious with the Scriptures. Therefore, the diligent effort which we will make to find Bible support for the various doctrines should be welcomed by one and all. Surely the Catholic Church’s recent re-emphasis upon Bible study should serve as a hearty stimulus to a re-examination of just what the Scriptures do teach in these different areas of faith.

As this study unfolds, it is our fervent prayer that all will be drawn very close to the loving God who is the Father of us all and the One who has so graciously provided us with his written Word to satisfy our every spiritual need. And as the harmony and reasonableness of the divine truths of Scripture are perceived, it is hoped that all will be encouraged to place their trust in the firm spiritual foundation which is laid for us in God’s written Word.

With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, let us endeavor to recapture the broad outlines of that pure “faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”

(Jude 3) In possession of this faith, we will surely be moved to the same zeal and enthusiasm as the early Christians in laying down our lives in the service of our great and wonderful God.

Section IX

The Virgin Mary

ONE element of Catholic faith which clearly sets it apart from Protestantism is the emphasis which is placed upon the worship of the Virgin Mary. Protestants are generally at a loss to understand why Mary has become so universally endeared in the hearts of Catholics. Statues and images of her are everywhere in evidence. In their thoughts and devotions Catholics give Mary an exalted place. Prayer addressed to her is more voluminous and has become more natural than to the Heavenly Father. Love, dedication, and service are directed to her in wholehearted abundance.

The Catholic explanation for rendering such honor and worship to Mary is quite simple:

. . . because she is the Mother of God, and consequently surpasses (all angels and other saints) in grace and glory and in her power of intercession. . . . Mary is styled 'Queen of the Angels' and 'Queen of all the Saints,' because the angels and the saints look up to and honor her as their queen.⁴⁰

In the Rosary, we find Catholics repeating: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now, and at the hour of our death."⁴¹ In an evening prayer: "We fly to thy patronage, O holy Mother of God. Despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us from all dangers, O ever glorious and blessed Virgin."⁴²

Protestants, of course, are familiar with and accept the Bible narrative regarding Mary. They believe that she was a pure and upright maiden, chosen of God to become the mother of Jesus. As such, they believe she is worthy of receiving honor and esteem and the appropriate scriptural designation of "blessed." (Luke 1:48) Mary is thus also seen to be endeared in the hearts of Protestants, but only in accordance with the honor that was shown to her in the Scriptures.

⁴⁰Francis Cassilly, *Religion, Doctrine, and Practice*, p. 70.

⁴¹Rev. Joseph Deharbe, *Abridged Catechism of Christian Doctrine*, p. V.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. XIV.

In Scripture

LET us first look more closely at the title, "Mother of God." This expression is neither found in the Bible as such, nor does it describe the truth of the matter. All will agree that Mary was the mother of Jesus. But Jesus is always termed as the "Son of God," and is never identified as the Almighty God or the Heavenly Father. It was the purely human babe Jesus who was born of Mary, not the Creator of the universe who existed from "everlasting to everlasting." (Psalm 90:2) Thus seen, the title, "Mother of God," expresses serious error, for He who exists and has neither beginning nor end is timeless, and could not be born of one who herself was a product of His creation.

Other Catholic beliefs regarding Mary seem equally as puzzling to Protestants. The Immaculate Conception is a dogma which was defined as recently as 1954 by Pope Pius IX. It does not pertain to the sinlessness of the babe Jesus, as some Protestants have mistakenly inferred from its title, but refers to the birth of his mother, Mary. In his pronouncement, the Pope said that the blessed Virgin Mary "in the first instant of her conception, by a singular privilege and grace granted by God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the human race, was preserved exempt from all stain of original sin."⁴³

Catholic authorities readily state that they cannot find scriptural substantiation for this dogma: "No direct or categorical and stringent proof of the dogma can be brought forward from Scripture . . ."⁴⁴ What they do not seem to realize, however, is that the teaching of the Bible plainly refutes it, and does not provide any ground for holding such a view.

Taking the human race as a whole, we find that only Adam and Eve were perfect, being created such directly by God. Because of their disobedience, this perfection was very short-lived. But not only were they condemned, but also all their progeny, as yet unborn: for the Scriptures read, "By the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation." (Rom. 5:18) Again, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23); and "there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not."—Eccles. 7:20

The only exception to this general rule which we find laid down in the Scriptures pertains to our Lord Jesus Christ, and the reason for it is clearly given. Of Jesus it is written that he was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners" (Heb. 7: 26), and that he "did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." (I Pet. 2:22) It was possible for Jesus to be born free from the taint of all sin because the Heavenly Father miraculously intervened in the usual course of human conception. Yes, it was the power of the Almighty

⁴³"Immaculate Conception," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, VII, 674.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

One which overshadowed Mary and caused her to conceive in her womb and later bring forth the babe Jesus. Only thus was it possible for Jesus to be born free of the adamic condemnation which plagued the entire race, and to exhibit the same perfection of human nature as was originally displayed in the first man Adam before he sinned.

But concerning Mary we find no such statements that she was preserved from all stain of original sin, nor is there any logical reason why she would have to be so exempted. Being conceived in the usual manner by two human parents, she was brought under the same condemnation which every other individual of the human race has inevitably inherited. If it were not so, we would expect a clear scriptural statement mentioning the matter and also explaining why it would be necessary. With no such teachings to be found in the Bible and no justification for holding such a view, there remains simply no basis for believing in the immaculate conception.

Actually, the truth of Mary's conception lends added credit to the character and demeanor of one who was found honorable and upright in her struggles against the shortcomings and weaknesses of the flesh which are inherent in the adamic condemnation, and pass upon all men. Yes, truly Mary was as one of us, who endeavored to live a righteous life, a pure and virtuous life, in the fear of the Lord, in spite of the fallen tendencies inherent in her very nature. What a blessed and wonderful reward she received, even in this life, by being chosen to become the mother of our Lord! What a wonderful example she is to us, who also strive against the inherited weaknesses of the flesh, to be found acceptable and pleasing in the sight of our same Heavenly Father!

Another belief respecting Mary which Protestants have difficulty in accepting is her perpetual virginity. Here, again, there appears to be abundant scriptural evidence to refute this view, and no logical reason for holding it. Matthew 1:24, 25 reads: "Then Joseph . . . did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took (her to his side as) his wife, but he had no union with her as her husband until she had borne her first-born Son." (Amplified N. T.) Certainly there appears to be a clear implication here that after Jesus was born Mary and Joseph lived a normal married life together. As a matter of fact, in the course of time several children, both boys and girls, were born to Mary, as enumerated in Mark 6:3: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us?"

One can only speculate that the theory of the perpetual virginity was intended to add still further to Mary's state of holiness, and thus make her a fit object for worship. But we notice that this theory is based upon the assumption that sanctity and wedlock are incompatible, which the Scriptures clearly teach is false. The marriage state was instituted by God,

and is therefore holy. Paul specifically wrote that “marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled.” (Heb. 13:4) We conclude, therefore, that Mary’s subsequent role as a mother of several children does not detract in any way from the honor due to her for having been chosen as the virgin mother of Jesus.

The bodily assumption of Mary into heaven is another belief which is freely admitted to find no support in Scripture. It may safely be stated that throughout all of the Bible there is not the slightest suggestion that Mary was shown preference over and above the apostles or other saints, in receiving her heavenly reward in advance of the others. All of the faithful believers in Christ were to await together the time of their change in the first resurrection, to occur at the appearance and return of the Lord Jesus.—I Thess. 4:15-17; I Cor. 15:51, 52

Also, there would be no need to retain the human body for those born of the Spirit in the first resurrection. As part of their heavenly inheritance the church has been promised glorious spiritual bodies befitting their divine nature, and fully capable of carrying out all the functions of spirit beings on that high plane of existence. (I Cor. 15:35-50) Their bodies of flesh were consumed on the symbolic altar of sacrifice during their earthly careers, and would only serve as a handicap to the new spiritual minds and bodies which they shall receive. (Rom. 12:1) Hence to insist that Mary was borne bodily into heaven at the moment of her death would appear to be unscriptural and unreasonable on two separate counts.

This brings us now to a consideration of Mary’s role as an intercessor, a belief which universally inspires Catholics to call upon her for help in their time of need. Catholics believe that in this capacity Mary has the power to intercede with Jesus on behalf of those who place their trust in her. The stress on her role as intercessor is placed not so much between God and men, which is generally held to be the province of Jesus Christ, as it is between Jesus Christ and men.⁴⁵

Catholics believe that she is our Mediatrix . . . between men and her Son. . . . They pray to her, not that she by her own authority or by any personal resources of her own, may give us graces and blessings, but that she may appeal on our behalf to her Divine Son, who in turn will make intercession for us before Him who is the source of every good and perfect gift.⁴⁶

In order for this belief in the special powers of Mary to merit acceptance, we would expect several things from the Scriptures. First, it would be most convincing if there were a direct teaching bearing on this matter, and explaining Mary’s role as an intercessor to us. Second, it would be helpful if

⁴⁵Knights of Columbus Religious Information Bureau, *Let Us Judge Catholics by the Bible*, p. 34.

⁴⁶*Ibid*, p. 36.

it were shown that prayer directed to Mary were proper, and in accord with the wishes of God. And third, we would expect a statement that it is better for Christians not to go directly to Jesus, but rather to confide the matter to Mary first and rely upon her ability to intercede for us.

What do we find, then, when we approach the Scriptures with these expectations in mind? As for direct teachings explicitly outlining Mary's assumed role as intercessor, there are none. As for secondary supporting material, at least suggesting the possibility of Mary's special powers, again there is none. The only claim that is made for Bible verification rests upon one statement, which we will shortly see has no bearing on the subject.

On the other side of the question, there are specific facts of Scripture which are inescapable. Not only did Jesus not say that believers were to approach him through Mary or another saint, but he very positively declared that all were to come directly to him: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matt. 11:28) "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6) "He that cometh to me, . . . I will in no wise cast out."—John 6:35, 37

Whereas the term "intercessor" is never once used to describe Mary, it is freely used in describing the work of Jesus for his followers:

Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? . . . It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." (Rom. 8: 33, 34) "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.— Heb. 7:25

Again, in the matter of offering formal prayer, there is not so much as an intimation that it should be addressed to Mary or any other saint. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, he replied, "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven." (Matt. 6:9) Yes, prayer should be offered to God himself, as shown by Jesus' own example and his specific declaration, "When thou prayest, . . . pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."—Matt. 6:6

All believers, then, on the basis of their faith in God and in his Son Jesus Christ, stand in a very personal relationship before the Father. At any time, and in any circumstance of life, they have this wonderful privilege of coming before the throne of heavenly grace to seek the face of the Father. But always this is done in the manner authorized by Jesus; that is, in his name and through his merit. Yes, we may come directly to Jesus in responding to his gracious invitation, and have the full assurance of faith that we will be received and welcomed. By trusting in his finished work of redemption on our behalf, through Jesus we may call upon the Heavenly Father and thus receive grace to help in our every time of need.—Heb. 4:16

There is no need for any other personality, no matter how worthy or endearing that individual may be, to come into this picture of the communion and fellowship of every believer with God through our Lord Jesus. Let the precious words of Jesus remind us of the legacy which is freely granted to all his followers: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. . . . Whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you."—John 15:7, 16

There is just one text that Catholics rely upon to provide some basis for their belief in Mary's intercessory powers. It is found in John 2:1-11, which recounts Mary's calling to the attention of her son Jesus the fact that there was insufficient wine at the marriage feast in Cana. This resulted in our Lord performing his first miracle, and hence is used to illustrate Mary's role as mediatrix and intercessor. We believe it is a fallacy to use this simple incident of our Lord's granting a request of his mother as the basis for such a vital doctrine respecting the supposed exalted station and distinguished role of Mary. If this simple act entitles Mary to this position, why would not others who were similarly favored be entitled to the same exaltation?

Let us explain this more fully by reference to other scriptural incidents where individuals were found interceding with Jesus on behalf of their loved ones. For example, turn to Matthew 20:20-23, where Zebedee's wife implored Jesus to grant her sons special honors; or the account in Matthew 8:5-13, where Jesus granted the wish of a centurion to have his servant healed of the palsy.

In none of these instances do we find Catholics attaching significance to the intercessory abilities of Zebedee's wife or the centurion. These are simply understood to demonstrate Jesus' willingness to help others whenever feasible, and especially in reward of exceptional degrees of faith. We believe the account of the marriage feast may be understood in this same manner.

In Church Tradition

IN OUR study of the various Catholic beliefs regarding Mary, we have found that Bible support is wholly lacking, and in most cases is not even claimed as a basis for them. This raises the logical question of how these beliefs arose in the church, and where their source really lies. In making our investigation of this area, we shall rely heavily upon Catholic authorities, as their statements are quite plain and revealing.

On the one hand, the Catholic Church maintains that the worship of the Virgin Mary is a practice as old as the church itself, yet on the other hand we have the findings of her own scholars to the contrary. Note this clear statement from the Catholic Encyclopedia, very much to the point: "We

do not meet with any clear traces of the cultus of the Blessed Virgin in the first Christian centuries."⁴⁷

Despite all evidence to the contrary, the notion that the worship of Mary was popular in early Christianity has been instilled by the Church to justify its practice. But again, the honest declarations of her own scholars stand out in sharp contrast: "Evidence regarding the popular practice of the early centuries is almost entirely lacking."⁴⁸ If, then, there are no clear traces of this doctrine and, in fact, if all evidence for it is entirely void, it certainly leads us to wonder how the Catholic Church can declare with such positive assurance that it was well-established in the Early Church.

Catholics themselves have pondered this inconsistency, but have only come up with vague speculations regarding it:

It is not impossible that the practice of invoking the aid of the Mother of Christ had become more familiar to the more simple faithful some time before we discover any plain expression of it in the writings of the Fathers. . . . In the paintings of the catacombs more particularly, we begin to appreciate the exceptional position that she began, from an early period, to occupy in the thoughts of the faithful. Some of these frescoes . . . are believed to date from the first half of the second century. Three others . . . are a century later. . . . More startling is the evidence of certain apocryphal writings, notably that of the so-called Gospel of St. James.⁴⁹

Let us stop to reflect upon this for a moment. Even from Catholic sources, no sound basis for this doctrine can be found. The best that can be offered is the statement that it always existed as a practice within the Church, although it is freely admitted that all evidence for such is lacking. For the first two hundred years of Christianity the only recourse that can be made is to various works of art which are supposed to depict the worship of Mary. That this is a feeble way to attempt to prove any matter of doctrine is pointed out by no less a Catholic authority than St. Augustine himself: "Thus to fall most completely into error was the due desert of men who sought for Christ and his apostles not in the holy writings, but on painted walls."⁵⁰

Next, we find that the apocryphal writings are turned to in an effort to find justification for this doctrine. We trust that our earlier discussion of these writings has shown that they are not trustworthy in matters of doctrine, and so must be passed by. By process of elimination, this brings us to the writings of the Early Church fathers.

⁴⁷ "Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, XV, 459.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 460.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Manuel Perez Vila, *I Found the Ancient Way*, p. 23.

The absence of any commentary in the earliest writings of the fathers would seem to signify that the worship of Mary was entirely unknown to them. Their later remarks pertaining to the various questionable beliefs about Mary are of a mixed nature, indicating disagreement among the writers themselves. Even here, Catholics cannot find clear substantiation for their beliefs, as freely admitted by their own authorities: "In regard to the sinlessness of Mary, the older fathers are very cautious: some of them even seem to have been in error on this matter."⁵¹

Not only do the early fathers fail to support the doctrine of the immaculate conception of Mary, but most amazing of all, we find that even some of the popes spoke out against it: "Pope Innocent III declared that Eve was formed without guilt and brought forth in guilt; that Mary was formed in guilt and brought forth without guilt. And Pope Leo I adds that among men only Christ was innocent, because he alone was conceived and born without concupiscence." Gregory the Great says the same thing.⁵²

One of the earliest references to a specific act of worshipping the Virgin Mary is found in the writings of St. Epiphanius. (d. 403 A.D.) This church father not only mentions the practice of offering cakes to Mary in sacrifice, which was carried out by an obscure sect known as the Collyridians, but specifically denounces them for doing it. His counsel to these Christians was: "Let Mary be held in honor. Let the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost be adored, but let no one adore Mary."⁵³

Actually, it was not until the period of the early Middle Ages that there developed an "authoritative acceptance of Marian devotion as an integral part of the Church's life. It is difficult to give precise dates for the introduction of the various festivals, but . . . the celebration of the Assumption, Annunciation, Nativity, and Purification of Our Lady may certainly be traced to this period."⁵⁴

And it was not until the later Middle Ages that the worship of Mary became a universal practice in the church. "It was characteristic of this period, which for our present purpose may be regarded as beginning with the year 1000, that the deep feeling of love and confidence in the Blessed Virgin, which hitherto had expressed itself vaguely and in accordance with the promptings of the piety of individuals, began to take organized shape in a vast multitude of devotional practices. In any case, the homage paid to Our Lady during the later Middle Ages was universal."⁵⁵

Now then, having traced the rise of Marian devotion as a progressive development within the Catholic Church, which required a full thousand

⁵¹ "Immaculate Conception, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, VII, pp. 674, 675.

⁵² Vila, *op cit.*, p. 42.

⁵³ "Devotion to the Blessed Mary," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, XV, 460.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 462.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 463, 464.

years to reach its fruition, we are still left without the knowledge of its true origin. Neither the Bible, the practices of the early Christians, nor the writings of the church fathers can be shown to serve as its basis. Nonetheless, history is not silent in this matter, and does furnish us with the true source of the worship of Mary.

For many centuries prior to the advent of Christianity the pagan religions had honored not only a variety of gods, but goddesses as well. One can well imagine the conflict of ideologies that accompanied the rise of the Judean-Christian concept of one God. The early Christian writers vigorously protested against the errors of polytheistic worship and especially "the pagan custom of raising men to the rank of gods or demigods."⁵⁶ However, paralleling the tremendous compromise in Christian doctrine effected by the later church of the fourth century, as detailed in an earlier section of this paper, Mary, the apostles, martyrs, and angels were substituted for the pagan gods and goddesses, in an effort to facilitate the forced conversion of hordes of unbelievers.

Often pagan divinities and heroes, more or less thinly transformed or disguised, persisted under Christian names or were displaced by Christian substitutes. When, as often happened, a pagan site or temple was appropriated for Christian purposes, something of its previous associations might remain. . . . The cult of the Virgin Diana may have contributed to the worship of the Virgin Mary and more than a coincidence may possibly be seen in the facts that one of the earliest churches in honor of Mary rose at Ephesus on the site of the famous temple of Diana, and that in the same city in 431 a synod was held which first officially designated Mary the Mother of God.

In some places in Italy the ancient Lares are said to have been replaced by the Virgin, or the saints, or figures of the child Jesus. Presumably under such circumstances something of the functions assigned to the old were transferred to their successors. In Sicily the Virgin is said to have taken possession of all the sanctuaries of Ceres and Venus, and the pagan rites associated with them are reported to have been perpetuated in part in honor of the Mother of Christ. At Naples lamps burning before the image of the Virgin are said to have replaced those before the family gods. At Naples, too, the popular cult of the Madonna is conjectured to have proceeded from that of Vesta and Ceres. . . . The conjecture is offered that figures of Isis and Horus suggested the form for pictures of the Virgin.⁵⁷

Thus the true origin of the worship of Mary is found to exist in the transposition of the popular polytheistic custom of worshipping goddesses

⁵⁶ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The First Five Centuries*, p. 319.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 320, 325.

into the realm of the church. No wonder it was not possible to establish a Christian source for this doctrine—it never was Christian from the very start!

In Personal Devotion

WITH this background, what should be said in evaluating the Catholic position regarding Mary, the mother of Jesus? Certainly we appreciate the sincerity of intention demonstrated in desiring to hold in highest esteem one whom the Heavenly Father has greatly honored. However, we cannot be negligent in pointing out the dangers that accompany even such a sincere effort, if it is not based firmly upon the written Word of God.

Consider some of the titles and offices that have been heaped upon Mary: "Refuge of Sinners," "Seat of Wisdom," "Morning Star," "Our Life, Our Sweetness and Hope," "Advocate," "Mediatrix," and "Co-redemptrix." In the language and meaning of the Holy Scriptures, such terms (except the last two, which are unscriptural) properly belong to our Lord Jesus Christ. To remove them from him and grant them to another amounts to a usurpation of his just place in the hearts of believers. Do we really believe that anyone should receive glory comparable to our Lord Jesus, or be raised to a level so high as to compete in effect with his lofty position in honor or devotion?

The Bible is consistent in directing our attention to the One who is most worthy of receiving our praise: "Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; who was faithful to him that appointed him." (Heb. 3:1,2) "He is before all things . . . he is the Head of the body, the church . . . the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence." (Col. 1:13-18) Yes, it is Jesus who was found faithful, even unto the ignominious death of the cross. And for this reason the Father has "highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth . . . and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." —Phil. 2:8-11

We are not endeavoring in any way to detract from the nobility and purity of the character of Mary, or to lessen the place of honor which should be accorded to her. Unquestionably, to deserve the honor of being selected as the mother of Jesus, she possessed the finest and most virtuous qualities to be found in the human race. We merely desire to point out that men may fall into the serious error of granting undue reverence and worship, to the extent of setting up a rival to Jesus Christ or even to God himself, when reliance upon the Holy Scriptures is neglected in this regard.

Returning to the Scriptures, we see that it is to Jesus Christ, and to him alone, that we are directed. He it is, through the Father's appointment, who gave himself in sacrifice to atone for our sins. He it is who suffered the Just for the unjust, bore our griefs and carried our sorrows; who was wounded

for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities.(Isa. 53: 4, 5) He it is who can now sympathize with us in our weaknesses and assist us in our difficulties.

Because of his great sacrifice on our behalf, it is Jesus who has become our great High Priest, our Advocate, and our Redeemer. Yes, he has entered “into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.” (Heb. 9:24) When we come short of God’s standard of perfection, “we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” (I John 2:1) And we may raise our petitions to the Father with confidence, for “we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God. . . . We have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”—Heb. 4:14-16

“Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due . . . fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.” (Rom. 13:7) Truly, Mary does deserve our esteem; and the Lord Jesus Christ our worship and praise. May all of us in our devotions endeavor to follow the pattern which the Holy Spirit has given us and look to the Scriptures for the correct emphasis of our honor and worship.

Section X

Veneration of Saints and Images

BEFORE proceeding with our study of this subject, it would be well to establish what is meant by the term "saint." In Catholic usage there is both a general and a specialized meaning given to the word:

All human beings whose souls are in heaven are saints. . . . But we cannot give public veneration to one who is not canonized or beatified. . . . To one who is beatified, only a limited public devotion is permitted. One who is beatified is called 'blessed;' one who is canonized is styled 'saint.'⁵⁸

To most Catholics the term "saints" instinctively calls to mind those past followers of Christ who were especially noted for their faith or acts of heroism, and later officially recognized and canonized by the church.

Ordinarily the inquiry into the question whether a person has practiced heroic virtue, which inquiry must precede beatification, is not begun until fifty years after his death. But of recent years there have been some remarkable exceptions to this rule. . . . Before beatification two certain and unquestionable miracles must be worked at the intercession of the person whose cause is being considered; and after beatification, before canonization, two additional miracles must be proven.⁵⁹

This, however, is not the sense in which the word "saints" has been used in this treatise, because it is not so defined in the Scriptures. In the New Testament the word is used synonymously with those who compose the church, the footstep followers and disciples of Jesus Christ. The term is used with equal propriety to describe those still striving to serve Christ in this life, or those who have passed beyond. The necessary qualifications are faithfulness and obedience to God amidst the adversity and persecution inherent in the real Christian life.

To bear out this thought, let us notice some purely scriptural usages of the word. Turning first to I Corinthians 1:2 we find the Apostle Paul introducing his letter in this way: "To the assembly of God existing in Corinth, purified in Christ Jesus: to the chosen saints." (Fenton) And in Philippians 1:1 he wrote: "To all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi." Yes, Paul

⁵⁸ Cassilly, *Religion, Doctrine and Practice*, p. 69.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

realized that all true Christians who were called out of this world were also considered to be saints of God.

Many other examples could also be cited. Before Paul's conversion it was written of him: "How much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem." (Acts 9:13) As Peter was bearing witness to the truth, the scripture reads: "He came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda." (Acts 9:32) In every case where "saints" is used, we are made to realize that all true followers of the Master who are living up to their privileges of sacrifice and service to God are considered as such, and therefore should appropriate this term to themselves.

In comparison with the Scriptures, Catholic usage of "saint" appears very limited, since it can only be applied to Catholics themselves, and never during their own lifetime upon earth. "The Catholic Church declares only Catholics to be saints. . . . The heroic and integrally Christian life which makes a person a saint can be lived only within the Catholic Church. . . . There and there alone are found those who qualify as saints."⁶⁰

But now let us move on to a consideration of the place which the saints, the angels, and their images hold in the worship and devotion of Catholics. Why does the Catholic Church hold up the saints and the angels to veneration? We will let a Catholic source provide the answer: "That we may be encouraged to imitate their virtues and that we may be helped by their intercession."⁶¹

Here is some of the reasoning advanced to justify and encourage the offering of prayers to the saints:

In heaven the saints know about conditions on earth. . . . We can pray to them, and . . . God enables them to know our prayers. . . . They want to help . . . and they can help. . . . They have influence with God; and that influence is at our disposal. It becomes effective through prayer.⁶²

It is natural for us to approach persons in authority through mutual friends. If we desire a favor from a king or president, instead of going to him directly, we frequently ask one who has influence with him to speak for us. In a similar way, when we consider our own unworthiness, we feel that we have a better chance to obtain a spiritual favor, if we ask the saints who are so close to God to intercede for us.⁶³

Prayers to the saints may be formal or informal. An example of the

⁶⁰Knights of Columbus Religious Information Bureau, *But Why Don't You Pray to the Saints?* p. 1.

⁶¹Cassilly, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

⁶²*Ibid.*, pg. 42, 42, 44.

⁶³Cassilly, *loc. cit.*

former is a prayer taken from the liturgical act of the Mass which is said on the sixth of December: "O God, who didst honor the holy pontiff Nicholas with countless miracles, we ask that through his merits and intercession we may be freed from the flames of hell."⁶⁴ In addition, "each Catholic usually has some special saints whom he admires in a particular way These he is urged to imitate and to call upon frequently."⁶⁵

The entire foundation of praying to the saints is thus seen to be based upon purely human conception and reasoning. Sometimes, as we have shown, and we believe in this instance as well, these human ideas not only find no basis in the Scriptures, but actually run counter to the Bible's teachings. All that was said previously in connection with Mary's alleged intercessory abilities applies here as well. Not in all the Bible is there a single admonition for the believer to offer a prayer to Mary, to a saint, or to an angel. Always the exhortation is, "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God," and we might add, only through the merits of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.—Phil. 4:6

However, even within the sphere of the Catholic Church there have been outstanding spokesmen who cried out against reliance upon the saints. Notice how St. Ambrose demolishes the chief argument that is raised to justify the need for saints as intercessors: He writes that "to address God through his creatures, and to compare him who sees everything with the kings of the earth, whom we can't approach except through their courtiers, is a crime of divine lese majesty (Epistle to Romulus, 1)."⁶⁶

The Catholic Church endeavors to justify the worship of Mary, the saints, and angels by teaching that there are different degrees or quality of worship. The highest form of worship is "latria," reserved only for God. Next comes "hyperdulia," properly rendered to Mary, slightly inferior in quality. Finally, there is "dulia," properly offered to saints and angels, somewhat more inferior, yet still part of worship. Let us see how this is delineated in the Catechism of Christian Doctrine, used in England:

Divine honor or worship . . . belongs to God alone. We should pay to the angels and saints an inferior honor or worship, for this is due to them as the servants and special friends of God. We should give to relics, crucifixes and holy pictures a relative honor, as they relate to Christ and his saints and are memorials of them.⁶⁷

Here, then, is a system of worship which includes as its principal objects God, Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, the saints, the angels, and images of holy things. It is the way that Catholics are taught to carry out their devotions

⁶⁴Manuel Perez Vila, *I Found the Ancient Way*, p. 31

⁶⁵Knights of Columbus Religious Information Bureau, *But Why Don't You Pray to the Saints?*, pg. 44.

⁶⁶Vila, *op. cit.*, pp. 33, 34.

⁶⁷"Veneration of Images," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, VII, p. 67.

and add to their own sanctity. But the vital question becomes, is it the way taught in the Scriptures?

Worship of God the Father and worship of his Son Jesus Christ are both clearly illustrated and called for in the Bible. Concerning the Father, Jesus said: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." (Matt. 4:10) Of the Son it is written: "Let all the angels of God worship him," and "All men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father." (Heb. 1:6, John 5:23) There is no question of propriety whatsoever when it comes to rendering grateful worship to the Almighty God, the Creator and Sovereign of the universe, and to his only begotten Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Here we are in wholehearted accord.

However, this is the sum total and full extent of acceptable worship as described in the Scriptures. The kind of worship that is offered to God and to Christ is of the same order of magnitude, and no other kind of worship is shown to be proper. Search as we might, we will not be able to find a scriptural breakdown of worship into various degrees for different beings or objects. There is no support whatsoever for the Catholic hypothesis that an inferior kind of worship should be granted Mary, the angels, the saints, and images of holy things.

To the contrary, the divine disapproval of rendering reverence and worship to any but God or Christ is shown over and over. Turn first to Acts 14:8-18, where Paul and Barnabas are depicted on a missionary journey into Asia. At Lystra, Paul noticed a man who had been a cripple all his life, and observed also that he had the faith necessary to be healed of his affliction. Paul therefore commanded,

Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked. And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker.

Then the priest of Jupiter . . . brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people. Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, and saying Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth. . . . And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.

What an exciting experience for these early missionaries! But it was

more than this, because we believe its recording in the Scriptures was meant to provide us with a valuable lesson. Notice that under no circumstances did Paul and Barnabas desire to have worship directed to themselves, even if it meant forcibly restraining the people from doing so.

In another account, found in Acts 10:25, 26, Peter is shown reproving the first Gentile convert for endeavoring to worship him: "And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshiped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man." Then in Revelation 22:8, 9, as a result of John's experience, we have a clear-cut indication that not even angels are to receive our worship: "When I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which showed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellow servant, . . . worship God."

In endeavoring to pinpoint the origin of worshipping of saints and martyrs, we are led to the very same conclusions as those that apply to the Virgin Mary. Catholics are led to believe that the custom is as old as the Church itself: "It has been the immemorial practice and tradition of the Church to venerate the martyrs and other saints, to institute feasts and dedicate churches in their honor."⁶⁸ But in investigating this area we find it is not possible to establish a Christian basis for this custom, for the simple reason that it was not, in fact, Christian to begin with. Its adoption occurred only after the simplicity of the original Christian doctrine was abandoned. Evidently it was incorporated into the faith of the later Church to simplify the forced conversion of the masses of heathen. The saints and angels were given the same exalted positions that the great number of gods and demigods previously had held in the minds of such converts.

The Christian Theodoret openly rejoiced that martyrs had been substituted for the pagan gods and given their glory. Sometimes, as did Gregory Thaumaturgos, officials of the Church encouraged the practice. . . It is natural to assume an historic connexion between pagan ceremonies on the one hand and on the other the offering of lamps and flowers to the saints, the placing of food before the dead, the feasts in memory of the martyrs, and visits paid to them deep in the night.⁶⁹

The Place of Images

WE come now to an area of Catholic practice which many Protestants consider to be verging upon the superstitious and sacrilegious—that of venerating images. The official Catholic position was stated by the Council of Trent in 1543:

The Holy Synod commands that images of Christ, the Virgin

⁶⁸ Cassilly, *op. cit.*, p. 68

⁶⁹ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The First Five Centuries*, pp. 319-321

Mother of God, and other saints are to be held and kept especially in churches, that due honor and reverence are to be paid to them, not that any divinity or power is thought to be in them for the sake of which they may be worshiped, or that anything can be asked of them, or that any trust may be put in images . . . but because the honor shown to them is referred to the prototypes which they represent, so that by kissing, uncovering to, kneeling before images we adore Christ and honor the saints whose likeness they bear.⁷⁰

Here is an area where Catholics find extreme difficulty in attempting to harmonize the teachings of the Church with the clear statements of Scripture. Compare the foregoing Catholic view with the second of the well-known Ten Commandments, for example: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath . . . Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God."—Exod. 20:4, 5

These Bible verses are so plain and the instructions so explicit that for many years the Catholic Church has been reluctant to make them well-known. In the official Church catechisms it is standard practice to group the first two commandments together, under the general heading of the First Commandment. The over-all number of commandments is kept the same by dividing the Tenth Commandment into two parts.⁷¹ By doing this it is possible to minimize the import of the Second Commandment, and to include only a partial quotation of it along with the entire First Commandment. Thus, many Catholics who rely heavily upon their catechism for scriptural understanding are prevented from having the complete instructions of God relative to the making and honoring of images. We would urge our readers to verify this by carefully comparing the listing of the Ten Commandments as they appear in the twentieth chapter of Exodus with that in a Catholic catechism.

When confronted with the complete statement of the Second Commandment as it appears in the Bible, Catholic authorities offer several different explanations. Two are suggested in the footnote for this verse in the Douay Bible: First, it is stated that this passage forbids only images which are made to be worshiped with divine honor, implying that images which receive a lesser degree of worship are allowable; second, that images in the house of God were expressly authorized in the Old Testament, as shown in the Jewish Tabernacle arrangement.⁷²

The first allegation has already been answered from the Scriptures, which were found to tolerate only one kind of worship—the true

⁷⁰ "Veneration of Images," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, VII, p. 671.

⁷¹ Rev. Joseph Deharbe, *Abridged Catechism of Christian Doctrine*, pp. 22-29; Vila, *op. cit.*, pp. 17, 18.

⁷² "The Douay Bible House, *The Holy Bible*, footnote p. 85.

worship of God and Christ. Statements of other Catholic authorities also help to defeat this argument: "The First Commandment would seem absolutely to forbid the making of any kind of representation of men, animals, or even plants. . . . The people are not only told not to adore images nor serve them; they are not even to make any graven thing or the likeness—it would seem—of anything at all. . . . In distinction to the nations around, Israel was to worship an unseen God. . . . Any attempt to represent the God of Israel graphically is always put down as being abominable idolatry. Except for the human heads of the cherubim, we read nothing of statues of men in the lawful cult of the Old Testament. In this point at least, the Jew seems to have understood the commandment to forbid the making of such statues."⁷³

With these sentiments we are in complete accord. But what about the second allegation concerning the images of cherubim which stood on both sides of the ark in the most holy compartment of the tabernacle? (Exod. 25:18-20) Were these used as objects of inferior worship such as Catholics today employ for their variety of images?

In studying the matter we find that the Israelites in general never even saw these cherubim. Though encamped about the tabernacle, they were never permitted to enter it. A high linen fence prevented them from seeing into the court which surrounded it. As a matter of fact, only the high priest was allowed to enter into the most holy compartment to carry out the rites of his priestly function. Nor were these cherubim designed to be worshiped at all, but rather, to serve as representations of certain of the attributes of the Almighty God, who manifested the glory of his presence in the most holy. Thus, another effort to defend the worship of images upon the basis of Scripture is seen to fall utterly short of its mark.

Catholic authorities are always careful to point out that when they advocate the veneration of images it is not because they feel that any special powers or abilities are inherently present in them, but only because they are reminders of the true persons whom they represent. But again let us notice how completely contrary to the teachings of Scripture even this qualification is found to be. As already verified from Catholic sources, the second commandment forbade the making and possessing of any kind of graven image, whether it be of false gods, men, or even of the true God himself. This is brought out very forcibly in Deuteronomy 4:15-18, where it is stated that God purposely refrained from showing himself to the Israelites in any form, so that they would have no basis for making a graven likeness to him:

Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out

⁷³ "Veneration of Images," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, VII, pp. 664, 665.

of the midst of the fire: Lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any beast, . . . any winged fowl, . . . any thing that creepeth, . . . any fish.

Hence, not only does God forbid the idolatrous worship of images or false gods, but he is equally as displeased with the making of graven images of the true God, if such a thing were possible to do!

Observe how the inspired words of Paul reveal that the wrath of God is kindled against those who insist on making such images or representations of the true God:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men . . . because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God. . . . but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four footed beasts, and creeping things. . . . Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more [margin, or, *rather*] than the Creator, who is blessed forever.—Rom. 1:18, 21-23, 25

The second commandment of God, in the all-inclusive manner in which it is stated in the Bible, leaves no room for exceptions or compromise. When all else fails, the only way Catholics really can reconcile it with their practice is by rejecting it altogether with the assertion that it was a Jewish ordinance and is no longer binding upon Christians today:

The clause: ‘Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image,’ etc is clearly not natural law, nor can anyone prove the inherent wickedness of making a graven thing; therefore it is divine positive law of the Old Dispensation that no more applies to Christians . . . It was once for all abrogated by the promulgation of the Gospel.⁷⁴

However, again we must identify this view as a purely human conception which is not supported by Scripture. Jesus said: “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.” (Matt. 5:17) Paul said: “The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, and just, and good.” (Rom. 7:12) We recognize that the Jewish Law consisted of two basic parts—moral and ceremonial. It is true that the carrying out of the ceremonial features has been done away with and is no longer obligatory upon Christians. But the moral features, as represented in the Ten Commandments, continue forever. Surely, what was holy, just, and good in one dispensation does not become modified in another, from God’s eternal viewpoint of what is beneficial to his creatures. Therefore we should not

⁷⁴ “Veneration of Images,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, VII, pp. 670, 671.

try to use such reasoning in an effort to justify the neglect of keeping these straightforward commandments of God.

It is difficult to comprehend how Catholic authorities on the one hand could have such a clear understanding of why God forbade the Israelites to make images, and on the other hand fail to appreciate that the very same reasoning holds true for Christians of today. For example, here is their comment on Exodus 20:3-5, partially referred to earlier:

The people are not only told not to adore images nor serve them; they are not even to make any graven thing or the likeness—it would seem—of anything at all. One could understand so far-reaching a command at that time. If they made statues or pictures, they probably would end by adoring them.⁷⁵

Yes, the recurring facts of Jewish history bear out this supposition. When the Israelites proved unfaithful to God and made various god-images for themselves, they did fall into the error of adoring and worshiping them. But, we ask, is this not exactly what has taken place in Catholic circles also, as admitted by Catholic Scholars? Notice the extremes to which encouraging the veneration of images has led in the past:

One must admit that just before the Iconoclast outbreak, things had gone very far in the direction of image worship. Even then it is inconceivable that anyone, except perhaps the most grossly stupid peasant, could have thought that an image could hear prayers, or do anything for us. And yet the way in which some people treated their holy icons argues more than the merely relative honor that Catholics are taught to observe towards them.

In the first place, images had multiplied to an enormous extent everywhere; the walls of churches were covered inside from floor to roof with icons, . . . they hung in a place of honor in every room, over every shop; they covered cups, garments, furniture, rings; wherever a possible space was found, it was filled with a picture of Christ, our Lady, or a saint. . . . Icons were crowned with garlands, incensed, kissed. Lamps burned before them, hymns were sung in their honor. They were applied to sick persons by contact, set out in the path of a fire or flood to stop it by a sort of magic. In many prayers of this time the natural inference from the words would be that the actual picture is addressed.⁷⁶

Thus fallen man's inclination to adore that which is made by his own hands, instead of the true and living God, is shown to be no less a problem in the Christian dispensation than in the Jewish. Do not these excerpts from the history of catholicism dramatize the same need to heed the commandments

⁷⁵ "Veneration of Images," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, VII, p. 670, 671.

⁷⁶ "Veneration of Images," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, VII, p. 668.

of God along these lines as was in evidence when the divine dealings were more directly with the Israelites?

If history is to be of any value to us today, certainly Christians should profit from the experiences of God's ancient people. Let us recall that it was for this very reason—the making and adoring of graven images—that Israel was cast off from God's favor and scattered into all the world:

When . . . ye shall have remained long in the land, and shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image, or the likeness of anything, and shall do evil in the sight of the Lord thy God, to provoke him to anger: . . . ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land . . . And the Lord shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen.—Deut. 4:25-27

Because of her unfaithfulness, Israel lost the opportunity to become members of the royal priesthood or body of Christ—that select company which God will use in blessing all the nations of earth. The Apostle Paul, in his masterful sermon recorded in the eleventh chapter of Romans, tells us that it was as a result of Israel's fall that the great salvation could come unto the Gentiles. The natural branches of the olive tree were broken off because of unbelief, and wild branches from among the Gentiles were permitted to be grafted in, to partake of the glorious promise made to Abraham.

But notice Paul's grave warning to all who come into this close relationship with God: "If God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off."—Rom. 11:21, 22

Now, then, if the making and venerating of graven images contributed directly to Israel's downfall and prompted the severity of God to descend upon her, what shall we say for Christians engaged in this very same practice today? We simply do not believe it is possible to merit a share of God's goodness and favor if this displeasing practice is continued. Disobedience can lead only to the cutting off which Paul predicted.

Origin of Image Worship

LET us now explore the origin of this practice of venerating pictures and statues in the Christian church. Catholic scholars themselves freely concede that there is no evidence to show that this was engaged in by the Early Church:

For the first period we have no information. There are so few references to images at all in the earliest Christian literature that we

should hardly have suspected their ubiquitous presence were they not actually there in the catacombs as the most convincing argument. But these catacomb paintings tell us nothing about how they were treated. We may take it for granted . . . that the first Christians understood quite well that paintings may not have any share in the adoration due to God alone.⁷⁷

Once again we find the Catholic Church making an appeal to works of art in an effort to establish a doctrine. But we are not supplied with a single scrap of evidence which even implies that these pictures were considered sacred, or that any kind of worship was accorded to them.

The earliest Christians, of course, were of Jewish vintage. They were all thoroughly familiar with the Old Testament and the earlier commandments which God had given their nation. In practicing and propagating their new Christian faith, the furthest thing from their minds would have been to return to the forbidden act of constructing and venerating images. This was what they observed in all the pagan lands around them; this was what their faith in the one true God caused them to reject; and their nonconformity in this respect was one of the chief causes of their persecution.

For those prepared to approach the study of church history in an objective manner, it is a fairly simple matter to determine the attitude of the early Christians toward images. One source writes plainly: "Images were unknown in the worship of the primitive Christians; and this fact was, indeed, made the ground of a charge of atheism on the part of the heathen against the Christians."⁷⁸

Coming to the writings of the Early Church fathers, we find there is no question where they stand on this matter. Throughout the course of the church's development, there were men of God who

. . . feared the ever-growing cult of images and saw in it danger of a return to the old idolatry. We need hardly quote in this connection the invectives of the apostolic fathers against idols (Athenagoras, Theophilus, Minucius Felix, Arnobius, Tertullian, Cyprian) in which they denounce not only the worship, but even the manufacture and possession of such images. . . .

Eusebius of Caesarea (d. A. D. 340), the father of Church history, must be counted among the enemies of icons. . . . They are a 'heathen custom'; he wrote many arguments to persuade Constantine's sister Constantia not to keep a statue of our Lord. A contemporary bishop, Asterius of Amasia, also tried to oppose the spreading tendency. . . . Epiphanius of Salamis (d. A. D. 403), tore down a curtain in a church

⁷⁷ "Veneration of Images," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, VII, p. 667.

⁷⁸ McClintock and Strong, *Cyclopedia*, IV., p. 503.

in Palestine because it had a picture of Christ or a saint. Philostorgius, as late as the fifth century, and Serenus, Bishop of Marseilles, were also prominent in opposing the veneration of images as a Christian practice.⁷⁹

There is also preserved in the historical records an example of an Early Church resolution which was passed in an effort to maintain the purity of the Christian faith and practice:

Canon XXXVI of the Synod of Elvira is important. This was a general synod of the Church of Spain held . . . about the year 300. . . . The canon reads: 'It is ordained that pictures are not to be in churches, so that which is worshiped and adored shall not be painted on walls.'⁸⁰

But the vigorous admonitions of the church fathers and the efforts of various individual churches were powerless to quell the tide surging toward the adoption of images in the church. Again we are faced with the question, if image worship was not a part of the early Christian faith, from where did it emanate? And was the decision to adopt the practice based truly upon Christian principles, or was it merely part of an overall program designed to simplify the conversion of the pagan masses?

In searching for the true origin of image worship, we discover before going very far that here is another area where Catholic scholars find it difficult to avoid confirming a pagan link. Observe, for example, what is said concerning the current Catholic practice of crowning statues and pictures of the Virgin Mary:

The coronation of images is an example of an old and obvious symbolic sign of honor that has become a fixed rite. The Greek pagans offered golden crowns to their idols as specially worthy gifts. St. Irenaeus (d. A. D. 202) already notices that certain Christian heretics crown their images; he disapproves of the practice. . . . The offering of crowns to adorn images became a common practice in the Eastern Churches. . . . At Rome, too, a ceremony evolved out of this pious practice. . . . The Chapter of St. Peter have a right to crown statues and pictures of our Lady since the seventeenth century.⁸¹

What a clear and revealing outline, tracing the development of this practice to its origin! First it was the Greek pagans who delighted in offering gifts to their idols. In the second century certain Christian heretics were observed to have copied the custom, employing images of Christian saints instead of the pagan idols. They were severely reprimanded for doing so

⁷⁹ "Veneration of Images," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, VII, 669.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 670.

by a prominent spokesman of the Early Church. Nevertheless, the custom spread and finally was adopted by the church at large. Today, it is common practice in the Catholic Church and considered a special privilege to crown statues and pictures of the Virgin Mary!

By the fourth century the church had become so thoroughly saturated with pagan customs that the new converts were permitted to continue their old practices under Christian guise:

Philostorgius says that in the fourth century the Christian Roman citizens in the East offered gifts, incense, even prayers (!) to the statues of the emperor. It would be natural that people who bowed to, kissed, incensed the imperial eagles and images of Caesar, . . . should give the same signs to the cross, the images of Christ, and the altar. So . . . there grew up traditions of respect that gradually became fixed, as does all ceremonial. Such practices spread in some measure to Rome and the West, but their home was the Court at Constantinople.⁸²

But it remains for the Catholic scholar Cardinal Newman to make the clearest admission in this regard: “. . . images at a later date . . . are all of pagan origin and sanctified by their adoption into the Church.”⁸³ Some Catholics have even viewed with pride their church’s incorporation of various pagan rites, in the belief that a greater universality is thus expressed.

For our answer to this we turn to the words of our Master, who taught that only truth can sanctify, and in particular, God’s written Word of truth, the Holy Scriptures: “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy Word is truth.” (John 17:17) If we accept Jesus’ testimony, the act of adopting pagan error into the church is seen in its proper light. The mere approval of a religious practice by certain officials of a church does not serve to sanctify it, if it is not also in harmony with God’s will as revealed in the Bible. The Christian church was commissioned to pass on in their purity the eternal truths left by its founder, not to compromise them with pagan error.

Worshipping in Spirit and in Truth

IN bringing this subject to a conclusion, we would like to point out some of the dangers that are present in image worship. First there is always the possibility of confusing the object with what it is supposed to represent. This problem is especially acute among the lesser educated in both Catholic and pagan lands. The Apostle Paul counseled us against falling into this error when he said: “Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device.”—Acts 17:29

Next there is the danger of thinking that the sacred image possesses

⁸² “Veneration of Images,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, VII, p. 667.

⁸³ Cardinal John H. Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, p. 373.

inherent grace or special powers which can benefit the believer. We have already seen the extremes to which this belief led in earlier times. In our own day we are all familiar with the practice of wearing or carrying small images of the saints, considered by many to bring blessings and good fortune. But hear the sober words of the prophet Habakkuk:

What profiteth the graven image that the maker thereof hath graven it; the molten image, and a teacher of lies, that the maker of his work trusteth therein, to make dumb idols? Woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall teach! Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it.—Hab. 2:18, 19

Undoubtedly the greatest danger of all in the practice of venerating images is that it serves to detract from the true worship of the one Almighty God and his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Paul wrote: "To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him." (I Cor. 8:6) The church father Cyprian wrote: "Why do you bow your body captive before foolish images and creations of earth? God made you upright, . . . your countenance is raised upwards to heaven and to God. Look thither, lift your eyes thitherward, seek God in the highest."⁸⁴

Our Lord Jesus himself also described the nature of true worship when he said: "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him." (John 4:23) We have a partial insight into what Jesus meant by this from the words of Clement of Alexandria: "For, in sooth, the image is only dead matter shaped by the craftsman's hand. But we have no sensible image of sensible matter, but an image that is perceived by the mind alone—God, who alone is truly God."⁸⁵ Yes, when we examine Christianity in contrast with heathen religions, we find that it is unique in not requiring idols or images to assist in worship. The Christian's conception of God is not based upon the forms or likenesses which his art is capable of producing. It is a purely mental image which is given life, form, and reality by the revelation of Scripture. It is from a study of God's written word that we perceive the wisdom, justice, love, and power of our God. As shown earlier, the deeper appreciation of God's plans and purposes is revealed to those who humbly ask of him, who have given their lives in consecration to him, and who are granted the guidance of his Holy Spirit.

The true worship of God is based upon faith—faith both in his existence and in his ability to bring to pass all that he has spoken. Faith, by the very definition of the word, does not require pictorial representations or images,

⁸⁴ Vila, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 23.

since it is “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Heb. 11:1) This evidence of the reality of spiritual and heavenly things is provided for us in God’s Word, the Holy Scriptures.

If we have the Bible, and the correct understanding of it as provided by the Holy Spirit, we have all the ingredients necessary to carry out the true worship of God. If we are careful in using this means of grace to exercise our spiritual senses, there will be no need to turn to graven works of art or any other source. Through an appreciation of the character and plan of God, we will desire to render worship which will be acceptable to him, the true worship which is “in spirit and in truth.”—John 4:24

Section XI

Attaining Salvation

How does a Christian gain salvation? The Catholic answer is, “by means of the sacraments.” The sacraments are various ordinances participated in by the faithful under the careful ministration of the church. For the Catholic, they hold a vital place in the belief and ritual of the church, and provide the basic means of bringing salvation within his reach. Let us determine, then, what is meant by a sacrament, how many there are, their individual significance, and the true position they hold in God’s plan of salvation. In developing this subject, we shall entertain the Catholic view first.

The Sacramental Way

THE Council of Trent solemnly defined that there are seven sacraments of the New Law, truly and properly so called, viz., baptism, confirmation, Holy Eucharist, penance, extreme unction, order, and matrimony.”⁸⁶ The first five of these are considered to minister saving grace. “The seven sacraments are intended, in the wisdom of God, to sanctify and assist us in the various conditions and necessities of life. . . . How unfortunate are the people outside the Church who are deprived of them!”⁸⁷

In this brief coverage, while it will not be possible to examine all the detailed teachings regarding the sacraments, sufficient will be mentioned to bring out the main issues. Let us look at the sacraments first in a general way to see how they are designed to impart grace and sustain the Christian from the Catholic point of view.

Through baptism, all stain and defilement of original sin and actual sins committed to that time are washed away and the individual is made a member of the church. Baptism is all important, vitally necessary for salvation, without which one is generally considered to be eternally lost. Confirmation is the rite by which the spiritually young are made strong and vigorous, receive an

⁸⁶ “Sacraments,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, XIII, 299.

⁸⁷ Cassilly, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

infusing of the Holy Spirit, and are enabled to obtain salvation more easily and fully. It is not absolutely necessary, as baptism is, but still important. The Holy Eucharist is the spiritual food for the soul whereby the body, blood, and divinity of Jesus Christ are received. Christ being the source of all graces, it follows that this sacrament bestows a multitude of graces upon the recipient, as well as remitting venial (lesser) sins.

The sacrament of penance restores life and health to the soul of one who has committed sins, especially if they be mortal (major) sins. The state of grace is restored by having the sinner come to the priest and offer contrition (repentance) and confession, and then carry out a work of penance which is called satisfaction. Penance is thus as vital to those who fall into sin as baptism was before they were saved. Extreme unction provides consolation and special grace to die in peace, and restores the vigor of the soul by removing all remaining vestiges of sin. The sacraments of holy orders and matrimony do not minister saving grace, and thus will not be considered here.

Catholics believe, then, that the sacraments have the power of bringing holiness and righteousness to the individual, and that they are the basic means of attaining salvation. It thus becomes possible for the clergy to minister salvation to the faithful through these ordinances of the church. If the recipient is properly disposed, it is believed a measure of saving grace will be conferred upon him every time the sacraments are received, though baptism and confirmation may be received but once.

All will agree that this is indeed an elaborate theological system of salvation, and that it progresses in an orderly fashion from baptism to extreme unction, from birth to death. From the human viewpoint, it is a system not without logic and reason. In our examination of this subject, however, we are not concerned as much with the human point of view as we are with God's viewpoint. The vital question becomes, then, is the sacramental way to salvation God's way? Is it the way which is outlined for us in the Bible, the Word of God?

Which Sacraments?

AS WE come to the Scriptures, the very first surprise we receive is that the word "sacrament" is not used in the Bible at all. We do recognize, however, that there are certain sacred practices which were instituted by Christ, and enjoined upon his followers. We are not as concerned with the particular terms that might be used to describe these observances as we are with identifying what is meant by them and their validity for the church today. Therefore we will be quite content to continue to use the word "sacraments" as we search the pages of both Scripture and church history for enlightenment concerning them.

Though used especially of Baptism and the Eucharist, the application of the term [sacrament] by Christian writers was at first exceedingly loose, for it was taken to describe not only all kinds of religious ceremonies, but even facts and doctrines of the Christian faith. The vagueness of prevailing notions is illustrated . . . by the fact that Hugo of St. Victor (12th century) enumerates about thirty sacraments that had been recognized in the Church.⁸⁸

The use of the word 'sacramentum' in the Western Church from Tertullian to Augustine differs from that in the classic Romish use. . . . In the old Latin Bible . . . the new signification 'mysterious, holy ordinance or thing' was added to the [old] meaning 'oath, sacred obligation.' Accordingly Tertullian already used the word to denote sacred facts, mysterious and salutary signs and vehicles, and also holy acts. Everything in any way connected with the Deity and his revelation, and therefore, the content of revelation as doctrine, is designated 'sacrament'; and the word is also applied to the symbolical which is always something mysterious and holy.⁸⁹

The Council of Trent defined the nature of a sacrament more closely. . . . It further delimited the sacramental area by re-enacting (in 1547) a decision of the Council of Florence (1439) in which effect was for the first time authoritatively given to the suggestion of Peter Lombard (12th century) and other Schoolmen that the number of the sacraments should be fixed at seven. . . . —a suggestion that was evidently influenced by the belief that seven was a sacred number.⁹⁰

Here is where the Catholic system of sacraments shows its first sign of weakness: Although the church maintains that all seven of the sacraments were instituted by Christ, neither the Bible nor the tradition of the church for over a thousand years gives any evidence to substantiate this claim. According to Catholic authorities themselves, it was not until the 12th century that any clear suggestion of seven sacraments was offered, (and this number was not officially adopted until the 15th century!):

According to some writers, Otto of Bamberg (1139) . . . was the first who clearly adopted the number seven. Most probably this honor belongs to Peter Lombard (d. 1164) who . . . defines a sacrament as a sacred sign which not only signifies but also causes grace, and then enumerates the seven sacraments.⁹¹

This vagueness concerning the identity of the sacraments for well over a thousand years of the church's history certainly makes us wonder at the

⁸⁸Dr. James Hastings (ed.), "Sacraments," *Dictionary of the Bible*, IV, 8, 9.

⁸⁹Dr. Adolph Harnack, *History of Dogma*, II, 138, footnote.

⁹⁰Hastings, *op. cit.*

⁹¹"Sacraments," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, XIII, 299.

propriety of selecting seven. What is needed at this point are reliable criteria for establishing the validity of a sacrament and separating it from all other ceremonies of the church, regardless of how suggestive or endearing these may be. The uniqueness that belongs to the sacraments has generally been considered to rest upon Christ's personal appointment of them as such, by his instituting them and leaving them as a charge upon all his followers. The reasonableness of these criteria has led both Catholics and Protestants to accept them as such.

Upon this basis, baptism and the Lord's Supper stand out in bold relief, both in Scripture and in church tradition. For example, in I Corinthians 11:23-25 we find the Apostle Paul quoting the exact words used by Jesus on the night of his betrayal when he instituted the Lord's Supper among his apostles: "The Lord Jesus . . . took bread: and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me." Then also in Matthew 28:19 is recorded one of Jesus' final instructions to his disciples: "Go ye, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

This scriptural emphasis upon two sacraments would seem to justify their segregation from all other church practices, and their having special significance attached to them. The fact that Jesus' own words are intimately bound together with them, and were recorded as such, seems especially indicative. This is not the case, however, for the remaining five rites which Catholics accept as sacraments. According to the Scriptures, these were neither instituted by Christ nor enjoined upon his followers. Catholics are willing to concede that baptism and the Lord's Supper overshadow every other church rite, but are not without explanation for it:

On some sacraments, particularly essential to Christianity, Baptism and Holy Eucharist for example, Christ explained himself completely, so that the Church has had from the very beginning full and entire consciousness of these sacramental rites. As to the rest, the Saviour laid down their essential principles, leaving to development to show the Apostles and the Church what the Divine Master wished to accomplish.⁹²

It is rather difficult to believe that such a vital matter as the sacraments would not have been fixed by our Lord once and for all, instead of leaving it a matter of confusion for century after century, as scholars of the church expressed their differing views on it. Once an attempt is made to go beyond the two basic sacraments, no longer are the accepted criteria being adhered

⁹²Dr James Hastings (ed.), "Confirmation," *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, IV, 8.

to, and the basis for separating one practice from another has been lost. To settle upon the number of seven, then, appears completely arbitrary, for once baptism and the Lord's Supper are bypassed, it is not possible to proceed on any known principle that would produce a given number.

As we shall now see, the selection of confirmation, penance, extreme unction, holy orders, and matrimony as official sacraments comparable to baptism and the Lord's Supper was dependent upon the human reasoning of church scholars. It represented a gradual process which required hundreds of years to crystalize into final form. At best, it must be conceded that the disciples of Jesus, the Early Church, and even the church of the early Middle Ages, were without the knowledge or benefit of them. To bear this out, consider the following references written either by Catholic authorities or faithfully representing that point of view:

Although Trent teaches that Confirmation, like all the other Sacraments, was instituted by Christ, nothing is positively laid down concerning the manner of that institution. . . . It would be readily conceded that, in the case of such a Sacrament as Confirmation, the historical evidence is in some respects imperfect and obscure. The Church does not claim to clear up all the dark passages, but she claims to supplement by supernatural guidance and theological reasoning. . . . The doctrine is clearly enunciated at least as early as the middle of the 12th century.⁹³

"The Sacrament of Confirmation is a striking instance of the development of doctrine and ritual in the Church."⁹⁴

Of the earliest history of the Sacrament of Penance very little, is known. By the third century, there had emerged a developed system of public Penance, . . . [Later] a new system was developed through the influence of Celtic or Anglo-Saxon monk-missionaries. . . . This differed from the earlier system, . . . but the Penance remained public, long, and arduous. . . . Absolution . . . was withheld until completion of the Penance. Gradually it was pushed back until it was granted on confession and before the Penance was begun. From this developed the 'private Penance' of today, with its confession, absolution, and light formal penance. The private Penance received its charter at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), which required every Christian to confess his sins in Penance at least once a year.⁹⁵

For the convenient and public regular exercise of penance there have been introduced, not earlier than the sixteenth century, among

⁹³ Dr James Hastings (ed.), "Confirmation," *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, IV, , 9.

⁹⁴ "Confirmation," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, IV, 217

⁹⁵ F. L. Cross (ed.), "Penance," *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p.1041.

the furniture of the Roman Catholic churches confessionals, either movable or immovable.⁹⁶

The following excerpts pertain to the rite of extreme unction:

When the anointing of the sick came to be looked upon principally as a preparation for death, it received this name, which properly means the last of the unctions' . . . The name is not found before the end of the 12th century; it appears first in Peter Lombard; after that it became common. But the idea itself is found in the 10th century, in Aelfric. We find frequent directions on the subject in the [later] Middle Ages.⁹⁷

Owing to the comparative paucity of extant testimonies from the early centuries relating to this sacrament, Catholic theologians habitually recur to the general argument from prescription. . . . As to the actual paucity of early testimonies, various explanations have been offered. . . . It should finally be premised that in stating the argument from tradition, a larger place must be allowed for the principle of development than theologians of the past were in the habit of allowing.⁹⁸

From the pen of her own scholars, then, we note the inconsistency of the Catholic Church's teaching regarding the origin of the sacraments. Instead of seven sacraments stemming from Christ, five are seen to owe their existence to gradual development within the church. More than this, we are even given a hint of the source of this development, which immediately leads us to suspect the entire basis of reasoning underlying these added sacraments: "Scholastic writers of the 13th century introduced into their explanations of the sacraments terms which were derived from the philosophy of Aristotle."⁹⁹ And so again we have forcibly brought to our attention the extent of the intermingling of paganism with Catholic thought and doctrine.

Grace for the Soul

HERE is an even more important aspect of this subject. What is the correct depth of meaning which we should attach to the sacraments? Let us begin with Augustine's brief definition, the classic in Catholic circles: "A Sacrament is a sign of a sacred thing," or "signs pertaining to things Divine."¹⁰⁰ Perhaps it was the brevity of this definition and the fame of its author which contributed heavily to the confusion of ideas for many hundreds of years, and for a time led to the adoption of about thirty sacraments. Through the centuries, modifications were suggested and hotly

⁹⁶ Dr. James Hastings (ed.), "Penance," *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, IX, 714.

⁹⁷ Dr. James Hastings (ed.), "Extreme Unction," *Dictionary of the Bible*, XII, 513.

⁹⁸ "Extreme Unction," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, V, 718-719.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, "Sacraments," XIII, 298.

¹⁰⁰ Dr. James Hastings (ed.), "Sacraments," *Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 810.

debated by church theologians, leading finally to the currently accepted form:

“According to the teaching of the Catholic Church . . . the sacraments of the Christian dispensation are not mere signs; they do not merely signify Divine grace, but in virtue of their Divine institution, they cause that grace in the souls of men.”¹⁰¹ Again, “The sacraments not only signify grace—they give it; that is, when rightly used they move God infallibly to confer it upon the soul.”¹⁰² Let us determine if these concepts are based upon the teachings of the Bible.

The word “grace” is used many, many times in the New Testament. Its primary meaning is the unmerited favor of God. For example, we read, “God; who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus.” We . . . beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.” (II Tim. 1:8, 9; II Cor. 6:1) The Heavenly Father is the Author of this grace, and his Son Christ Jesus is the means by which it is conveyed to us: “God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to [“in,” *Diaglott*] every good work.” “Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.”—II Cor. 9:8; John 1:17

Is there any scriptural basis for the belief that the sacraments have the power of causing that grace within the soul? Is God unalterably moved to grant his divine favor whenever the sacraments are received? Surprising as it may seem, nowhere in the Bible is there found even so much as a hint of this belief. What, then, does the Bible teach concerning saving grace and the way in which it may be obtained?

In Romans 3:23, 24, we read, “Being justified freely by his [God’s] grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” Three related things are mentioned in this text: Justification, God’s grace, and the redemption which is in Christ. The grace or unmerited favor of God results in the believer’s being justified—considered perfect in the sight of the Father. This standing of perfection was made possible by the sacrifice of Christ, when upon Calvary’s cross he died as the ransom price. There he stood in the place of Adam and the entire human race represented in him, willingly receiving the condemnation of God in their stead. There redemption was provided for all desiring to accept it. Well do the Scriptures state: “We indeed esteemed him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. Yet he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement for our peace was upon him; and through his bruises was healing granted to us.”—Isa. 53:4, 5, *Leeser*

¹⁰¹ “Sacraments”, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, XIII, 296.

¹⁰² Cassilly, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

By exercising faith in Jesus' sacrifice and his efficacy to save, the believer may freely receive the Father's grace and have his shortcomings covered by the merit of the blood of Jesus. Through this one act of faith, all original sin is at once forgiven: "Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past." (Rom. 3:24, 25) Not only this, all personal sin is also covered by faith in the precious blood: "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."—I John 1:7

It is this act of faith on the believer's part, rather than the performance of any specific rite or ceremony, which is all-important, and entitles him to receive this wonderful outpouring of grace: "Our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand." (Rom. 5:1, 2) Notice how this same thought is repeated in Philippians 3:9, where Paul discusses the condition of righteousness (justification) which is of God: that righteousness "which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."

What stress on faith! Not even a mention of the sacraments! How clearly the Scriptures teach that grace proceeds from the Father through the Son by individual faith, and belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, Ransomer, and Redeemer.

What, then, is the true role of the sacraments? If grace comes through faith, and faith by the (written) Word of God, does this minimize the need for the sacraments? The difficulty here arises from an improper understanding of the purpose for which the sacraments were given. Scripturally, we believe that the sacraments were intended to be beautiful symbols of the sacrifice of Christ and of the complete consecration of the believer to do the will of God. We will endeavor to illustrate this in the discussion of both baptism and the Lord's Supper, yet to follow. For now, we would like to sum up the Protestant position on the sacraments, based upon the New Testament teachings:

Grace, in the proper sense, is no quality inhering in man . . . but a disposition of God toward man, i.e., God's favor shown man without merit on man's part. The grace of God reaches man through a promise, and that promise is apprehended only by faith. . . . The Pauline doctrine of justification [is] an act of God with reference to man, . . . [not] wrought within man, in a continuous, gradual process, by the infusion of grace, through the sacraments. The value of the sacrament [is] placed solely in its communication of the word of grace, to be apprehended by the intelligence of the subject, and appropriated by faith.

The grace, therefore, offered and received in the sacraments in no way differs from that offered and received in hearing and reading the Word. The promise of the sacraments is the very same as is offered in the Word without the sacraments. The necessity of the Word is absolute;

without it there is no salvation; that of the sacraments is relative. We are bound to them because God has instituted and enjoined them."¹⁰³

How unfortunate that high Catholic officials have not examined the Bible afresh, and endeavored to harmonize the teachings of Paul with their church's dogma! Instead of this, there is only the Council of Trent's sweeping condemnation of all who adhere to the foregoing view:

If any one say that the sacraments of the New Law do not contain the grace which they signify, or that they do not confer grace on those who place no obstacle to the same, let him be anathema. If any one say that grace is not conferred by the sacraments *ex opere operato*, but that faith in God's promises is alone sufficient for obtaining grace, let him be anathema.¹⁰⁴

Here we let the matter rest to the honest judgment of our readers. May we keep in mind the counsel of Paul in his appropriate words: "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the [scriptural] doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."—I Tim. 4:16

A Living Faith

WE ARE glad that both Catholics and Protestants are in agreement upon the fundamental importance of faith in the life of a Christian. It makes the believer. It separates him from the world at large which does not believe in God, spiritual things, or the Bible. As we shall see, it stems from God as a free gift, but it is accepted only by a few.

To Catholics, faith does not lead directly to salvation, however. This faith must be directed to the power of the church which acts as God's channel in providing the graces necessary for salvation. Only through the church may the sacraments be received, and only by following her systematic instructions may merits be gained and good works multiplied. And after all is said and done in conformity to the prescribed ritual, has the desired salvation been attained? Unfortunately, according to Catholic doctrine, at no point in the earthly life of the believer is it possible to know with assurance, beyond any reasonable doubt, that he has been saved. There are just too many contingencies, too many uncertainties, too many sins that may not have been fully expiated.

In contrast, we would like to present the plain teachings of the Bible, which show that faith in Jesus Christ, accompanied by the fruitage of the Holy Spirit, leads directly to salvation and the full assurance of it: "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." "Therefore being justified by

¹⁰³ Dr. James Hastings (ed.), "Sacraments," *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, X, 909-910.

¹⁰⁴ "Sacraments," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, XIII, 297.

faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand.”—Eph. 2:8, 9; Rom. 5:1, 2

The Scriptures teach that Jesus Christ, “by the grace of God . . . taste[d] death for every man.” (Heb. 2:9) Upon the basis of simple faith in this ransom sacrifice, every believer is now released from all condemnation and guilt of sin, both original and individual. We read, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” (Rom. 8:1) First and foremost, the church’s justification is brought about by faith. By exercising this faith in the efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice and atonement for sin, the believer can obtain an absolute assurance of salvation—no mere hope or guessing about it.

A faith that is alive and active will permeate every aspect of the Christian’s life. All his thoughts, his words, and his actions will be regulated by it. The true Christian’s faith is not a one-day-a-week affair. It will find means of expressing itself each and every day, to the praise of God and to the benefit of all that are brought in contact with it. “As it is written, The just shall live by faith.”—Rom. 1:17

Here is cause for reflection. It is not attendance at church services, the careful receiving of the sacraments, the pious repetition of certain prayers, the learning of the catechism, or even the reading of the Bible which is meritorious in God’s sight. It is faith in his Word, faith in his plan, and faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, which pleases God. It is this simple act of faith which brings the grace or unmerited favor of God to us, rather than any ordinances or prescriptions of the church.

During the Millennial Age, when the kingdom of God is established upon earth, this same faith will be required of all mankind. Without faith it will not be possible to receive the gracious provisions for everlasting life which were made in Jesus Christ: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”—John 3:16

With faith, it will be possible for all who manifest obedience to receive “the gift of God [which] is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Rom. 6:23) As mankind exercises faith in Jesus as its Redeemer, it will receive the saving and healing merit of his sacrifice. The whole world will then be justified to life as is the church class now. However, since the circumstances will then be more favorable for responding to God, the rewards of obedience will be correspondingly less than for the church.

Perhaps some of our readers who appreciate the fundamental importance of faith would have some difficulty in accepting this approach, which places its value above the authority of the church. And perhaps a word of caution is necessary to prevent a misunderstanding of the simplicity of the scriptural

teaching. For example, let us turn to the account of the conversion of the “keeper of the prison,” found in Acts 16:19-34. Paul and Silas, who had been unjustly imprisoned, were released miraculously by an earthquake, which also instilled godly fear in the “jailor.” This man fell down before Paul and Silas, saying, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”—vss.29-31

Based on the foregoing, the question might be raised, can man be saved merely by such a simple act of faith as this? Does it not seem incredible that God would justify such an one rather than the devout man who obediently follows prescribed works of devotion and religious exercises? To help us at this point, we should look a little more closely at the words “faith” and “belief” to determine the depth of meaning that they were meant to convey, and their import in the life of the Christian.

“Faith” is an assurance and a conviction regarding the spiritual truths revealed in the Bible that comes to us apart from any physical senses, and which cannot be demonstrated along material lines. As we have seen, it stems from God, and is freely bestowed upon those desiring to have it. When received, it accomplishes a work of transformation that permeates every avenue of life, so that the demeanor and actions of an individual become a more reliable barometer of faith than his confessions of it.

Yes, believing in the Lord Jesus Christ entails far more than many people have generally thought—much more than a mere confession of faith and trust. The word “believe” as it is used throughout most of the New Testament is a translation of the Greek word, *pisteuo*, meaning “to adhere to, to trust, and to rely on.”¹⁰⁵ If one really relies upon the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior, trusts him, clings to him, and is convinced of the truthfulness of his teaching, what a change will be wrought in his life! Upon conversion, such a believer no longer lives to self, but renounces self-will and gladly dedicates his life to doing the will of God. For him, Jesus’ words become the keynote of his entire life: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.”—Matt. 16:24

Thus seen, the simple scriptural declarations that faith and belief in Christ lead directly to assurances of salvation take on added meaning. In the Amplified Version, the preceding account of Paul and Silas is translated as follows:

Men, what is it necessary for me to do that I may be saved? And they answered, Believe in and on the Lord Jesus Christ—that is, give yourself up to him, take yourself out of your own keeping and entrust yourself into his keeping, and you will be saved. . . . And they declared the Word of the Lord [that is, the doctrine concerning the attainment

¹⁰⁵ Dr. Robert Young, “Believe,” *Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, p. 86.

through Christ of eternal salvation in the kingdom of God] to him.

John 3:16 is rendered thus: "For God so greatly loved and dearly prized the world that he [even] gave up his only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in (trusts, clings to, relies on) him may not perish—come to destruction, be lost—but have eternal [everlasting] life." Be it noted that this is the kind of belief spoken of and required in the Bible—relying intimately upon the Savior and laying down life itself in his service. This is the mature faith which leads to justification to life and peace with God—quite a difference from a mere nominal expression of belief!

Works Pleasing to God

FAITH and good works, we believe, go hand in hand. It is faith in the redemptive merit of Christ's sacrifice that opens the door to God's grace. It is a life of dedication and service to God that permits the believer to continue to bask in the sunshine of his favor. By rendering works acceptable to him, he can demonstrate the sincerity and depth of his faith. James wrote, "Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. . . . By works a man is justified, and not by faith only." (James 2:17, 24) This naturally raises the question, what are the works which are pleasing and acceptable to God?

According to Catholic theology, the three eminent good works are prayer, fasting, and alms-deeds. "Prayer in this connection embraces all kinds of prayer, the prayer of petition, of praise and of thanksgiving; mental as well as vocal prayer. Fasting here includes all works of penance and self-denial; alms-giving, all deeds of mercy."¹⁰⁶

A person is considered to be perfect in his state of life when he:

Practices its virtues to a high degree; is very careful to avoid all deliberate venial sin; and keeps his passions under control. . . . Absolute perfection, however, is not attainable in this world, for even very holy persons have their faults and limitations. . . . We must never be satisfied with the holiness we have attained, but aim at still further perfection. . . . The short road to perfection is to imitate Jesus Christ in all our actions. . . . We imitate Christ when we endeavor to perform our actions as we think he would perform them were he in our place.¹⁰⁷

These are noble sentiments, and, as far as they go, we find ourselves in agreement with them. We are so glad that Catholics and Protestants alike may look to their Master and Head for guidance in all matters. This agrees with the Scriptures which state: "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith. . . . For

¹⁰⁶ Cassilly, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself." "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."—Heb. 12:1-3; Phil. 2:5

First and foremost, then, the Christian is to develop character which will be a reflection of God's own attributes and those of his dear Son. Paul vividly compares these desirable works of the Spirit with the despicable works of fallen flesh in Galatians 5:16-26:

For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other. . . . Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections [margin, or, *passions*] and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Peter also tells us how the Christian may live victoriously in this life and ensure his receiving an abundant entrance into the kingdom of heaven:

Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly-kindness; and to brotherly-kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren [margin, Gr., *idle*] nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . Brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.—II Pet. 1:5-11

Character building is a lifetime work. But along with it there are other responsibilities for the Christian. He is to be concerned with advancing the cause of truth and proclaiming the message of the coming kingdom of God. This is in harmony with Jesus' command to preach the Gospel "in all the world for a witness unto all nations" (Matt. 24:14) as "ambassadors for Christ." (II Cor. 5:20) His special work in this connection is to participate in the "ministry of reconciliation" (II Cor. 5:18), calling out from among the nations the "people for his [God's] name" (Acts 15:14), "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I [Christ] have commanded you." (Matt. 28:20) This is the same work, we remember, which so thrilled the hearts of the early followers of the Master, and moved them to such zeal and courage in his service.

What a privilege it is to point men to God! What joy it brings to tell others the good tidings of the coming kingdom, when all shall know the Lord, from the least unto the greatest! (Jer. 31: 34) For every saint of God, for every member of the true church, here is a spiritual ministry sorely needed by the world. All humanity is groaning and travailing in pain, weighted down by the heavy load of sin, sickness, sorrow, and death. How desperately they need to be told of the blessed Savior who died for them!

How urgently they need the peace and the comfort and the assurances which only the true knowledge of God as found in the Bible can bring!

Like the early followers of the Master, Christians who have been enlightened by the Spirit of God are motivated to do good unto all men as the opportunity arises, but especially unto them that are of the household of faith. (Gal. 6:10) It is a very special privilege to minister to fellow believers, encouraging, assisting, and edifying one another to establish themselves and build each other up in the most holy faith. Paul wrote, "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained."—I Tim. 4:6

At this point the question might be raised, do the good works such as have been enumerated earn or merit grace from God? Catholics answer in the affirmative, believing that "sanctifying grace is preserved and increased in the soul by all good works, especially by prayer. Our degree of glory in heaven will be in proportion to the amount of sanctifying grace we possess at death."¹⁰⁸ The term "sanctifying grace" is defined as that which "cleanses us from sins, makes us holy, pleasing to God and heirs of heaven."¹⁰⁹

We believe our understanding of this would be clarified by retaining the simplicity of the Scriptures. Grace pertains to the unmerited favor of God which is granted to man. As already shown, this grace was made operative by the sacrifice of Christ and reaches man only by the exercise of faith in that sacrifice. But do not good works tend to increase that grace? We would prefer to say that good works help to retain that position of favor in God's sight when performed as a result of, and in conjunction with, a mature faith. Wherever there is deep faith there will also be found good works to accompany it; the two mutually supplement each other, going hand in hand. It is the combination of the two which makes possible the continuous enjoyment of the grace of God.

Is there nothing, then, that may be earned by the good works of a believer? Yes, we believe there is something! Remember, we found that salvation could be gained by faith as an inheritance in this life. In contrast, we might think of rewards as being earned now by good works, yet not received until after this present life has been completely consumed in sacrifice to God. To

¹⁰⁸ Cassilly, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

those who suffer for righteousness' sake, to those who constantly do good to others, to those who are diligent in the Father's service, the Bible says: "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven."—Matt. 5:12; Luke 6:35

In the Next Age

SO FAR all the good works we have been considering have been in relation to the church class during this present Gospel Age. Let us turn now to the Millennial Age, when God's kingdom is established upon the earth. What are the works which will be required of humanity when the dead shall be raised and the church will be reigning over the earth?—Rev. 5:10

It is in this period that some of the most tremendous promises of the Bible shall be fulfilled. Wars are to cease (Micah 4:1-5); poverty is to be abolished, along with fear of oppression (Isa. 65: 21-23); sickness and death are to be removed (Isa. 33:24; Rev. 21:4); and joy and happiness are to reign in every heart. (Isa. 35:10) What a thrilling prospect for the inhabitants of every land, as they are awakened in the general resurrection of the dead!—Acts 24:15

When this divine program for blessing all the families of the earth goes into operation, how the attitudes and hearts of men will be changed! (Gen. 12:3; 22:15-18) The very impact of having life restored in the resurrection, and awakening in a society ruled by Jesus Christ and his church, will cause many of the redeemed ones to seek righteousness. Numerous opportunities will present themselves to help their fellow-men and thereby to demonstrate their good works. Love for all, as exemplified in the golden rule—doing unto others as you would have them do unto you (Matt. 7:12; 19:19)—will be the standard. Those who meet it will find themselves developing in the fruits and graces of the Spirit and growing in the favor of God.

Many scriptures inform us of the rigid requirements and the general results of the divine law then in operation: "All kings shall fall down before him [Christ]: all nations shall serve him, . . . and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed." (Ps. 72:11, 17) "Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet." (Isa. 28:17) "When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness."—Isa. 26:9

The pathway of obedience to the laws of the kingdom will be made very plain, so much so that everyone will be able to understand: "And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein." (Isa. 35:8) Also, at long last the shadow of Satan's deceptive influences shall be restrained, "that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should he fulfilled."—Rev. 20:3

Understandably, with all stones of stumbling removed from the pathway of harmony with God, the penalty of disobeying him and the righteous laws of his kingdom will be very severe:

A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear [listen to and understand by hearing and heed—Amplified Version] that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.” (Acts 3:22, 23)

This prophet will be Christ during the kingdom age, the word “prophet” here meaning teacher or public expounder.¹¹⁰

Those who disobey him—probably relatively few in number—will constitute the incorrigible class of mankind, who are to be punished by permanent extinction of life—the second death: “The fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.”—Rev. 21:8

Under the favorable circumstances for learning the ways of righteousness, the great majority of people will choose to obey God. From their bitter experiences with the results of disobedience—sickness, suffering, and death—they will be in a position to recognize the benefits accruing from accepting God’s way. By yielding themselves to the uplifting and righteous influences of the kingdom, they will gradually lose all vestige of the selfishness and sin remaining in their hearts. At the close of the Millennium they will have been regenerated to the original mental and moral likeness of their Creator, and perfect physical bodies will also have been restored. Then they will both desire to obey God and have the perfect ability of doing so.

¹¹⁰ Young, “Prophet,” *op. cit.*, p. 781.

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