

# Roman Catholicism

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## Part 3

# THE PRIESTHOOD

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### 1. THE OFFICE OF THE PRIEST

The office or work of the priest is perhaps the most difficult to present and the least understood of any part of the Christian system. In the Old Testament the work of Christ was prefigured under the three offices of prophet, priest, and king. Each of these was given special prominence in the nation of Israel. Each was designed to set forth a particular phase of the work of the coming Redeemer, and each was filled, not by men who voluntarily took the work upon themselves, but only by those who were divinely called to the work.

The prophet was appointed to be God's spokesman to the people, revealing to them His will and purpose for their salvation. The priest was appointed to represent the people before God, to offer sacrifices for them and to intercede with God on their behalf. And the king was appointed to rule over the people, to defend them and to restrain and conquer all His and their enemies. In the present study we are concerned only with the priesthood.

The essential idea in priesthood is that of a mediator between God and man. In his fallen estate man is a sinner, guilty before God, and alienated from Him. He has no right of approach to God, nor does he have the ability, or even the desire, to approach Him. Instead, he wants to flee from God, and to have nothing to do with Him. He is, therefore, helpless until some one undertakes to act as his representative before God.

In ancient Israel the priests performed three primary duties: they ministered in the sanctuary before God, offering sacrifices to Him on behalf of the people; they taught the people the law of God; and they inquired for the people concerning the divine will. Under the old covenant the men who held the offices of prophet, priest, or king were only shadows or types of the great Prophet, the great Priest, and the great King who was to come. With the coming of Christ each of these offices found its fulfilment in Him. And with the accomplishment of His work of redemption, each of these offices, as it functioned on the human level, reached its fulfilment and was abolished. As regards the priesthood, Christ alone is now our Priest, our one and only High Priest. He fulfils that office in that He once offered up Himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, thereby making unnecessary and putting an end to all other sacrifices. He paid the debt for the sin of His people, and so opened the way for renewed fellowship between them and God. And as the risen and exalted Saviour of His people He intercedes effectually for them with God the Father.

All of this is clearly set forth by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews who in the ninth

chapter says that ‘Christ having come a high priest of the good things to come, through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation, nor yet through the blood of goats and calves, but through his own blood, entered in once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption’ (vs. ii. 12); that we are redeemed through ‘the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish unto God’ (v. 14); that ‘Christ entered not into a holy place made with hands, like in pattern to the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear before the face of God for us’ (v. 24); that ‘now once at the end of the ages hath he been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself (v. 26); and in 8: 1, 2, that ‘We have such a high priest, who sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man.’

Thus under the figure of Israel’s sacrificing priesthood, particularly through the figure of the high priest who entered into the holy of holies on the day of atonement with blood that had been offered, we are shown that Christ, who is our High Priest, has entered into the heavenly sanctuary with the merits of His atoning sacrifice, that its atoning and cleansing power may be constantly applied to all who put their trust in Him.

In accordance with this New Testament change in the priesthood, through which the old order of ritual and sacrifice which prefigured the atoning work of Christ has been fulfilled and Christ alone has become our true High Priest, the human priesthood as a distinct and separate order of men has fulfilled its function and has been abolished. Furthermore, all born-again believers, having now been given the right of access to God through Christ their Saviour, and being able to go directly to God in prayer and so to intercede for themselves and others, themselves become priests unto God. For these are the functions of a priest. This we term the *universal priesthood of believers*. And this is the distinctive feature of Protestantism as regards the doctrine of the priesthood.

‘Ye also,’ says Peter, ‘as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. . . . Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession’ (1 Peter 2: 5, 9). In making that statement Peter was not addressing a priestly caste, *but all true believers*, as is shown by the fact that his epistle was addressed to Jewish Christians who were scattered throughout the various nations, ‘sojourners of the Dispersion’ (1: 1), even to those who are as ‘newborn babes’ in the faith (2: 2). And in Revelation 1: 5—6, John, writing to the seven churches in Asia, says: ‘Unto him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by his blood: and he made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father.’

The sacrifices offered by the Christian in the exercise of this priesthood are not for sin, as professedly are those of the Roman Catholic mass. Christ offered the true and only sacrifice for sin, *once for all*. His sacrifice was perfect. When He had completed His work

of redemption upon the cross and was ready to give up His spirit, He said, 'It is finished' (John 19: 30). With His sacrifice God was fully satisfied. It therefore does not need to be repeated, nor supplemented nor modified in any way.

The sacrifices offered by the Christian are termed 'spiritual,' and they relate to worship and service. First, there is the sacrifice of praise: 'Through him then let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of lips which make confession in his name' (Heb. 13: 15). This offering of thanks and praise to God in worship, which expresses the gratitude of the heart, is an acceptable offering. Second, there is the sacrifice offered through our gifts, as our substance is given for the support of God's work. He has declared that it is His pleasure to receive such gifts when they are given willingly and with pure motives: 'But to do good and to communicate forget not [i.e., sharing with others, helping those who are in need]; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased' (Heb. 13: 16). And third, there is the offering of ourselves, our bodies, our lives, in Christian service: 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service' (Rom. 12: 1). Furthermore, we are sons of God through faith in Christ (1 John 3: 1—2). As no longer servants but sons in His family, we have direct access to Him as our Father and no longer need the mediation of any order of human priests. To depend upon such priestly mediation is by that much to return to Judaism and to introduce an element of apostasy into Christianity.

Thus the New Testament sets forth a new and different kind of priesthood: first, Christ, the true High Priest, who is in heaven; and second, the universal priesthood of believers, through which they offer the 'spiritual' sacrifices of praise, of gifts, and of themselves in Christian service. It thereby repudiates the pretentious claims of the Roman priesthood, which would perpetuate the Jewish priesthood, and limit it to a few chosen men who are set apart from the laity, who profess to offer literal sacrifices in the mass, and who supposedly are nearer to God than are other men.

Every believer now has the inexpressibly high privilege of going directly to God in prayer, without the mediation of any earthly priest, and of interceding for himself and for others. We are told: 'Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you' (Matt. 7: 7); 'If ye shall ask anything of the Father, he will give it you in my name' (John 16: 23); 'Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved' (Acts 2: 21).

The believer approaches God not in his own merits but only through the merits of Christ who has made a perfect sacrifice for him. It is precisely at this point that the Roman Catholic fails to see God's true way of salvation; for he thinks that man still must approach God as in Old Testament times through a priest, or now perhaps through Mary or some saint whose merits can avail for him. But Paul says, 'By grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the *gift of God*' (Eph. 2: 8). Christians have, by virtue

of their union with Christ, free access to God at all times. This right is one of the finest things in the Christian faith, and it is a present possession. Yet Rome would rob us of this privilege and would interpose her priests and dead saints between the soul and God. Rome's teaching and practice is heresy, for in many places the Bible invites us to come to God through Christ, without any reference to priests or other intercessors.

The Bible teaches that 'There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ' (1 Tim. 2: 5). The Church of Rome teaches that there are many mediators, the priests, Mary, a host of saints, and the angels, and that it is right and proper to pray to them. But to any Spirit-taught priest in the Church of Rome it must become more and more apparent that Christ is the only true Priest, the only true Mediator, and that in serving as a priest, in pretending to offer the sacrifice of the mass and to forgive sins, he is merely acting the part of an impostor.

## **2. NO NEW TESTAMENT AUTHORITY FOR A HUMAN PRIESTHOOD**

The really decisive answer to all theories concerning a human priesthood is found in the New Testament itself. There we are taught that the priesthood, along with the other elements of the old dispensation, including the sacrificial system, the ritual, the Levitical law, and the temple, has served its purpose and has passed away. With the coming of Christ and the accomplishment of redemption through His work, the entire Old Testament legalistic and ritualistic system which had prefigured it became obsolete and passed away as a unit. It is highly inconsistent for the Roman Church to retain the priesthood while discarding the other elements of that system.

An enlightening article that appeared in the *Chicago Lutheran Theological Seminary Record*, July, 1952, has this to say about the priesthood:

'The writers of the New Testament had two separate words for *elder* and *priest*. They do not mean the same thing at all, and the New Testament never confuses them. It never says *presbuteros*, elder, when it means *priest*. The New Testament word for priest is *hiereus*. In Greek, from Homer down, this word had a singular meaning. It meant a man appointed, or consecrated, or otherwise endowed with power to perform certain technical functions of ritual worship, especially to offer acceptable sacrifices, and to make effectual prayers. Likewise in the Septuagint *hiereus* is the regular if not invariable translation of the Old Testament *kohen* and *kahen*, the only Hebrew word for priest. It occurs more than 400 times in the Old Testament in this sense. In the New Testament *hiereus* always means priest, never means elder. There is not anywhere in the New Testament the shadow of an allusion to a Christian priest in the ordinary sense of the word, that is, a man qualified as over against others not qualified for the special function of offering sacrifices, making priestly intercessions, or performing any other act which only a priest can perform. The Epistle to the Hebrews attributed both priesthood and high-priesthood to Christ and to Him alone. The argument of the Epistle not only indicates that a Christian priesthood was unknown to the writer, but that such priesthood is unallowable. It is to Jesus only that Christians look as to a priest. He has performed perfectly and permanently the function of a priest for all believers. His priesthood, being perfect and eternal, renders a continuous human priesthood both needless and anachronistic.'

Paul enumerates the different kinds of ministers and agents in the Christian church, and the office of priest is not among them: ‘And he gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers’ (Eph. iv: 2). And again, ‘And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers. . . .’ (1 Cor. 12 :28). There is never any mention of priests. The only mediatorial priesthood recognized in the New Testament is that of Christ, the great High Priest, and to Him alone is the title ‘priest’ (*hiereus*) given: ‘Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek’ (Heb. 7:17); ‘But he, because he abideth for ever, hath his priesthood unchangeable. Wherefore also he is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such a high priest became us, holy, guiltless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people; for this he did *once for all*, when he offered up himself’ (Heb. 7: 24-27). ‘For by *one offering* he hath perfected *for ever* them that are sanctified’ (Heb. 10: 14).

Since the priesthood occupied such an important place in the Old Testament dispensation and in the thinking of the Jewish people, it is inconceivable that had it been continued in the New Testament dispensation God would have made no mention of it at all—how priests were to be chosen, and ordained, and how they were to carry out their functions in this radically different dispensation. The fact of the matter is that the Old Testament priesthood was the human, Aaronistic priesthood, and that by its very nature it was, like the sacrificial system and the elaborate temple worship of which it was a part, a temporary affair, a mere shadow and prefigurement of the reality that was to come. And so, with the coming of Christ and the establishment of His priesthood, it fell away, as the stars fade before the rising sun, and as the petals fall away before the developing fruit. The priesthood as an order of clergy has been abolished.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews several chapters are devoted to showing that the Old Testament priesthood has been abolished, that there is no place in Christianity for a sacrificing priesthood, because Christ, ‘through his own blood, entered in *once for all* into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption,’ and that He has offered ‘*one sacrifice for sins for ever*’ (9: 12; 10: 12). The many human priests with their innumerable animal sacrifices were effective in their work of reconciling the people to God only because they represented the true High Priest and the one true sacrifice that was to come. But after the reality appeared there was no more need for the shadows and types that had preceded it. Hence we read concerning the sacrifice of Christ: ‘But now *once* at the end of the ages hath he been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself’ (Heb. 9 :26); and again: ‘We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Christ *once for all*’ (Heb. 10: 10).

The sacrifice of Christ was therefore a ‘once for all’ sacrifice which only He could

make, and which cannot be repeated. By its very nature it was final and complete. It was a work of Deity, and so cannot be repeated by man any more than can the work of creation. By that one sacrifice the utmost demands of God's justice were fully and forever satisfied. Final atonement has been accomplished. No further order of priests is needed to offer additional sacrifices or to perpetuate that one. His was the one sacrifice to end all sacrifices. Let all men now look to that one sacrifice on Calvary! Any continuing priesthood and any 'unbloody repetition of the mass,' which professes to offer the same sacrifice that Christ offered on Calvary, is in reality merely a sham and a recrudescence of Judaism within the Christian Church.

The abolition of the priestly caste which through the old dispensation stood between God and man was dramatically illustrated at the very moment that Christ died on the cross. When He cried, 'It is finished,' a strange sound filled the temple as the veil that separated the sanctuary from the holy of holies was torn from top to bottom. The ministering priests found themselves gazing at the torn veil with wondering eyes, for God's own hand had removed the curtain and had opened the way into the holy of holies, symbolizing by that act that no longer did man have to approach Him through the mediation of a priest, other than Christ Jesus, but that the way of access to Him is now open to all.

But the veil which had been torn by the hand of God was patched up again by priestly hands, and for forty years, until the fall of Jerusalem, sacrifices continued to be offered in a restored temple service, and in Judaism the veil continued to stand between God and men. In our day the Roman priesthood has again patched up the veil. Through the use of spurious sacraments, the sacrifice of the mass, the confessional, indulgences, and other such priestly instruments it insists on keeping in place the curtain that God Himself has removed. It continues to place fallible human priests, the Virgin Mary and dead saints as mediators between the sinner and God, although the Bible declares most clearly that 'There is one God, and *one* mediator between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus' (1 Tim. 2:5).

Hence the continuing priesthood in the Church of Rome is absolutely unscriptural and unchristian. It owes its existence solely to a man-made development that can be traced in detail in the history of the church, for it was not until the third or fourth century that priests began to appear in the church. That system has been a source of untold evil. But papal dominance has been built up on that practice and is dependent on its continuance. Without a hierarchical priesthood the papal system would immediately disintegrate.

The apostle Peter, far from making himself a priest or a pope, was content to call himself one of the many elders, a *presbuteros*. And he specifically warned the elders against that most glaring error of the Roman Catholic priests, lording it over the charge allotted to them. He urged rather that they serve as examples to the flock: 'The elders therefore among you I exhort, who am a fellow-elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, who am also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Tend the flock of God which is

among you, exercising the oversight, not by constraint, but willingly, according to the will of God; nor yet for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you, but making yourselves ensamples to the flock' (1 Peter 5:1-3).

As regards priestly innovations that have been made by the Roman Church, Dr. R. Laird Harris, Professor of Old Testament in Covenant Theological Seminary, in St. Louis, writes:

'First-century Christianity had no priests. The New Testament nowhere uses the word to describe a leader in Christian service. The Jewish priesthood was changed, we are told in Hebrews 7: 12. Christ is now our "priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 7 : 17). It is true that the Douay but not the Confraternity version does use the word "priest" (in a Christian connection), but the Greek never uses the word 'hiereus' (priest), nor does the Latin so use "sacerdos" (priest). It is good that this clear mistranslation of the Douay has been corrected in the newer Roman Catholic Confraternity edition. Christian priests are a Roman Catholic invention' (Booklet, *Fundamental Protestant Doctrines*, II, p. 3).

But the doctrine of the universal priesthood of believers is not merely a negative teaching abolishing an order of clergy. For along with that freedom which makes the believer responsible only to God for his faith and life, there is an added responsibility. We are members of a Christian community, 'an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession' (1 Peter 2: 9). As Christians, then, we are not 'laymen,' not mere spectators of the Christian enterprise who may or may not engage in it as we choose, but 'priests,' and therefore responsible to God for the faith and lives of others. We are under obligation to make known this message of salvation. The word 'layman' is not found in the New Testament, nor is there any 'layman's movement' in the Bible. A priest is inevitably involved in the lives of others, and is responsible to God for others. He has the high privilege and duty of making God known to others. This priesthood, therefore, applies to *all* believers, and consists of two things: (1) Immediate access to God in prayer for one's self; and (2) The right and duty of intercession for others. Only as we grasp these ideas can we appreciate the full, rich meaning of the doctrine of the universal priesthood of believers.

Furthermore, we are a *royal* priesthood. That means that we have been called, chosen, by the King of kings to be His priests before our fellow men. We are not first of all clergy and laymen. We are first of all a royal priesthood, under obligation *individually* to make known the message of salvation. And the strength of Protestantism lies precisely here, in the willingness of its people to accept this strange office and all that it means, and to serve in the household of God as the royal priests that we really are.

### **3. CLAIMS OF THE ROMAN PRIESTHOOD**

The Council of Trent, whose decrees must be accepted by all Roman Catholics under pain of mortal sin or excommunication, says:

'The priest is the man of God, the minister of God. ... He that despiseth the priest despiseth God; he that hears him hears God. The priest remits sins as God, and that which he calls his

body at the altar is adored as God by himself and by the congregation. ...It is clear that their function is such that none greater can be conceived. Wherefore they are justly called not only angels, but also God, holding as they do among us the power and authority of the immortal God.'

In a similar vein a Roman Catholic book, carrying the imprimatur of the Archbishop of Ottawa, Canada, says:

'Without the priest the death and passion of our Lord would be of no avail to us. See the power of the priest! By one word from his lips he changes a piece of bread into a God! A greater fact than the creation of a world.

'If I were to meet a priest and an angel, I would salute the priest before saluting the angel. The priest holds the place of God.'

To millions of Christians who are outside the Roman Church such words border on blasphemy, if indeed they are not blasphemy. Surely such declarations are a usurpation of the power that belongs only to God.

It is surprising how little Scripture authority even the Roman Church cites as a basis for her doctrine of the priest hood. Her main and almost only support is found in two verses, Matthew 16: 18-19, which she has misinterpreted, and then, by adding one human tradition to another, has built up an elaborate system which not only has no real support in Scripture but which actually is contrary to Scripture. And by teaching her people this one interpretation and denying them the right to read or hear any other, she has misled millions so that they have come to believe that this is true Christianity. These verses read:

'And I say unto thee, thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven' (Confraternity Version).

There are various interpretations of these verses. Suffice it to say here that this passage contains symbolical language and that the interpretation of the 'rock,' the 'keys,' the 'gates of hell,' and the 'binding' and 'loosing' adopted by Rome is by no means the only one, nor even the most plausible one. We shall treat these verses more fully in connection with the discussion of Peter as the alleged head of the church on earth.

There is probably no other doctrine revealed in Scripture that the Roman Church has so obviously turned upside down as that of the priesthood. No function of any New Testament minister or official resembled that of a priest of the Roman Church. The titles of 'archbishop,' 'cardinal' ('prince of the church,' as they like to be called), and 'pope' are not even in the Bible. The term 'bishop' (overseer, or shepherd of the flock) designated an entirely different office than that for which the term is used in the present-day Roman Church. In fact the terms 'bishop' (*episcopos*) and 'elder' (*presbuteros*) were used interchangeably. Elders could be of two kinds—what we term the teaching elder, or pastor, and the ruling elder, who represented the congregation in the general affairs of the church.

Paul ordained elders in the newly established churches and gave his assistants, Timothy and Titus, instructions for choosing and ordaining elders in every city (1 Tim. 3 : 2—7; Titus 1: 5). During the Middle Ages the teaching elder became a priest at the altar, and the function of the ruling elder was usurped by bishops, cardinals, and the pope, until practically no authority was left in the hands of the congregation, which is the precise condition that continues in the Roman Catholic churches of today. Rome has robbed the laity of nearly all of its privileges.

Christ intended that His church, which consists of all true believers, should enjoy all of the rights and privileges that were conferred by Him. But Rome withdraws those rights and privileges from the people, and invests them in an order of priesthood. Christ bade His followers practise humility, acknowledge one another as equals, and serve one another (Matt. 20 :25-28; 23: 8; 1 Peter 5:3; 2 Cor. 4: 5). But Rome denies this equality and sets up the priest as a dictator belonging to a sacred order, altogether apart from and superior to the people of the parish. The loyal Roman Catholic must heed what the priest says, for priestly dignity is above all. The priest dictates to his people concerning their church, school, marriage, children, family affairs, political activities, what literature they should read, and so on all of which matters he may inquire into intimately in the confessional. From before birth until after death that influence continues. As father confessor and ‘director of conscience,’ and as God’s spokesman to the people, his word is not to be questioned.

The feeling of fear and dread of the priest, so characteristic of the people in Romanist lands, is comparable only to the fear and dread that pagan people have for the witch doctor. Says one from Southern Ireland who has had ample opportunity to observe from within the workings of that system:

‘You who have never been under this influence, who have from childhood been allowed freedom of speech, liberty of conscience, and who see no distinction between your clergy and laity, you cannot, you never will understand the influence that Roman Catholic priests have over the laity of their own nationality’ (Margaret Shepherd, *My Life in the Convent*, p. 46).

Romanism puts the priest between the Christian believer and the knowledge of God as revealed in the Scriptures, and makes him the sole interpreter of truth. It puts the priest between the confession of sins and the forgiveness of sins. It carries this interposition through to the last hour, in which the priest, in the sacrament of extreme unction, stands between the soul and eternity, and even after death the release of the soul from purgatory and its entrance into heavenly joy is still dependent on the priest’s prayers which must be paid for by relatives or friends. The Roman priests, in designating themselves, the Virgin Mary and the saints as mediators, and in making membership in their church the indispensable requirement for salvation, place a screen between God and the people. And where does Christ come in in this system? If you search you will find Him in the background, behind the priest, behind the Virgin, behind the church. The inevitable result is that the spiritual life of the Roman Catholic is weak and anaemic, and that Roman

Catholic countries, such as Spain, Italy, Southern Ireland, Quebec, and Latin America, are immersed in spiritual darkness.

No matter what the moral character of a priest, his prayers and his ministrations are declared to be valid and efficacious because he is in holy orders. The Council of Trent has declared that, 'Even those priests who are living in mortal sin exercise the same function of forgiving sins as ministers of Christ'— such a declaration was necessary at that time, in the middle of the sixteenth century, if the Roman Church was to continue to function at all, because of the general and well-known immorality of the priests. Just as the medicine given by the doctor is supposed to cure the patient regardless of the moral character of the doctor, so the priest's official acts are supposed to be valid and efficacious regardless of his personal character. He is accounted a 'good priest' so long as he remains loyal to the church and correctly performs the appointed rituals and ceremonies. Says one writer, 'When you see the way the system of the priesthood works out in daily life, be glad you are a Protestant.'

Few Protestants realize the nature and significance of the vast chasm which separates the Roman Catholic priesthood from the people. No such gulf exists between the Protestant clergyman and his congregation. A fiction of sacerdotal wisdom and holiness, particularly as displayed in the sacrifice of the mass, sets the priest apart from the awed and reverent Catholic laity. Yet the Roman Church seeks to have the world believe that a close unity exists between the clergy and the laity. And an almost total ignorance on the part of the Catholic people concerning the political machinations of the hierarchy leaves them usually not only willing but even proud to be identified with whatever programme is put forth in the name of the Roman Church.

In our method of choosing a minister, which we believe is in harmony with the teaching of Scripture and the practice of the early church, we choose a man not because he is of a superior order, but because of our belief that he is capable of ministering the things of the Spirit to his fellow men, and because we believe he will live an honest, humble, sincere, and upright life. Ordinarily the minister marries and dwells in a family because this is the natural state of man, and hence he is closer to his people than is the celibate priest. He is chosen by the people, not, however, to govern according to the will of the people, but according to the will of Christ as revealed in the Scriptures. He is among the flock as a spiritual leader, friend, and counsellor, not to be ministered unto, but to minister.

#### **4. THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY NOT A SACRIFICING MINISTRY**

We have said that it is the work of a priest to represent man before God, to offer sacrifices, to intercede for men, and so to make God propitious, that is, favourably inclined toward them. In all pre-Christian religions, Judaism included, there were two common elements: (1) a human priesthood; and, (2) the teaching that the salvation provided was incomplete. In the very nature of the case their sacrifices were of limited value and therefore deficient. In the pagan religions this usually led to belief in a future round of existence after death

wherein the still unsaved sinner would have to make further expiation for his sins. In Judaism it was shown in the never-ending cycle of those sacrifices as day after day the same ritual was repeated.

Now Roman Catholicism, although it professes to be Christian, possesses those same two elements. It claims a human priesthood; and, it teaches that salvation in this life is not complete, but that after death the soul must suffer a longer or shorter time in purgatory and that repeated masses must be said to pay the debt for sin. But Protestantism teaches that with the coming of Christ and the completion of His work on Calvary a new element was added, one which completely eliminates the other two, namely, the evangel, or the ‘good news’ that because Christ was both God and man, His sacrifice was of infinite value, and that it was, therefore, *complete, efficacious, and final*.

This is the clear teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews, for there we read:

‘By which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ *once for all*. And every priest indeed standeth day by day ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: but he, when he had offered *one sacrifice* for sins *forever*, sat down on the right hand of God; henceforth expecting till his enemies be made the footstool of his feet. For *by one offering* he hath *perfected forever* them that are sanctified’ (10: 10—14).

And again:

(Christ), ‘who *needeth not daily*, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins, and then for the sins *of* the people: for this he did *once for all*, when he offered up himself’ (7 :27).

Here we are taught, first of all, that the pre-Christian element of an incomplete salvation was superseded by the complete salvation obtained through the one efficacious sacrifice offered by Christ; and, secondly, that the human priesthood offering daily sacrifices for the sins of men was eliminated, having been done away through the *once for all* sacrifice for sins when Christ offered up Himself. This means further that sin cannot persist as something to be expiated after death; that we are saved completely, not half-saved; and that therefore there can be no such place as purgatory.

In the Jewish priesthood, (1) there were many priests; (2) they were men of infirmity; and (3) it was necessary that they repeat their sacrifices many times, for their own sins and for those of the people. These same reasons apply with equal force against the Roman priesthood: (1) they too are many; (2) they too are men of infirmity; and (3) they too repeat their sacrifices many times for themselves and for the people. In the nature of the case there could be nothing permanent about the work of the Jewish priesthood, for it was merely a foreshadowing or a prefiguring of the work that was to be accomplished by Christ. But the ‘one sacrifice,’ offered ‘once for all’ by Christ, paid the penalty for the sin of His people and so fulfilled the ritual and made all further sacrifices unnecessary. There is, therefore, no place for a sacrificing priesthood in the Christian dispensation.

This same truth is taught when we are told that after Christ had completed His work, He ‘sat down’ on the right hand of God, thus symbolizing that His work was finished, that nothing more needed to be added. In Hebrews I:— we read: ‘who being the effulgence of his glory, and the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had made purification for sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high’; and in Hebrews 10: 12—13: ‘But he, when he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God thenceforth expecting till his enemies be made the footstool of his feet.’

The greatness and completeness and finality of Christ’s sacrificial work is seen in His royal rest. The fact that He has sat down is of special interest since in the tabernacle and the temple there were no seats or benches on which the priests could ever sit down or rest. Their work was never done. Their sacrifices had to be repeated daily because there was no saving power in them. Therefore their task was endless. But the work of Christ was entirely different. His sacrifice of Himself was ‘once for all.’ By that one sacrifice He made perfect provision both for the sinner and for the sin. Therefore, as our High Priest, He sat down in the place of authority, and is now waiting until His enemies are brought into subjection and His kingdom is brought to fruition.

It is interesting to notice that when Christ sent out His apostles He commanded them to preach and teach, but that He said not one word about sacrifice. In the Great Commission He said: ‘Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them . . . teaching them . . .’ (Matt. 28: 19—20). Yet the most prominent feature of the Roman priesthood is its sacerdotal or sacrificial character. The mass is the very heart of the service. In the first part of the ordination service for a priest he is addressed as follows: ‘Receive thou the power to *offer sacrifices* to God, and to celebrate masses, both for the living and for the dead. In the name of the Lord. Amen.’

In the Book of Acts there are many references to the founding of churches, preaching the Word, the assembling of Christians, the governing of the churches, and the matter of controversies with those who advocate error, But there are no references whatever to a sacrificing priesthood. Paul likewise through his epistles gave many directions concerning the duties of the ministry. But nowhere is there even a hint that the ministers were to offer sacrifices, nowhere even an allusion to the mass! The Greek word for priest, *hiereus*, as we have noted, is never applied to New Testament ministers. Strange indeed, if this was the work of the early ministers, that in Scripture we find no references whatever to it!

But in contrast with this, in later ages, after the Roman Catholic Church had developed, we find the writings of the spokesmen for the church filled with references to the mass—how, when, how often, and under what circumstances it is to be administered. It became during the Middle Ages, as it is today, the most distinctive feature of the Roman worship, the primary thing that they profess to do. Surely it is clear that the sacrifice of the mass is a

later development, a radical perversion, and that the Roman Catholic priesthood is following a system quite foreign to that of the early church.

Some Roman Catholics who have turned to Protestantism have said that before they left the Roman Church the charges which hurt them most were those which declared that the Bible does not reveal a teaching authority with the pope and the priesthood as its divinely authorized agents, and, that the blessed sacrament of the altar does not exist in the New Testament. But with further investigation they were forced to conclude that such was the case and that in truth the sole support of the priesthood was nothing other than the traditions of men.

Our conclusion concerning the priesthood must be that Christ alone is our true High Priest, the only Mediator between God and men, the reality towards which the entire Old Testament ritual and sacrifice and priesthood looked forward, and that when He completed His work that entire system fell away. Consequently, we reject all merely human and earthly priests, whether in the Roman Catholic Church or in heathen religions, and look upon their continued practice as simply an attempt to usurp divine authority.

## **5. TRAINING FOR THE PRIESTHOOD**

(The following information about methods of training for the Roman Catholic priesthood deals primarily with the position in the United States of America. It may, however, be taken as typical of Roman arrangements throughout the world, even though these may be subject to minor local variations.)

There are approximately 56,540 Roman Catholic priests in the United States. And there are 237 bishops, archbishops, and cardinals who make up the American hierarchy, according to *The Official Catholic Directory* (May, 1963). The large proportion of the priests, some 34,465, are what are termed diocesan priests, whose work is in the local churches, while the remainder, some 22,075, are in the various religious orders, such as the Franciscan, Dominican, Benedictine, and Jesuit. Those in the various orders tend to specialize in some specific work, e.g., the Franciscans dedicating themselves to the relief of suffering and want, the Dominicans to theological and ministerial studies, the Benedictines to service in the schools and churches, and the Jesuits to the field of education, although the various fields overlap considerably. There are about 35,000 Jesuits in the world, some 8,000 of whom are in the United States. There are also about 177,000 nuns in the United States who work primarily in the schools and hospitals, although some are cloistered.

Many people find it difficult to understand why so many young people choose to dedicate themselves for life to the rigorous system of the Roman Catholic Church as priests and nuns. The answer is that most of them do not enter as a result of free personal choice, but are recruited while quite young, usually between the ages of sixteen and eighteen, with greater or lesser degrees of leading or persuasion by the priests who are instructed to keep their eyes open for promising boys and girls. The confessional, which affords the priests an

opportunity to know intimately the personalities, ambitions, and problems of the young people, affords an excellent opportunity for such leading. The church seeks candidates for its personnel and tries to gain their commitment at that period in the lives of boys and girls when spiritual ideals are strongest but illusive and superficial. That is the age when the ambitions of youth soar highest and when they feel the urge for self-sacrifice in building a better world. Those the church wants are, for the most part, selected by the priests, nurtured over a period of time, sometimes even for years, and so led into the various fields of service, although the priests are by no means successful in getting all they want. The result is that many a boy and girl who had never felt any natural inclination towards the priesthood or convent life has found himself or herself following that road and more or less committed to it before realizing the consequences.

Most of those who eventually enter the priesthood are recruited from the middle or lower class families, boys who for the most part would not have much opportunity for higher education or for advancement in life, and to whom ordination means promotion to a position of prestige which their family status would not be likely to attain for them. Training is for the most part provided without cost. In their new positions, with their handsome rectories, luxurious vestments and beautiful motor-cars they can feel superior to their parishioners. Those become most beholden to the hierarchy for the advantages that they have received, and are the most easily controlled. Having been drilled and disciplined into the system, they feel powerless to change. This is especially true of those who come from orphanages, whether priests or nuns. They are the real victims of the system. This is an unhealthy situation and deeply unjust, but one that is difficult to control or remedy.

A former English priest, Joseph McCabe, in his book, *The Popes and Their Church*, says that the Jesuits and Benedictines, who control large schools, appeal more to the middle class, but that as a rule they fail to secure the more intelligent of their pupils, that the intellectual and moral level of priests is not nearly as high as, for instance, that of teachers and doctors, and that only a minority have any exceptional ability or deep religious feeling. Other writers have said substantially the same thing. Furthermore, the idea has been promoted among Roman Catholics that it is a special honour to have in one's family a priest or nun, and unusual privileges and favours, sometimes quite substantial, are directed by the church towards the families of those so chosen. Getting into the service of the Roman Church is not very difficult; getting out after one has committed oneself is the real problem.

In order to understand why Roman Catholic priests act as they do, and why the priesthood is able to hold them so firmly, it is necessary to know something about the training they receive. That has been set forth clearly by Mr. McLoughlin, and we present in considerable detail the account of his training in St. Anthony's Seminary, at Santa Barbara, California, which he informs us was during the years 1922—27. He says:

‘When a boy enters a seminary, he begins twelve years of the most thorough and effective intellectual indoctrination the world has ever known. It begins gently, with a blending of the

legitimate pleasures of boyhood, the stimulus of competition in studies, and the pageantry of the forms of an ancient religion unseen in an ordinary parish church. It ends twelve years later, with a mental rigidity and acceptance of medieval superstitions and religious concepts as archaic as those of the Buddhist monks upon the isolated, frozen mountains of Tibet. It may surprise non-Catholic Americans to learn that the story of Tibet in Lowell Thomas' *On Top of the World* has its counterpart in the hundreds of Roman Catholic seminaries flourishing in the cities and countrysides of America.

'The course of training for the priesthood is roughly divided into two periods. The first six years are spent in the junior seminary—four years of high school and two years of what would be considered college work. The senior seminary provides the last college years, devoted mainly to Catholic philosophy, plus four years of training in all the intricacies of Catholic theology. Between the junior and senior seminaries in religious orders (Franciscans, Dominicans, Vincentians), there comes a year devoted entirely to religious indoctrination. This is the novitiate...

'All our textbooks, even in high school courses, were written by Catholic authors. No daily newspapers were permitted, and no non-Catholic magazines. All incoming mail was opened by the Prefect of discipline, a priest; if he deemed advisable, the letters were confiscated. All outgoing mail had to be placed in the Prefect's office in unsealed envelopes. Along with newspapers and movies, radios were forbidden for the use of junior seminarians. The priests in their supervised recreation hall were permitted a radio—but we were not admitted to that hall. Not only were we gradually withdrawn from the world but we grew to feel that the non-Catholic public disliked us and, if given opportunity, would persecute us.

During these junior years, the boy has no official ties binding him to the Church. He may leave the seminary at any time, without penalty. Many boys do so; and others are dismissed as being too worldly or intellectually unqualified for the intense indoctrination ahead.

'With one magnificent gesture, the ceremony of entering the novitiate sweeps aside the centuries. The aspirant for the priesthood in the Franciscan Order finds himself, in spirit, walking the ancient streets of Assisi, eating in its hallowed monastic halls, and chanting the sixth-century hymns of Gregory the Great. ....To symbolize more effectively the repudiation of the "old" man and the start of a "new" spiritual life, even our names were changed. I had been christened John Patrick. I was now named Emmett—or, in Latin, Emmatus in memory of an obscure saint in early Irish and French history....

'During this year our seclusion from American life and our indoctrination in the "spirit" of the Catholic Church became so intensive that I came to feel that I alone was a true Christian, privileged to commune with God. I believed that the American way of life was pagan and sinful, a rebirth of the Roman Empire and destined to the same disgraceful doom in the ashes of history. I came to believe that the American government was to be tolerated though wrong—tolerated because it gives unlimited freedom to the Roman Catholic Church, wrong because it gives freedom to other churches. I believed the ideal form of government was the one in which I was living in the seclusion of my spirit—the era when the papacy made kings because the power to govern came from God to the king through his "representative," the pope. My boyhood concept of civics—of the right of man to the processes of law and government through the consent of the governed—faded away under the constant repetition of the teachings of Thomas Aquinas and the moral theologians. The Constitution of my country and the laws of its states dimmed into trivialities in comparison with the all-powerful Canon Law of the Roman

Catholic Church: I became in all truth a citizen of the Church, living—by accident— in the United States.

‘Such intensive indoctrination was unknown to the Western world outside the Roman Catholic Church until it was copied by Fascism, Nazism, and Communism. The training for the priesthood goes on, after the novitiate year, for six more years. We were no longer permitted to visit our homes, even for vacations, unless a death occurred in our families.

‘The process of indoctrination in all seminaries is intensified by the use of the Latin language. All textbooks of Catholic philosophy and theology are in Latin. The lectures by professors (at least in my day) were in Latin. Examinations were conducted in Latin. We reached the point where we were thinking in Latin, the language of the early centuries of Christianity. Subconsciously we were living, not in the age of presidents and politicians, or labour unions and capitalists, but in the age of masters and slaves, of kings and serfs, of popes, representing God, and the faithful, who meekly acquiesced in their decisions as coming from the throne of God Himself.

‘The chains with which the religious orders of the Roman Catholic Church bind their priestly aspirants to a lifetime of service are the three vows of obedience, poverty, and chastity.

‘The vow of obedience is the most important of the three. It identifies all ecclesiastical superiors with the Church, and it identifies the Roman Catholic Church with God. Every command by the superior of a religious community or by a church pastor, no matter how petulant, how ill-advised, or how unjust, must be considered as a command from God Himself and must be obeyed as such under penalty of sin.

‘The robe of every Franciscan monk is girded with a rope. One strand hangs from his side. It has three knots on it symbolizing the three vows—poverty, chastity, and (the bottom knot) obedience. The young Franciscan is trained that when the Provincial Superior greets him he must kneel on one knee and kiss the lowest knot on the Superior’s cord, and then his hand. It is the token of complete, abject, unreasoning obedience.

‘The student priest must learn to crush the desire of the flesh by fasting, self-denial, and even physical pain. Many Americans have read of the ascetics and hermits of the early middle ages of Christianity who mortified the flesh by wearing hair shirts, fastening chains about their waists, and sleeping on boards or in bare coffins. But it might surprise these Americans to know that in the senior seminaries for Franciscan priests in the United States there hangs, inside the door of every cell or bedroom, a scourge or whip. It is made of several strands of heavy cord, each knotted at the end. Each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday evening at:—4 o’clock we closed the doors of our cells; to the chant of the “miserere” we disrobed and “scourged our flesh to bring it into submission.” The Superior patrolled the corridors to listen to the sound of beating—the assurance of compliance.

‘The distinction between the licit and the illicit was so elusive in our minds that we could not discern it. We were warned constantly about the danger of any association with women. The saints had characterized them as tools of the devil, devils themselves in beautiful forms, instruments permitted by God to exist and test man’s virtue of chastity’ (*People’s Padre*, pp. 7—18).

At the conclusion of the book Mr. McLoughlin says:

‘To non-Catholic America, I have attempted to portray life within the priesthood as it actually is. I have emphasized the long, narrow, effective mental indoctrination of the seminary, taking young boys from their families, walling them off from society, from world events, from modern education through the formative years of adolescence, and then turning them out into the “vineyard” after ordination as thoroughly dedicated as a Russian envoy to the United Nations. I have pictured the tyranny of fear that chains these men to their religious posts long after they have become disillusioned and yearn for the freedom and normal life of America. I have tried to show, through my own experience and through correspondence, the miasmatic fog which the Church has intentionally spread to conceal the truth from the Roman Catholics who blindly follow it—stifling their freedom of thought, of worship, of action, and of life itself. I contend that this foreign thing is far more subtle, far less forthright, but just as inimical to the American concept of life as Communism itself. It is often the indirect cause of Communism by keeping whole nations in ignorance and poverty and by developing techniques of fear, indoctrination, and mental tyranny that the Kremlin exploits. The Inquisition led by the Catholic Church in the sixteenth century finds its parallel in the political persecution by the Communists in Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Russia’ (p. 279).

We urge everyone who possibly can to read this very informative and interesting book by Mr. McLoughlin. It is written in a truly Christian spirit by one who knows intimately the Roman Catholic Church, written not in spite, or hatred, or vindictiveness, but to acquaint Roman Catholics themselves with the truth concerning the secret inner workings of their hierarchy, and to inform those outside the Roman Church concerning the nature of this growth which chokes freedom of thought and action in those lands which it controls.

We should add that the priestly course of preparation reaches its climax in a colourful and solemn ordination ceremony, in which the Roman church believes that he is constituted ‘a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.’ To himself and to the Roman Catholic world the young priest becomes an *altar Christus*, ‘another Christ,’ offering in the mass the same sacrifice that Christ offered on the cross. People bow before him and kiss his hands as a token of respect and submission. Ordinarily a priest is not ordained before the age of 24, although ordination can be performed earlier by special permission. According to Canon Law, a priest once ordained can never lose his ordination. Even if he leaves the Roman Catholic Church, renounces it, and becomes a Protestant minister, he still remains a priest, although unable to function as a priest until he returns and repents.

## **6. GROUPS WITHIN THE PRIESTHOOD AND WITHIN THE LAITY**

After the new recruits have finished their long course of preparation and are ordained as priests, what is their reaction to the environment in which they find themselves? Dee Smith, a former Roman Catholic layman who writes with an intimate knowledge of conditions within the Roman Church, finds that when they emerge from the seminary they gradually evolve into three fairly distinct groups which may be classified as: (1) the naive; (2) the disillusioned; and (3) the aggressive. He says:

1. ‘The naive are worthy souls, so honest themselves that they never question the honesty of others. Even repeated experiences of hypocrisy and corruption among their priestly brothers

are insufficient to shake their faith or extinguish their inexhaustible charity. Such priests never advance to high rank among the clergy. They are found in poor city parishes, lonely country stations, or out in the mission field, sharing the meagre life of their parishioners.

2. 'What of the disillusioned? Emmett McLoughlin estimates that about 27 per cent of the priests would like to leave not only the priesthood but also the church. . . . Not all who leave have the stamina to stay with it. The memory of indolent, well-padded living is too beguiling. Expecting the same thing, plus adulation, in the Protestant camp and not finding it, these feeble characters inevitably return to Rome.

'In their eagerness not to jeopardize their cushy sinecure a second time they cravenly accept the hypocritical "penances" handed out to them and become the most ardent of Rome's propagandists. Nevertheless it would be unfair to judge harshly all disillusioned priests who fail to break with Rome. When one considers the scurrilous attacks which will be made upon them in the Roman Catholic press, the boycott pressures which will starve them out of a means of livelihood, the malignant persecution which will seek them out and hound them wherever they go, one can readily understand that the decision to leave is a more heroic one than most of us are ever called upon to make. It cannot be denied that some of these priests are good men who, to atone for their lack of courage, do what they can to comfort, encourage, and assuage the lot of the duped and betrayed Catholic people.

3. 'Nothing, however, can be said in extenuation of the aggressive cohort of the priesthood, the class which comprises the hierarchy and upper clergy as well as many of the lower. No man can rise very high in the ranks of the Roman Catholic priesthood unless he is of this class. In fact, the savagery of their intolerance against all who stand in the way of ruthless ambition extends far beyond their hatred of their tacit opponent, the non-Catholic world, and intimately permeates their own relationships. The viciousness of their tactics against one another in the competition for promotion is precisely the same quality as that of medieval cardinals who hired poisoners and assassins to dispose of their rivals in the Consistory.

'Their objective is not merely a life of privilege, luxury, and carnal self-indulgence. In fact, there are among them men of rigid ascetic character. But each and every man of them is driven by an insatiable lust for power. Each sees himself as a factor to be reckoned with in a globe-dominating force. Having lost the capacity for love, they seek the fear of their fellow-men—the more abject the headier. Is it any wonder that the hierarchy's own security demands an impassable gulf between the decent, well-meaning Catholic people and these men with the hearts and spiritual nature of wolves, these men with no God but Greed, no religion but Power?' (*Christian Heritage*, May, 1959).

The chief victims of the Roman Catholic system are the people themselves, who are schooled to accept the teachings of their church implicitly and who are almost totally ignorant of the political machinations of their clergy. Again we are indebted to Dee Smith for an analysis which, with some degree of overlapping, groups the Roman Catholic laity as follows:

1. First, there is that comparatively small group of people whom we may designate as 'converts' to Romanism, or 'joiners,' those who when they see the Roman Church growing in influence 'jump on the band wagon.' Such as these would join almost any movement, even the

Communist if it appeared to offer them advancement. They have only a nominal Christianity, and usually have suffered frustration in some form. In Romanism they become the centre of attention and gain a position of influence that would not otherwise be attainable to them.

2. A second group, much the largest group in the Roman Church, consists of those whom we may designate as spiritual suicides. They shrink from any serious thought concerning religious truths which they do not want to face, truths which if followed through might involve them in arduous spiritual effort. In the Roman Catholic Church they gain a promise of heaven through the payment of money and the recitation of sterile formulas. They are content simply to float along and to leave the spiritual and intellectual problems to others.

3. A third group consists of those who are genuinely naive. For them, as Dee Smith says, 'the beautiful music, gorgeous trappings, fragrant incense, majestic temples, and eye-filling spectacles perform the office for which Rome designed them, namely, to lull the senses into a state of euphoria which the victim mistakes for heavenly transport. Like wide-eyed children at a circus, the victims of this form of mass hypnosis see nothing of the shoddy meanness behind the glitter.'

4. There are those whom we may term the 'practical Catholics,' those who for personal reasons make a career of their church connections. They are the typical members who are always ready to do the bidding of the clergy, serving as a front against the non-Catholic world, bullying book-stores into refusing to handle anti-Catholic literature, organizing boycotts, coercing business men to support Catholic charities, posing the threat of the 'Catholic vote,' etc.

5. Another group is that of the 'nominal Catholics,' those who are members of the church simply because they were born such. They follow the rules of the church only so far as it suits their convenience. They are not critical of the church, but neither do they have any particular devotion for it. They generally attend mass, and they vote for Roman Catholic candidates. They are, however, unsteady and a source of concern to the clergy.

6. There is a comparatively small group of real liberals, men of integrity who try to reconcile the teachings of their church with their consciences as long as possible, but who in a showdown between church and conscience follow their conscience and walk out of the church.

7. Lastly, there is the group, consisting of perhaps one-third of the membership, who by any standard are good, honest, self-respecting people. They are, to be sure, somewhat naive, but they are good neighbours to their Protestant fellow-citizens and are the kind of people for whose sake Protestants sometimes resent any insinuations against the Roman Catholic Church. They are people who, if they knew the true purpose, motives and character of their church's leadership, would leave in disgust at the betrayal of their faith. They are good not because they are Roman Catholics but in spite of that fact. They are the kind of people who, not going to the trouble to investigate the doctrinal tenets of the faith they profess, would be good in any faith in which they might have membership. Innocently and unknowingly they serve as a perfect smoke-screen for the hierarchy. By using the good character and sincere faith of these followers, and by surrounding themselves with a stage-setting of exalted faith, the priests are able to create the illusion of true religion for their entire system. But that system in its basic reality remains like the magnificent Hollywood temples, so impressive and awesome to the untrained eye, but in reality nothing more than plywood and canvas (*Christian Heritage*, May, 1959).

Protestants who have made any effort to talk with Roman Catholics about spiritual things know that they have received but very little Bible instruction from their priests. But that lack of Bible knowledge is but a natural consequence of the fact that the priests themselves have only a minimum of Bible study in their seminary training. L. H. Lehmann, a former priest who founded *The Converted Catholic Magazine* (now *Christian Heritage*), says that only in the last years of their training in seminary did they have any Bible study, and that even then it was in Latin. 'The Scripture course itself,' he says, 'was merely an apologetic for papal interpretation of certain texts of Scripture to suit the past historical development and aims of the papal power. Nothing was taught or indicated to us about the spiritual, individual message of Christ in the Gospel itself. Hence, what was sought in teaching the Bible was a glib use of tag-ends of texts in defence of papal power. The *letter* of texts, apart from their content, supplied the pretext for Roman Catholic use of Scripture. The *spirit* of the word was overlooked' (*The Soul of a Priest*, p. 54).

A further word about the different orders of priests: As we have indicated earlier, there are two classes: (1) Secular or Diocesan priests, who are responsible only to the local bishop, and who usually are assigned to churches; and (2) Religious priests, who belong to an order, and who in most cases are responsible to an abbot who rules the monastery. Secular priests promise to observe celibacy and to yield obedience; they may own property. Members of religious orders take the three vows, poverty, chastity, and obedience, and are of two classes: monks, who withdraw from the world for religious motives, usually live in a monastery, and engage in meditation, study, and writing; and the plain religious priests, who engage in various public activities for the order to which they belong. Those belonging to an order, taking the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, but not being ordained as priests are called *Brothers*. These may teach in church schools, or engage in other kinds of church work. The Jesuits belong to an order but are not monastic, and usually are engaged in educational work in the colleges and seminaries.

As a rule the monks have a reputation for being lazy; the Jesuits for being industrious. The Jesuits are tightly organized under a military type of discipline, and their number is relatively fewer than those of the other orders. Their influence, however, has been out of proportion to their numbers. For centuries they have been the real power behind the papacy, often determining the election of popes, but apparently not trusted by their fellow priests and not being able to elect any of their own number. They have been the object of much criticism because of their advocacy of questionable moral principles, the word 'Jesuitical' having entered the dictionary as a synonym for that which is crafty, deceptive, cunning. On various occasions the Jesuits have been banned from practically all of the European and South American countries, from Catholic as well as from Protestant countries. On one occasion the order was condemned and dissolved by a pope, but was restored by a later pope. Often there is bitter rivalry between them and the other orders, which they tend to look upon as inferior, or at least as less efficient.

A custom of the Roman priesthood offensive to Protestants is that of having people address them as ‘father,’ and particularly that of calling the pope the ‘Holy Father’ (capitalized)—which we term simply blasphemy. In this connection Christ Himself commanded in the clearest language that the term ‘father’ in a spiritual sense should not be used when addressing our fellow men. ‘Call no man your father on the earth,’ said He, ‘for one is your Father, even he who is in heaven’ (Matt. 23: 9). Yet the priests continually and openly violate that command.

## 7. LEAVING THE PRIESTHOOD

The priesthood is the *real crux* of the Roman system. Most of the priests, even during their seminary course, as we have indicated, have but very little Bible study; and such knowledge of the Word as they acquire relates chiefly to disconnected portions of Scripture and is given primarily with the purpose of preparing them to answer the arguments that Protestants make against the Roman system. Such has been the testimony of various ones who have left the priesthood. There is in this regard a great contrast between Protestant ministerial training and Roman Catholic training for the priesthood. Rome does not like Bible study either for her priests or for her people, for they find too many things there that are not in accord with their church.

We believe that if these men could be persuaded to make an unprejudiced study of the Bible, many would be convinced of the error of their system and would turn from it. An encouraging feature in this regard is that a considerable number, after years of useless priestly ministry, have on their own accord made a serious study of the Bible and have found that it not only does not teach the distinctive doctrines of their church but that it contradicts those doctrines. When an honest priest studies Protestantism without prejudice, in the light of the Word of God and not of Roman tradition, he cannot but recognize that it is Christianity in its purity and in its originality. Much to his surprise, and contrary to all that he has been taught, he finds that Protestantism is very simple, very clear, and profoundly attractive. He finds that its doctrines are based solidly on the Bible, which is the true manual and code of Christianity. Says Lucien Vinet, a former Canadian priest:

‘In the Church of Rome faith is based on the authority of a man, the Pope, and the traditions of men, namely, the opinions of former theologians such as the Fathers of the Church.

‘In Roman Catholicism, Christianity is the doctrines and practices of men: in Protestantism, Christianity is the doctrines of Christ as revealed to us, not by fallible men, but by the infallible Bible’ (*I Was a Priest*, p. 126).

Many a priest, struggling against moral degradation and frustration of mind (and one who spends much time in the confessional has an abundance of both) has had an intense battle within himself as to whether or not he should remain in the Church of Rome. He possesses a Bible, but in accordance with the rules of his church he usually does not dare to read it apart from the assigned notes and commentaries, and so remains ignorant of its saving message. How difficult it is for him to realize that all that anyone has to do to

receive forgiveness from sins and to experience the joy of salvation is to confess his sins to Christ and to put his trust in Him alone. When he does read the Bible he finds that most of the doctrines that he has held and taught either were perversions of the Scripture or that they were the inventions of men. Would that thousands of those men could be persuaded to turn from that false and subversive system to the clear teachings of Scripture! The key to the whole problem is the priest. And the task before us is to persuade him to read the Bible with an open mind.

It may seem surprising that it takes so long for a priest to discover the truth. But the fact is that a candidate for the priesthood enters the twelve year course of training from parochial school as just a boy—the preferable age is 16—that during his training he is quite effectively cut off from the surrounding world, and that he is an adult before he completes his training. He has not known any other kind of life. During that long and intensive course practically all of those who show signs of independent thinking, those whose dispositions indicate that they might not be obedient to their superior, and those in whose make-up there are any traits which might indicate lack of perseverance or failure for any reason, are weeded out. Not all who finish the course are chosen by the bishop for ordination. But those who are chosen are for the most part of a type that can be reasonably depended upon to continue loyal and submissive to the church. Those who become priests are not so much those who have volunteered for that service but rather those who have been chosen by the hierarchy and carefully screened and trained for that occupation. They are what we may term ‘hard core Romanists.’

Becoming a Roman Catholic priest is a far different thing from becoming a Protestant minister. Everything possible has been done to impress upon the Roman priest the idea that if he breaks with the Roman Catholic Church he will not be trusted by anyone, either within or outside of the Roman Church, and that he cannot make his way in the commercial world for which he now is so entirely unfitted. His intensive training in Latin, doctrine, liturgics, and church history, is of comparatively little value in the outside world, and in fact has been in part designed to unfit him for anything except the priesthood. He has been disciplined for that particular work, and his soul is in a real sense held captive within the walls of Roman Catholic dogma and within the bonds of the priesthood. It is an exceedingly difficult thing for one who has been so trained, and who has committed himself to that system, to break those bonds and to come out into a new kind of life—even into the freedom of the Gospel, for he does not know what that means. This is particularly true if he does not reach that decision until middle age or later. Furthermore, the Roman Catholic people are forbidden to have anything to do with one who has left the priesthood. Getting into, or getting out of, the priesthood is no easy task.

Certainly there are many priests who do not believe what they are teaching, at least not all that they are teaching. Many are ill at ease, and a considerable number are struggling

against a real sense of frustration. But they usually remain in the priesthood because they feel more or less helpless and lack the courage to break away.

Emmett McLoughlin, in an address in Constitution Hall, in Washington, D.C., in 1954; said:

‘It is not unusual for people to change their religious affiliation, but it is considered very unusual for Roman Catholic priests to leave the priesthood. Yet one-third of the class of which I was ordained have deserted the hierarchy. I know ten priests who have quit St. Mary’s Church in Phoenix where I lived for fourteen years. The number of priests quitting the priesthood is kept as secret as possible . . . . According to the best estimate I have been able to find, at least 30 per cent of all Roman Catholic priests leave Rome.’

In his *People’s Padre* he says:

‘The hold of the Roman Catholic hierarchy over most of the clergy, as I have observed it, is not the bond of love, or of loyalty, or of religion. It is the almost unbreakable chain of fear—fear of hell, fear of family, fear of the public, fear of destitution and insecurity. I firmly believe that, in place of the 30 per cent of the clergy who probably leave the priesthood today, fully 75 per cent would do so if it were not for fear....’

‘Most priests, torn between the intellectual realization that they have been misled by the hierarchy and the fear of family reaction, hesitate and live on through barren years in the priesthood . . . . Every priest is taught through the years that anyone who leaves the priesthood will be not only cursed by God but also rejected by the public. The priest believes that people will sneer at him as one who has violated his solemn promises and therefore cannot be trusted with responsibility. In Catholic circles mention is never made of ex-priests who are successful—only of those who have strayed, who have starved, and who have grovelled back to the hierarchy, sick, drunken, broken in spirit, begging to do penance for the sake of clothes on their backs and food in their bellies’ (pp. 98—100). ‘Hundreds of priests quit the church every year. Hundreds more would if they had the means of earning a living’ (p. 203).

And again:

‘My experience has proved that an ex-priest can overcome his own fears and survive the most concentrated attacks of Roman Catholicism. That experience proves also that the American non-Catholic public still believes strongly in freedom of thought, freedom of religion, and freedom of the right to change one’s means of livelihood—and that it will support a man who exercises that right. There is no need for any disillusioned priest or nun to seek the protective anonymity of Los Angeles, New York, or Detroit. He needs only the courage of his convictions, a willingness to work, a deep confidence in America, and a solid faith in God’ (p. 261).

Lucien Vinet gives the following analysis as to why priests remain in the priesthood:

‘There is no doubt that the great majority of the Roman priests in the ministry of their church have come to realize, just as many ex-priests have done, the hypocrisy, intrigue and falsehood of Romanism. There are various reasons why so many intellectual men still cling to a false religious system and even spend much time and energy in defending this un-Christian religious organization.’

‘Priests who remain in the priesthood can be classed in four categories:

1. ‘There are some priests who really are convinced that Christ founded the Roman Church and that “Out of the Church of Rome there is no salvation.” They explain the contradiction between the doctrines of Christ and those of Rome as apparent only and believe that the traditions of the Roman Church have equal doctrinal value as the words of the Holy Spirit in the Bible. They excuse the many scandals of Romanism as a necessary human factor in the organization of the Church of God on earth. They believe in the infallible teaching authority of the pope and therefore placate their conscience in relying on the Pontiff of Rome for their spiritual and doctrinal convictions. We met very few priests during the nine years of our life in the priesthood, who could be sincerely classed in this category. Most priests know just as well as we do that Christ is the only Teacher of Christianity and that Romanism is anti-Christian in its doctrines and practices.

2. ‘There are priests who are fully convinced of the falsehood and hypocrisy of the Roman priesthood, but find it impossible to leave the priesthood.... Many of them hope that some day an opportunity will be given them to quit Romanism. They realize that their training in the Seminaries provides no preparation whatever for a proper position in life that will enable them to earn a decent living. Their knowledge of Latin, Greek, History of the Church, and Roman Theology is to them of very little use to obtain a decent position in our modern world. By the time they fully realize that their priesthood is a usurpation of the *only priesthood* of Christ and that of the priesthood of believers, they are usually too old to start a new training for a proper career in life. Their health might not be as good as it used to be and they fear that if they leave the comfortable existence they now enjoy, they might land in the poor house.

‘The greatest incentive that keeps priests in the priesthood is fear. They fear the curse and persecution of Rome, the rebukes of some of their Roman Catholic friends and the loss of esteem and association of their families. Some of them, of course, fear hard work.

3. ‘There are now the priests who stay in the priesthood because they like the comfort and pleasure that the Roman ministry affords them. It is the very life of a priest that they like. They command the respect and obedience of many credulous Roman Catholics and they enjoy to the utmost dictating to them. . . . Their life is assured and they have no financial troubles. Even if they cannot accept all the doctrines of the Church, they do not have to admit it publicly. They can travel extensively in distant lands where their identity is not known and where they can enjoy life as any other human being would do....

4. ‘Finally there is a group of priests who remain in the priesthood, not on account of their Roman religious convictions and not because they find material comfort in the Roman ministry, but because they experience indescribable mental and sexual pleasure in the very exercise of their Roman ministry. These priests appear to the world as deeply religious and ascetic. They seldom indulge in material comforts and no one can accuse them of any actual sins of any visible form whatsoever, but they are spiritual perverts. The greatest satisfaction or pleasure of their lives is not “Wine, women and song,” but the torturing of human souls in confession and in spiritual direction. They love to explore secrets of souls and hearts. They experience sordid pleasure in embarrassing female penitents by impertinent questions and prescriptions. Only the Roman system of confession can provide them with the means of indulging in these criminal and sordid pleasures’ (*I Was a Priest*, pp. 75—80).

Mr. Vinet also recalls the suggestion of an old priest that if the priests in Canada were given ten thousand dollars each there would not be enough priests left to man the churches. We do not suppose anyone is going to offer that kind of an inducement for them to leave the priesthood, but undoubtedly the fear of not being able to make a livelihood has kept many in their positions.

## **8. RENOUNCING PRIESTLY VOWS**

We do not hesitate to say that a priest who becomes disillusioned and finds that the Church of Rome has deceived him with false pretensions should repudiate his vows, declare his independence, and make a new start. In such a case the church has misrepresented herself to him, the ideal that she held before him has proved deceptive and fruitless, and therefore he is not bound to continue in such a relationship. He has not failed the priesthood; the priesthood has failed him, and has been revealed as something other than that which it was represented as being at the time of his ordination. He was led to believe that the Roman Church was the only true church, God's chosen and exclusive instrument for the salvation of souls. She has failed to substantiate her claim to be the only true church, and has been found rather to be a mixture of truth and error, with error in many cases overshadowing the truth.

In so far as the Roman Church has extracted vows that are unscriptural and unreasonable, it is right that those vows should be repudiated. This principle applies not only to priests and nuns, but also to parents who in signing a marriage contract that was forced upon them have pledged away the religious freedom of their children even before they were born. No man has the right to swear away his own religious or civil liberty or that of others, and so to place himself or those who are given into his care in a state of subjection to a fellow-mortal. Human slavery, whether physical or spiritual, is wrong and cannot be tolerated. Enforced spiritual servitude of one's self or of one's children to another person or institution can be as degrading and galling as physical servitude. 'Ye were bought with a price, become not bondservants of men,' says the Scripture (1 Cor. 7: 23). 'Ye were redeemed . . . with precious blood. . . even the blood of Christ' (1 Peter 1: 18—19). 'No man can serve two masters' (Matt. 6: 24). Christ is our true Master; He has set us free, and no other person or organization has the right to usurp that freedom.

It is universally acknowledged that when one party to a contract breaks that contract and makes impossible its normal functioning, the other party is not under obligation to continue fulfilling its terms. Yet that is the condition in which many a priest and nun has found himself or herself. Even in human contracts only those obligations continue to be binding which the person to whom the promise was made wishes to be carried out; and certainly in this field of promises to God it is only reasonable to suppose that we are not bound to do what God does not want us to do, merely because we were led through false pretences or false motives to promise that we would do it. In this instance the priest has made an unscriptural vow of complete obedience to another man, the bishop, and has pledged

himself to a service that in reality does not exist. We have already seen that, with the coming of Christ and the completion of His work on Calvary, the human priesthood was abolished forever. Hence the Roman priesthood is in reality nothing but a sham and a delusion.

On these grounds all priestly vows are to be considered null and void. This was the position taken by the Reformers, Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and others, as they renounced the authority of Rome, and the Gospel became the proclamation of liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who were bound.

Those who leave Romanism for this reason are not traitors to the church of Christ, as the Roman Church attempts to make them believe. On the contrary they are enlightened and intelligent men, courageously following the path of duty. ‘The real traitor,’ says Lucien Vinet, ‘is the Roman priest who knows the wickedness of Romanism and yet clings to it for material gain’ (*I Was a Priest*, p. 10).

‘It must come as a shock to non-Catholics,’ says McLoughlin, ‘to realize the possessiveness of even the lay Catholics toward their clergy. It is accepted practice among Protestant, Mormon, and Jewish groups to recognize a clergyman’s right to change his vocation. Rabbis become merchants, Mormon bishops enter politics, and ministers in unknown numbers exchange the pulpit for farming, law, mining, teaching, trade, or just plain loafing. But not so a former Roman Catholic priest’ (*People’s Padre*, p. 176).

McLoughlin expresses as follows his justification for leaving the priesthood:

‘Many letters from Roman Catholics had lamented that I had broken my solemn vows, my word to God. But I felt no guilt. I had entered sincerely into a contract, a bilateral contract, when I solemnly vowed poverty, chastity, and obedience. I was one party to the agreement. The Provincial Superior claimed to represent God. My indoctrination trained me to believe that he did. I know now that he did not. The contract was null and void’ (p. 183).

And again:

‘I was an unsuspecting pawn or tool in the greatest swindle of all history. . . . I have not defied God—I have rejected an organization that has usurped the prerogative of God and claims an exclusive right of speaking in His name. My only regret is that it took me so many years to come to my senses’ (pp. 203, 204).

#### FOOTNOTE

\* A graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary (Th.B., 1928; ThM., 1929), where he studied Systematic Theology under Dr. C. W. Hodge, his books include: *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, *Roman Catholicism*, *Studies In Theology, Immortality*, *The Millennium* and *A Harmony of the Gospels*.

## Part 7

### MARY.

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#### 1. MARY'S PLACE IN SCRIPTURE

The New Testament has surprisingly little to say about Mary. Her last recorded words were spoken at the marriage in Cana, at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry: 'Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it'—then silence. But the Church of Rome breaks that silence, and from sources entirely outside Scripture builds up a most elaborate system of Mary works and Mary devotions.

Following Mary's appearance at the marriage in Cana, we meet her only once more during Jesus' public ministry, when she and His brothers came where He was speaking to the multitudes, seeking Him, only to draw the rebuke: 'Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? . . . Whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother' (Matt. 12:46-50). She was present at the cross, where she was committed to the care of the disciple John for the remainder of her natural life (John 19:25-27). Finally, in Acts 1:14, she is mentioned as having been with the disciples and the other women and the Lord's brethren engaged steadfastly in prayer immediately after the ascension, but she has no prominent place.

The apostles never prayed to Mary, nor, so far as the record goes, did they show her any special honour. Peter, Paul, John, and James do not mention her name even once in the epistles which they wrote to the churches. John took care of her until she died, but he does not mention her in any of his three epistles or in the book of Revelation.

When the church was instituted at Pentecost there was only one name given among men whereby we must be saved, that of Jesus (Acts 4:12). Wherever the eyes of the church are directed to the abundance of grace, there is no mention of Mary. Surely this silence is a rebuke to those who would build a system of salvation around her. God has given us all the record we need concerning Mary, and that record does not indicate that worship or veneration in any form is to be given to her. How complete, then, is the falsehood of Romanism that gives primary worship and devotion to her!

## 2. 'MOTHER OF GOD'

The doctrine of 'Mary, the Mother of God' as we know it today is the result of centuries of growth, often stimulated by pronouncements of church prelates. And yet the full-fledged system of Mariolatry is a comparatively recent development in Roman Catholic dogma. In fact the last one hundred years have quite appropriately been called the 'Century of Mariolatry.'

As late as the fourth century there are no indications of any special veneration of Mary. Such veneration at that time could begin only if one were recognized as a saint, and only the martyrs were counted as saints. But since there was no evidence that Mary had suffered a martyr's death, she was excluded from sainthood. Later the ascetics came to be acknowledged as among the saints. That proved to be the opening wedge for the sainthood of Mary, for surely she of all people, it was alleged, must have lived an ascetic life! The church acknowledged that Christ was born of the *virgin* Mary. Apocryphal tradition built on those possibilities, and slowly the system emerged.

The phrase 'Mother of God' originated in the Council of Ephesus, in the year 431. It occurs in the Creed of Chalcedon, which was adopted by the council which met in that city in 451, and in regard to the person of Christ it declared that He was,

'Born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God according to the manhood,'

—which latter term means: according to the flesh of human nature. The purpose of the expression as used by the Council of Ephesus was not to glorify Mary, but to emphasize the deity of Christ over against those who denied His equality with the Father and the Holy Spirit. A heretical sect, the Nestorians, separated the two natures in Christ to such an extent that they held Him to be two persons, or rather a dual person formed by the union between the divine Logos and the human person Jesus of Nazareth. They were accused of teaching that the Logos only inhabited the man Jesus, from which it was inferred that they held that the person born of Mary was only a man. It was therefore only to emphasize the fact that the 'person' born to Mary was truly divine that she was called 'the Mother of God.'

But the term as used today has come to have a far different meaning from that intended by the early church. It no longer has reference to the orthodox doctrine concerning the person of Christ, but instead is used to exalt Mary to a supernatural status as Queen of Heaven, Queen of the Angels, and much else, so that, because of her assumed position of prominence in heaven, she is able to approach her Son effectively and to secure for her followers whatever favours they ask through her. When we say that a woman is the mother of a person we mean that she gave birth to that person. But Mary certainly did not give birth to God, nor to Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of God. She was not the mother of our Lord's divinity, but only of His humanity. Instead, Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, has existed from all eternity, and was Mary's Creator. Hence the term as used in the present-day Roman Church must be rejected.

In the life and worship of the Roman Church there has been a long course of development, setting forth Mary's perpetual virginity, her exemption from original sin and from any sin of commission, and now her bodily assumption to heaven. In the Roman Church Mary is to her worshippers what Christ is to Protestants. She is the object of all religious affections, and the source whence all the blessings of salvation are sought and expected.

The Bible calls Mary the 'Mother of Jesus,' but gives her no other title. All that the Roman Church has to substantiate her worship of Mary is a sheaf of traditions entirely outside the Bible telling of her appearances to certain monks, nuns and others venerated as saints. At first glance the term 'Mother of God' may seem comparatively harmless. But the actual consequence is that through its use Roman Catholics come to look upon Mary as stronger, more mature, and more powerful than Christ. To them she becomes the source of His being and overshadows Him. So they go to her, not to Him. 'He came to us through Mary,' says Rome, 'and we must go to Him through her.' Who would go to 'the Child,' even to 'the holy Child,' for salvation when His mother seems easier of access and more responsive? Romanism magnifies the person that the Holy Spirit wants minimized, and minimizes the person that the Holy Spirit wants magnified.

Says S. E. Anderson:

'Roman priests call Mary the "mother of God," a name impossible, illogical, and unscriptural. It is *impossible*, for God can have no mother; He is eternal and without beginning, while Mary was born and died within a few short years. It is *illogical*, for God does not require a mother for His existence. Jesus said, "Before Abraham was born, I am" (John 8:58). It is *unscriptural*, for the Bible gives Mary no such contradictory name. Mary was the honoured mother of the human body of Jesus—no more—as every Catholic must admit if he wishes to be reasonable and Scriptural. The divine nature of Christ existed from eternity past, long before Mary was born. Jesus never called her "mother"; He called her "woman"' (Booklet, *Is Rome the True Church?* p. 20).

And Marcus Meyer says:

'God has no mother. God has always existed. God Himself is the Creator of all things. Since a mother must exist before her child, if you speak of a "mother of God" you are thereby putting someone before God. And you are therefore making that person God. . . . Mary would weep to hear anyone so pervert the truth as to call her the mother of her Creator. True, Jesus was God; but He was also man. And it was only as man that He could have a mother. Can you imagine Mary introducing Jesus to others with the words: "*This is God, my Son?*" (Pamphlet, *No Mother*).

Furthermore, if the Roman terminology is correct and Mary is to be called God's mother, then Joseph was God's step father, James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas were God's brothers, Elizabeth was God's aunt, John the Baptist was God's cousin, Heli was God's grandfather, and Adam was God's fifty-ninth great-grandfather. Such references to God's relatives sound more like a page out of Mormonism than Christianity.

### 3. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

It is not difficult to trace the origin of the worship of the Virgin Mary. The early church knew nothing about the cult of Mary as it is practised today—and we here use the word 'cult' in the dictionary sense of 'the veneration or worship of a person or thing; extravagant homage.'

The first mention of the legend about Mary is found in the so-called *Proto-Evangelium* of James, near the end of the second century, and presents a fantastic story about her birth. It also states that she remained a virgin throughout her entire life. Justin Martyr, who died about 165, compares Mary and Eve, the two prominent women in the Bible. Irenaeus, who died about 202, says that the disobedience of the 'virgin Eve' was atoned for by the obedience of the 'virgin Mary.' Tertullian, one of the greatest authorities in the ancient church, who died in or about 222, raised his voice against the legend concerning Mary's birth. He also held that after the birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph lived in a normal marriage relationship. The first known picture of Mary is found in the Priscilla catacomb in Rome and dates from the second century.

Thus the Christian church functioned for at least 150 years without idolizing the name of Mary. The legends about her begin to appear after that, although for several centuries the church was far from making a cult of it. But after Constantine's decree making Christianity the preferred religion, the Graeco-Roman pagan religions with their male gods and female goddesses exerted an increasingly stronger influence upon the church. Thousands of the people who then entered the church brought with them the superstitions and devotions which they had long given to Isis, Athena, Diana, Artemis, Aphrodite, and other goddesses, which were then conveniently transferred to Mary. Statues were dedicated to her, as there had been statues dedicated to Isis, Diana, and others, and before them the people kneeled and prayed as they had been accustomed to do before the statues of the heathen goddesses.

Many of the people who came into the church had no clear distinction in their minds between the Christian practices and those that had been practised in their heathen religions. Statues of pagan gods and heroes found a place in the church, and were gradually replaced by statues of saints. The people were allowed to bring into the church those things from their old religions that could be reconciled with the type of Christianity then developing, hence many who bowed down before the images of Mary were in reality worshipping their old gods under a new name. History shows that in several countries Roman Catholicism has absorbed local deities as saints, and has absorbed local goddesses into the image of the Madonna. One of the more recent examples is that of the Virgin of Guadalupe, a goddess

worshipped by the Indians in Mexico, which resulted in a curious mixture of Romanism and paganism, with sometimes one, sometimes the other predominating—some pictures of the Virgin Mary now appearing show her without the Child in her arms.

As we have seen, the expression ‘Mother of God,’ as set forth in the decree of the Council of Ephesus, gave an impetus to Mary worship, although the practice did not become general until two or three centuries later. From the fifth century onwards the Mary cult becomes more common. Mary appears more frequently in paintings, churches were named after her, and prayers were offered to her as an intercessor. The famous preacher Chrysostom, who died in 407, resisted the movement wholeheartedly, but his opposition had little effect in stemming the movement. The Roman Catholics took as their text the words of the angel to Mary, found in Luke 1:28: ‘And he came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee.’ It is to be noted, however, that shortly after the angel spoke to Mary, Elizabeth, speaking by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, did not say, ‘Blessed art thou *above* women,’ but, ‘Blessed art thou *among* women’ (Luke 1:42). Starting with the false premise that Mary was above all other women, there developed the practice of worshipping her.

Invocation of the saints had a similar origin. In the year 610, pope Boniface IV first suggested the celebration of an All Saints’ festival and ordered that the Pantheon, a pagan temple in Rome that had been dedicated to all the gods, should be converted into a Christian church and the relics of the saints placed therein. He then dedicated the church to the Blessed Virgin and all the martyrs. Thus the worship of Mary and the saints replaced that of the heathen gods and goddesses, and it was merely a case of one error being substituted for another.

The spiritual climate of the Middle Ages was favourable to the development of Mary worship. Numerous superstitions crept into the church and centred themselves in the worship of the Virgin and the saints. The purely pagan character of these practices, with dates and manner of observance, has been clearly established by a number of competent historians.

The art of the Middle Ages represented Mary with the child Jesus, or Mary as ‘mater dolorosa’ at the cross. The rosary became popular; poems and hymns were written in honour of the ‘god-mother.’ Stories of miracles performed by her started in response to prayers addressed to her.

Also during that period arose the custom of looking to ‘patron saints,’ who in fact were merely Christianized forms of old pagan gods. In polytheism everything had its own god: the sea, war, hunting, merchants, agriculture, and all else. After the same fashion there developed the Roman Catholic gallery of ‘patron saints’ for seamen, soldiers, travellers, hunters, and in modern times for fliers, divers, cyclists, artillerymen, and many others. This kinship with the pagan cults explains why Mary worship developed so rapidly after Constantine made Christianity the official religion.

#### 4. CONTRAST BETWEEN ROMAN AND PROTESTANT TEACHING

We are indebted to Dr. Joseph Zacchello, editor of *The Convert*, Clairton, Pennsylvania, for the following statement concerning Mary's rightful place in the Christian church, followed by extracts in one column from Ligouri's book, *The Glories of Mary*, and in a parallel column extracts setting forth what the Bible teaches:

'The most beautiful story ever told is the story of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. And a part of that beautiful story is the account of Mary, the mother of our Lord.

'Mary was a pure virtuous woman. Nothing is clearer in all the Word of God than this truth. Read the accounts of Matthew and Luke and you see her as she is—pure in mind, humble, under the hand of God, thankful for the blessing of God, having faith to believe the message of God, being wise to understand the purpose of God in her life.

'Mary was highly favoured beyond all other women. It was her unique honour that she should be the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed was Mary among women. Through her, God gave His most priceless gift to man.

'But, though Mary be worthy of all honour as a woman favoured of God beyond all others, and though she be indeed a splendid, beautiful, godly character, and though she be the mother of our Lord, Mary can neither intercede for us with God, nor can she save us, and certainly we must not worship her. There is nothing clearer in the Word of God than this truth.

'Let us notice this truth as it is diligently compared with the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church and with the Word of God. The following quotations are taken from the book, *The Glories of Mary*, which was written by Bishop Alphonse de Ligouri, one of the greatest devotional writers of the Roman Catholic Church, and the Word of God taken from the Douay Version which is approved by James Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore. The Editor's notice says, "Everything that our saint has written is, as it were, a summary of Catholic tradition on the subject that it treats; it is not an individual author; it is, so to speak, *the church herself that speaks to us* by the voice of her prophets, her apostles, her pontiffs, her saints, her fathers, her doctors of all nations and ages. No other book appears to be more worthy of recommendation in this respect than *The Glories of Mary*.'" (1931 edition; Redemptorist Fathers, Brooklyn). Note the following deadly parallel:

***Mary is Given the Place Belonging to Christ***

*Roman Catholic Church:*

‘And she is truly a mediatrix of peace between sinners and God. Sinners receive pardon by Mary alone’ (pp. 82, 83). ‘Mary is our life. . . . Mary in obtaining this grace for sinners by her intercession, thus restores them to life (p. 80). ‘He fails and is LOST who has not recourse to Mary (p. 94).

*The Word of God:*

For there is one God, and ONE Mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus’ (1 Tim. 2:5). ‘Jesus saith to him: I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the Father, but by me’ (John 14:6). ‘Christ...is our life’ (Col. 3:4).

### ***Mary is Glorified More Than Christ***

*Roman Catholic Church:*

‘The Holy Church commands a WORSHIP peculiar to MARY’ (p. 130). ‘Many things . . . are asked from God, and are not granted; they are asked from MARY, and are obtained,’ for ‘She . . . is even Queen of Hell, and Sovereign Mistress of the Devils’ (pp. 127, 141, 143).

*The Word of God:*

In the Name of Jesus Christ For there is no other name under Heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved (Act 3:6, 4:12). His Name is ‘above every name. . . not only in this world, but also in that which is to come’ (Eph. 1:21).

### **Mary is the Gate to Heaven Instead of Christ**

*Roman Catholic Church:*

‘Mary is called . . . the gate of heaven because no one can enter that blessed kingdom without passing through HER’ (p. 160).

‘The Way of Salvation is open to none otherwise than through MARY,’ and since ‘Our salvation is in the hands of Mary. . . He who is protected by MARY will be saved, he who is not will be lost’ (pp. 169, 170).

*The Word of God:*

‘I am the door. By me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved,’ says Christ (John 10:1, 7, 9).

‘Jesus saith to him, I am the way . . . no man cometh to the Father but by me’ (John 14:6). ‘Neither is there Salvation in any other’ (Acts 4:12).

### **Mary is Given the Power of Christ**

*Roman Catholic Church:*

‘All power is given to thee in Heaven and on earth,’ so that ‘at the command of MARY all obey—even God . . . and thus God has placed the whole Church... under the domination of MARY’ (pp. 180, 181). Mary ‘is also the Advocate of the whole human race . . . for she can

do what she wills with God' (p. 193).

*The Word of God:*

'All power is given to me in Heaven and in earth,' so that 'in the Name of JESUS every knee should bow,' 'that in all things He may hold the primacy' (Matt. 28:18; Phil. 2:9-11; Col. 1:18).

'But if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, JESUS CHRIST the Just: and he is the propitiation for our sins' (1 John 2:1, 2).

### **Mary is the Peace-Maker Instead of Jesus Christ Our Peace**

*Roman Catholic Church:*

'Mary is the Peace-maker between sinners and God' (p. 197).

'We often more quickly obtain what we ask by calling on the name of MARY, than by invoking that of Jesus.' 'She is our Salvation, our Life, our Hope, our Counsel, our Refuge, our Help' (pp. 254, 257).

*The Word of God:*

'But now in CHRIST JESUS, you, who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace' (Eph. 2:13, 14).

'Hitherto you have not asked anything in my name. Ask, and you shall receive,' for 'Whatsoever we shall ask according to His will, He heareth us' (John 16:23, 24).

### **Mary is Given the Glory that Belongs to Christ Alone**

*Roman Catholic Church:*

'The whole Trinity, O MARY, gave thee a name . . . above every other name, that at Thy Name every knee should bow, of things in heaven, on earth, and under the earth' (p. 260).

*The Word of God*

'God also hath highly exalted HIM, and hath given HIM a Name which is above all names, that in the Name of JESUS every knee should bow, of those that are in Heaven, on earth, and under the earth' (Phil. 2:9, 10).

Ligouri, more than any other one person, has been responsible for promoting Mariolatry in the Roman Church, dethroning Christ and enthroning Mary in the hearts of the people. Yet instead of excommunicating him for his heresies, the Roman Church has canonized him as a saint and has published his book in many editions, more recently under the imprimatur of Cardinal Patrick Joseph Hays, of New York.

In a widely used prayer book, the *Raccolta*, which has been especially indulged by several popes and which therefore is accepted by Romanists as authoritative, we read such as the following:

‘Hail, Queen, Mother of Mercy, our Life, Sweetness, and Hope, all Hail! To thee we cry, banished sons of Eve; to thee we sigh, groaning and weeping in this vale of tears.’

‘We fly beneath thy shelter, O holy Mother of God; despise not our petitions in our necessity, and deliver us always from all perils, O glorious and Blessed Virgin.’

‘Heart of Mary, Mother of God. . . Worthy of all the veneration of angels and men. . . In thee let the Holy Church find safe shelter; protect it, and be its asylum, its tower, its strength.’

‘Sweet heart of Mary, be my salvation.’

‘Leave me not, My Mother, in my own hands, or I am lost; let me but cling to thee. Save me, my Hope; save me from hell.’

Also in the *Raccolta*, prayers are addressed to Joseph:

‘Benign Joseph, our guide, protect us and the Holy Church.’

‘Guardian of Virgins, and Holy Father Joseph, to whose faithful keeping Christ Jesus, innocence itself, and Mary, Virgin of Virgins, were committed, I pray and beseech thee by those two dear pledges, Jesus and Mary, that being preserved from all uncleanness, I may with spotless mind, pure heart, and chaste body, ever most chastely serve Jesus and Mary. Amen.’

The rosary, which is by far the most popular Roman Catholic ritual prayer, contains fifty ‘Hail Marys?’ The *Hail Mary* (or *Ave Maria*) is as follows:

‘Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now, and at the hour of our death. Amen.’

## 5. MARY AS AN OBJECT OF WORSHIP

The devotions to Mary are undoubtedly the most spontaneous of any in the Roman Catholic worship. Attendance at Sunday mass is obligatory, under penalty of mortal sin if one is absent without a good reason, and much of the regular service is formalistic and routine. But the people by the thousands voluntarily attend novenas for the ‘Sorrowful Mother.’ Almost every religious order dedicates itself to the Virgin Mary. National shrines, such as those at Lourdes in France, Fatima in Portugal, and Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico, are dedicated to her and attract millions. The shrine of Ste. Anne de Beaupré, in Quebec, the most popular shrine in Canada, is dedicated to Saint Anne, who according to

apocryphal literature was the mother of Mary. Thousands of churches, schools, hospitals, convents, and shrines are dedicated to her glory.

It is difficult for Protestants to realize the deep love and reverence that devout Roman Catholics have for the Virgin Mary. One must be immersed in and saturated with the Roman Catholic mind in order to feel its heart-beat.

Says Margaret Shepherd, an ex-nun

‘No words can define to my readers the feeling of reverential love I had for the Virgin Mary. As the humble suppliant kneels before her statue he thinks of her as the tender, compassionate mother of Jesus, the friend and mediatrix of sinners. The thought of praying to Christ for any special grace without seeking the intercession of Mary never occurred to me’ (*My Life in the Convent*, p. 31.)

The titles given Mary are in themselves a revelation of Roman Catholic sentiment towards her. She is called: Mother of God, Queen of the Apostles, Queen of Heaven, Queen of the Angels, The Door of Paradise, The Gate of Heaven, Our Life, Mother of Grace, Mother of Mercy, and many other titles which ascribe to her supernatural powers.

All of those titles are false. Let us consider just two of them. When she is called ‘Queen of the Apostles,’ is that an apostolic doctrine? Where is it found? Certainly it is not in Scripture. When did the apostles elect Mary their queen? Or when was she appointed by God to be their queen? And the title, ‘Queen of Heaven,’ is equally false, or even worse. Heaven has no ‘queen.’ The only references in Scripture to prayers to the ‘queen of heaven’ are found in Jeremiah 7:18; 44:17-19, 25, where it is severely condemned as a heathen custom practised by some apostate Jews. This so-called ‘queen of heaven’ was a Canaanitish goddess of fertility, Astarte (plural, Ashtaroth) (Judges 2:13). How shameful to impose a heathen title on Mary, and then to venerate her as another deity!

How can any one of the perhaps one hundred million practising Roman Catholics throughout the world who desire Mary’s attention imagine that she can give him that attention during his prayers to her, his wearing her scapulars for special protection, and his marching in parades in her honour, while at the same time she is giving attention to all others who are praying to her, attending to her duties in heaven, conducting souls to heaven, and rescuing souls from purgatory? The average Roman Catholic acts on the assumption that Mary has the powers of deity.

There is nothing in the Bible to indicate that any departed human being, however good, has any further contact with affairs on this earth, or that he can hear so much as one prayer from earth. How, then, can a human being such as Mary hear the prayers of millions of Roman Catholics, in many different countries, praying in many different languages, all at the same time? Let any priest or layman try to converse with only three people at the same time and see how impossible that is for a human being. Romanists impose on Mary works which no human being can do. How impossible, how absurd, to impose on her the works

which only God can do! Since Mary is not omnipresent nor omniscient, such prayers and worship are nothing less than idolatry—that is, the giving of divine honours to a creature.

Nowhere in the Bible is there the slightest suggestion that prayer should be offered to Mary. If God had intended that we should pray to her, surely He would have said so. Worship is accorded to the infant Jesus; but never to His mother. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, wise men came from the east, and when they came into the house, they saw the young child with Mary His mother. Did they then fall down and worship Mary? Or Joseph? Not at all! We read: ‘They fell down and worshipped *him*’ (Matt. 2:11). And to whom did they give their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh? To Mary? Or to Joseph? By no means! They presented their gifts to Jesus. They recognized Him, not Mary or Joseph, as worthy of adoration.

Furthermore, in Old Testament times the Jews prayed to God, but never to Abraham, or Jacob, or David, or to any of the prophets. There is never the slightest suggestion that prayers should be offered to anyone other than God. Nor did the apostles ever ask the early Christians to worship, or venerate, or pray to Mary or to any other human being.

The objections against prayers to Mary apply equally against prayers to the saints. For they too are only creatures, infinitely less than God. How, then, can they listen to and answer the thousands upon thousands of petitions made simultaneously in many different lands and in many different languages? Many such petitions are expressed, not orally, but mentally and silently. How can Mary and the saints, creatures as they were and are, be present everywhere and know the secrets of all hearts?

That living saints should pray to departed saints seems on the face of it to be the very height of the ridiculous. But the fact is that most Roman Catholics pray to Mary and the saints more than they pray to God. Yet they cannot explain how departed saints can hear and answer prayers. The endless prayers to the Virgin and to the countless saints cannot bring one closer to God. And particularly when we see all the gaudy trappings that are resorted to in Rome’s distorted version of a glamour queen, the whole procedure becomes, to Protestants, truly abhorrent.

The Roman Catholic Church commits grievous sin in promoting the worship of Mary. It dishonours God, first, by its use of images; and secondly, by giving to a creature the worship that belongs only to the Creator. We have here merely another example of Rome’s persistent tendency to add to the divinely prescribed way of salvation. Romanism sets forth faith *and* works, Scripture *and* tradition, Christ *and* Mary, as the means of salvation.

Charles Chiniquy, a former priest from Montreal, Canada, who became a Presbyterian minister, tells of the following conversation between himself and his bishop when doubts began to assail him regarding the place given to Mary:

‘My lord, who has saved you and me upon the cross?’

He answered, ‘Jesus Christ.’

‘And who paid your debt and mine by shedding His blood; was it Mary or Jesus?’

He said, ‘Jesus Christ.’

‘Now, my lord, when Jesus and Mary were on earth, who loved the sinner more; was it Mary or Jesus?’

Again he answered that it was Jesus.

‘Did any sinner come to Mary on earth to be saved?’

‘No.’

‘Do you remember that any sinner has gone to Jesus to be saved?’

‘Yes, many.’

‘Have they been rebuked?’

‘Never.’

‘Do you remember that Jesus ever said to sinners. “Come to Mary and she will save you”?’

‘No,’ he said.

‘Do you remember that Jesus has said to poor sinners, “Come to me”?’

‘Yes, He has said it.’

‘Has He ever retracted those words?’

‘No.’

‘And who was, then, the more powerful to save sinners?’ I asked.

‘O, it was Jesus!’

‘Now, my lord, since Jesus and Mary are in heaven, can you show me in the Scriptures that Jesus has lost anything of His desire and power to save sinners, or that He has delegated this power to Mary?’

And the bishop answered, ‘No.’

‘Then, my lord,’ I asked, ‘why do we not go to Him, and to Him alone? Why do we invite poor sinners to come to Mary, when, by your own confession she is nothing compared with Jesus, in power, in mercy, in love, and in compassion for the sinner?’

To that the bishop could give no answer (*Fifty Years in the Church of Rome*, p. 262).

Even to this day the province of Quebec is almost solidly Roman Catholic. Throughout the province one can scarcely hear the Gospel in any church, or in any local radio broadcast, or obtain anything but Roman Catholic literature. Quebec is full of idols. Pope Pius XII declared that the province of Quebec was the world's most Catholic country. But everywhere Mary, and not Christ, is represented as the only hope of the four million French-Canadians. And, let it be noticed further, the province of Quebec has the most illiteracy, the poorest schools, and the lowest standard of living of any province in Canada.

It is very difficult to convince Roman Catholic people that Christ has won for them the right to go directly to God in prayer. They read the Bible but very little. Instead they fall back on what their priests have taught them, that to obtain mercy and forgiveness they must cajole some saint, some close and favoured friend of God, to intercede for them. And the most powerful intercessor of all, they insist, is Mary, since she is the mother of Christ. Yet Scripture makes it abundantly clear that neither Mary nor any of the others ever promised, when they were living, that they would pray for their devotees after reaching heaven.

According to New Testament usage, all true Christians are saints. Paul's letter to the Ephesians was addressed, 'to the saints that are at Ephesus' (1:1); his letter to the Philippians, 'to all the saints that are at Philippi' (1:1). See also: Rom. 1:7; 16:15; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1. It has well been said, If you want a 'saint' to pray for you, find a true Christian and make the request of him. His prayer will be more effective than any request that can be made through departed saints. We have no need for the intercession of Mary, or departed saints, or angels, for we ourselves have direct access to God through Christ. Furthermore, not only do we have no single instance in the Bible of a living saint worshipping a departed saint, but all attempts on the part of the living to make any kind of contact with the dead are severely condemned (Deut. 18:9-12; Ex. 22:18; Lev. 20:6; Is. 8:19, 20).

The Scriptures directly repudiate all saint worship. We have specific examples of Peter, and Paul, and even of an angel rejecting such worship. When Peter went to the house of Cornelius in response to the vision that he had while at prayer on the housetop, we read that 'Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter raised him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man' (Acts 10:25, 26). Although Peter was one of the twelve, and had been personally associated with Jesus, he knew that he had no right to such worship, for he was only a man. At Lystra, after Paul had healed a lame man, the multitude attempted to worship him and Barnabas. We read: 'But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they rent their garments, and sprang forth among the multitude, crying out and saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you and bring you good tidings, that ye should turn from these vain things unto a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that in them is' (Acts 14: 14, 15). And

the apostle John writes concerning his experience on the island of Patmos: 'And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel that showed me these things. And he saith unto me, *See thou do it not*: I am a fellow-servant with thee and with thy brethren the prophets, and with them that keep the words of this book: worship God' (Rev. 22:8, 9). But how different is the attitude of popes, bishops, and priests who expect people to kneel before them and to kiss their hands or rings! The pope allows or expects that under some conditions they shall even kiss his feet! But how abhorrent to men of true faith are such servile and idolatrous practices!

## **6. IN ROMANISM MARY USURPS THE PLACE OF CHRIST**

A striking phenomenon in Roman Catholicism is the effective way in which they have caused Mary to usurp the place of Christ as the primary mediator between God and men. Christ is usually represented as a helpless babe in a manger or in His mother's arms, or as a dead Christ upon a cross. The babe in a manger or in His mother's arms gives little promise of being able to help anyone. And the dead Christ upon a cross, with a horribly ugly and tortured face, is the very incarnation of misery and helplessness, wholly irrelevant to the needs and problems of the people. Such a Christ might inspire feelings of pity and compassion, but not of confidence and hope. He is a defeated, not a victorious, Christ. The Roman Church cannot get its people to love a dead Christ, no matter how many masses are said before Him or how many images are dedicated to Him. There can be no real love for Christ unless the worshipper sees Him as his living Saviour, who died for him, but who arose, and who *now lives gloriously and triumphantly*—as indeed He is presented in Protestantism. In the Roman Church the people prefer a living Mary to a dead Christ. And the result is that the centre of worship has shifted from Christ to Mary.

Despite all protestations to the contrary, the fact is that the worship, intercessions, and devotions that are given to Mary obscure the glory of Christ and cause the church to set forth a system of salvation in which human merit plays a decisive part. While asserting the deity of Christ, Rome nevertheless makes Him subservient to the Virgin, and dispenses salvation at a price through the agency of the priest. This most blessed of women, the mother of Jesus, is thus made His chief rival and competitor for the loyalty and devotion of the human heart. In Romanism Mary becomes the executive director of deity, the one through whom the prayers of the people are made effective.

Mary has nothing whatever to do with our salvation. All who think she has are simply deceived. And yet in Romanism probably ten times as much prayer is directed to her as to Christ. The most popular prayer ritual of Roman Catholics, the *rosary*, has ten prayers to Mary for each one directed to God. The prayer book contains more prayers which are to be offered to Mary and the saints than to Christ. Mary is unquestionably the chief object of prayer.

## 7. MARY REPRESENTED AS MORE SYMPATHETIC THAN JESUS

The spiritual climate of the Middle Ages was favourable for the development of the Mary-cult. Particularly in that age Christ was represented as a Man of stern wrath, a strict Judge, avenging evil with an inexorable justice, while Mary was clothed with the virtues of lovingkindness and mercy. Where Christ would demand justice, Mary would extend mercy. The simple believer, who had been told that God was an angry Judge always ready to send the sinner to hell, wanted to flee to the protection of the tender-hearted and loving Mary. Even monks who lived ascetic lives and shunned or even hated women as instruments of their temptation and downfall sought the protection of Mary.

In *The Glories of Mary* Ligouri pictures Christ as a stern, cruel Judge, while Mary is pictured as a kind and lovable intercessor. Among other things Ligouri says: 'If God is angry with a sinner, and Mary takes him under her protection, she withholds the avenging arm of her Son, and saves him' (p. 124); 'O Immaculate Virgin, prevent thy beloved Son, who is irritated by our sins, from abandoning us to the power of the devil' (p. 248); and again: 'We often obtain more promptly what we ask by calling on the name of Mary, than by invoking that of Jesus' (p. 248).

In another instance Ligouri teaches that Mary is the saviour of sinners, and that outside her there is no salvation. He describes an imaginary scene in which a man burdened with sin sees two ladders hanging from heaven, with Christ at the head of one and Mary at the other. He attempts to climb the ladder at which Christ is the head, but when he sees the angry face he falls back defeated. As he turns away despondent, a voice says to him, 'Try the other ladder.' He does so, and to his amazement he ascends easily and is met at the top by the blessed virgin Mary, who then brings him into heaven and presents him to Christ! The teaching is, 'What son would refuse the request of his mother?'

The same reasoning is found among Roman Catholics today. Christ still is looked upon as a stern Judge. But Mary, being a mother, is looked upon as having a mother's heart and therefore as more capable of understanding the problems of her children. She can go to her Son with her requests and petitions, and He can never refuse to grant any favour that she asks. She is represented as everywhere present. Romanists are taught to appeal to her with confidence to allay the fierce judgment of Christ, and to turn His serious frown into a friendly smile—all of this in spite of the fact that no prayer by Mary for a sinner can be found anywhere in the New Testament.

But what a travesty it is of Scripture truth to teach that Christ demands justice, but that Mary will extend mercy! How dishonouring it is to Christ to teach that He is lacking in pity and compassion for His people, and that He must be persuaded to that end by His mother! When He was on earth it was never necessary for anyone to persuade Him to be compassionate. Rather, when He saw the blind and the lame, the afflicted and hungry, He was 'moved with compassion' for them and lifted them out of their distress. He had immediate mercy on the wicked but penitent thief on the cross, and there was no need for

intercession by Mary although she was there present. His love for us is as great as when He was on earth; His heart is as tender; and we need no other intermediary, neither His mother after the flesh, nor any saint or angel, to entreat Him on our behalf.

### **8. ONE MEDIATOR**

The Bible teaches that there is but one mediator between God and men. It says:

‘For there is one God, one mediator also between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus’ (1 Tim. 2:5).

When this verse is understood the whole system of the Roman Church falls to the ground, for it invalidates the papacy, the priesthood, and all Mary worship.

Other verses which teach the same truth are:

‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me’ (John 14:6).

‘And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved’ (Acts 4:12).

‘He is the mediator of a new covenant’ (Heb. 9:15)

‘If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous’ (1 John 2:1).

‘Christ Jesus . . . who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us’—Christ, not Mary, the Scripture says, is at the right hand of God making intercession for us (Rom. 8:34).

‘Wherefore also he is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them’ (Heb. 7:25).

Thus Christ, because He is both God and man, is the only Saviour, the only Mediator, the only way to God. Not one word is said about Mary, or a pope, or the priests, or the saints, as mediators. Yet Romanism teaches that there are many mediators, and the great majority of Roman Catholics, if asked, would say that our primary approach to God is through the Virgin Mary, and that only as she begs for us can we enter the presence of God.

The priests detract from the glory of Christ when they teach that Mary is a mediator. Humanly speaking, that must grieve her who would want all honour to go to Christ. The priests have no right to place her in such an unscriptural position. Mary is presented in Scripture as a hand-maiden of the Lord who fulfilled her office in the church according to promise, just as did John the Baptist and others, but whose work has long since ceased. The great antithesis is not between Eve and Mary, as Rome sets it forth, but between Adam and Christ (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21, 22, 45-47). Roman tradition has so altered the picture

of Mary that the Mary found in the New Testament and the Mary found in the Roman Catholic Church are two different and conflicting persons. Any fair-minded Roman Catholic knows that his church gives first place to Mary and that Christ is kept in the background.

The reason that Mary, the saints or angels cannot act as our priest or mediator is because they have no sacrifice, nothing to offer in behalf of our sins. Only a priest with a true sacrifice can serve as mediator between God and men. Christ alone has a true sacrifice, and He alone can act as our priest. In this connection Calvin says:

‘I deem it indisputable that the papal priesthood is spurious; for it has been formed in the workshop of men. God nowhere commands a sacrifice to be offered now to Him for the expiation of sins; nowhere does He command that priests be appointed for such a purpose. While then the pope ordains his priests for the purpose of sacrificing, the Apostle (Paul) denies that they are to be accounted lawful priests.’

### **9. ADORATION OR IDOLATRY?**

The Roman Catholic Church officially denies worshipping Mary. Officially she says that Mary is only a creature, highly exalted, but still a creature, in no way equal to God. Yet she tells us that Mary hears the prayers of millions and that she constantly gives attention to her followers throughout the world. It may well be that, as Rome says, she does not *intend* idolatry. But the intention and the practical working out of the system are two different things. We must insist that it *is* worship, and that therefore it is *idolatry* as practised by millions of people who kneel before Mary’s statues and pray and sing to her. Most of these people know nothing at all of the technical distinctions made by their theologians between adoration and worship. It certainly is idolatrous to give her the attributes of omnipresence and omniscience and to give her titles and functions which belong to God, as when, by pope Pius XII, she was officially designated the ‘Queen of Heaven,’ and ‘Queen of the World,’ and when prayers are made to her for salvation.

That the prayers addressed to Mary and the saints are idolatrous is clear from the fact that: (1) They are precisely the same kind, and are expressed in the same terms, as those addressed to God; (2) They are presented in the ordinary course of worshipping God; (3) They are offered kneeling; And (4) they form the bulk of the prayers offered.

We have mentioned the most famous of the prayers addressed to Mary, the *Ave Maria*, or *Hail Mary*. As commonly used, this prayer follows the Lord’s prayer and is offered in precisely the same way. Assuming that there are one hundred million ‘practising’ Roman Catholics throughout the world, and that half of them say the rosary at least once each day—the rosary contains fifty ‘Hail Marys’ and takes quite some time to repeat—Mary would have to have the attributes of deity to hear and answer such a mass of prayer. Surely Roman Catholics themselves can see the impossibility of all those prayers being heard and

answered by one who by the admission of their own church is not God, but only human. The whole thing is a deceit and an illusion. Even if it were true that the spirits of the departed have access to this world, that could not be known except by divine revelation. And no such revelation exists.

The growth of Mariolatry is indeed a sad chapter in the history of the church. Like the brazen serpent of Moses, which at the time of Hezekiah had become an object of idolatrous worship and had to be destroyed, so in the Roman Church Mary has come to be looked upon as the instrumental cause of salvation, and as such is given divine honours. The Roman Church ascribes to her large numbers of miracles, fully supernatural and similar in all respects to those performed by Christ. Numerous appearances are claimed for her. On some occasions statues of Mary are said to have blinked or wept. Relics in abundance have been exhibited in European cathedrals. Samples of her clothing, hair, teeth, and milk have been exhibited in numerous places.

Again, the worship of Mary is a great injustice to Mary herself, for it makes her the occasion for breaking the commandments of God. Nothing is more clearly revealed in Scripture than that divine worship is to be paid to God alone— ‘Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve’ (Matt. 4:10). Nothing is more severely rebuked than idolatry of every kind and form. If Mary could see all the Roman Catholics bowing down before her images in the thousands of churches and millions of homes, how great would be her grief! To pray to Mary is at the least a waste of time. And worse than that, it is idolatry, a direct product of the use of unscriptural doctrines and practices.

### **10. LATRIA—DULIA—HYPERDULIA**

The Church of Rome, without any warrant whatever from Scripture, technically divides worship into three kinds: (1) *Latria*, the supreme worship, given to God alone; (2) *Dulia*, a secondary kind of veneration given to saints and angels; and (3) *Hyperdulia*, a higher kind of veneration given to the Virgin Mary.

The theory, however, is useless in practice, for the average worshipper is not able to make the distinctions, nor does he even know that such distinctions exist. The subtleties of definition only confuse the issue, for who can balance his feelings so nicely as to give God, the Virgin, and the saints their due proportion? This is particularly true in Roman Catholic countries such as Italy, Spain, and Latin America where so many of the people are illiterate and given to all kinds of superstitions. We must insist that any religious worship, whether inward or outward, consisting of prayer, or praise, and expressed by outward homage such as bowing, kneeling, or prostration, is properly termed worship and belongs to God alone.

The slogan, ‘Through Mary to Christ,’ does not change the fact that for many worshippers the devotion naturally stops with Mary. They pray to Mary, not to Christ. Their prayers are directed to her personally. Roman Catholics are taught that all grace necessarily flows through Mary. She is regarded as a kind of fourth person of the Blessed Trinity. To

speak of Mary as 'holy,' as 'the Mother of God,' and as 'co-redeemer with Christ,' cannot but give the impression that she is more than human. Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922) gave expression to the thought that Mary suffered with her suffering and dying Son, and that with Him she has redeemed the human race. This pronouncement was also sanctioned by pope Pius XI in 1923.

The distinction that Rome makes between latria, dulia, and hyperdulia does enable her to maintain officially that she does not teach the 'worship' of Mary. However, the lengths to which her apologists have gone in trying to distinguish between such devotions and actual worship is evidence that she feels uncomfortable about the lofty names given to Mary and about the actual results, and that she does not dare take responsibility for what goes on in her churches. And, subtleties aside, some Roman theologians acknowledge that they do worship Mary.

## **11. JESUS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS MARY**

It is particularly instructive to notice the attitude that the Lord Jesus Himself took towards Mary. The first recorded instance occurred when, at the age of 12, the boy Jesus, after attending the Passover in Jerusalem with His parents, remained in the temple. We read, in the Confraternity Version, that when His parents found Him, 'His mother said to him, 'Son, why hast thou done so to us? Behold, in sorrow thy father and I have been seeking thee.' And he said to them, 'How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?' And they did not understand the word that he spake to them' (Luke 2:48, 49).

Says *The New Bible Commentary* (Protestant) in explanation of this event: 'The answer of Jesus is an expression of surprise. There was something about Him which He was surprised His parents did not know. . . . He had always been occupied with His Father's affairs and had no interests of His own to engage Him. This was what His parents might have known' (p. 844).

On two later occasions, after Jesus had reached His maturity, Mary attempted to show her parental authority, but each time was held in check. The first occurred at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, when the wine ran out. We read, again in the Confraternity Version:

'And on the third day a marriage took place at Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there [Notice, it does not say, "Mother of God"]. Now Jesus too was invited to the marriage, and also his disciples. And the wine having run short, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "What wouldst thou have me do, woman? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the attendants, "Do whatever he tells you" ' (John 2:1-5)

In this instance, the first of its kind after the beginning of His public ministry, Jesus gave Mary to understand that no one, not even His mother, must dictate to Him concerning the

time and manner of opening His public ministry, that thenceforth she was not to exercise any authority over Him, and that His working of miracles and the redemption of souls was, strictly speaking, none of her business. He was pointing out to His mother that from then on He had no dependence on her, but that she must depend upon Him. Mary's words to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you,' indicate that she understood and accepted this new role. In any event, Mary is not to be worshipped, nor does she have authority with her Son in behalf of others. Had Jesus submitted to His mother's suggestion and leading, there might have been some grounds for 'Mary worship,' and for the claim of the Roman Church that 'Mary is the hope of all.' But here at the very beginning of His public ministry, the ground is cut from under any such claim.

On another occasion, apparently after weeks of absence, Mary came seeking Jesus at the place where He was preaching to the multitude, but could not get to Him because of the crowd. Apparently she sent word to Him by messenger, making known her desire that He would come to her, or perhaps making the direct request that He come to her without regard as to how that might interrupt His work. But He refused her request. We read (Confraternity Version):

‘While he was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brethren were standing outside, seeking to speak to him. And someone said to him, “Behold, thy mother and thy brethren are standing outside, seeking thee.” But he answered and said to him that told him, “Who is my mother and who are my brethren?” And stretching forth his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Behold my mother and my brethren! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother”’ (Matt. 12:46-50).

Instead of granting Mary's request, He replied in such a way that it was in effect a public rebuke. Undoubtedly she felt it keenly. Perhaps Mary was even ashamed of the fact that her Son was attracting so much attention and wanted to withdraw Him from the crowd, for in Mark's account of this event we read, 'And the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. And when his friends heard it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself' (3:20, 21). As we read the New Testament we get the impression that neither Mary nor the brothers of Jesus understood His activities while He was on earth ('For even his brethren did not believe on him,' John 7:5), and that while Mary believed on Him earlier, His brothers may not have joined the company of believers until after His resurrection, perhaps not until after His ascension.

As a boy growing up in the home of Joseph and Mary, Jesus was obedient to them. But after His public ministry began, after He had presented Himself as the Son of God and as the Saviour of the world, Mary had to sink into the background. It is to Jesus alone that the world must turn for salvation. Undoubtedly He gave this rebuke purposely, that the world might know that Mary was His mother as man, but not as God.

If Mary had had the influence and authority over Him that is claimed by the Church of Rome, He would not have answered her as He did but would have honoured her request promptly. Here again we have Scriptural evidence that Mary has nothing to do with the ministry of the Son of God as regards the matter of salvation. By this statement He respectfully classes her and His brethren along with other converts. To Him they were all the same — ‘Who is my mother and who are my brethren? . . . Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother!’ As the Son of God and the Redeemer of men, His relation to Mary was identically the same as to any others who would hear His Word, and do it.

On still another occasion a woman in the crowd raised her voice in praise of Mary. We read (Confraternity Version):

‘Now it came to pass as he was saying these things, that a certain woman from the crowd lifted up her voice and said to him, “Blessed is the womb that bore thee, and the breasts that nursed thee.” But he said, “**Rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it**”’ (Luke 11:27, 28).

This was the most subtle attack of all, appealing, as it does, to the sentiments and the emotions. It is a device that even today traps unstable souls into worshipping a woman, that is, into Mariolatry. But here again Jesus gave a plain and decisive answer which should settle forever the question regarding the superiority of Mary or the promotion of any Mary cult. He utterly rejected the idea that Mary occupies a position of holiness above that of other women, or that she was to be crowned the ‘Queen of Heaven’ and become the object of worship. After the ascension of Christ she is seen with the apostles and several other women in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14) but no special honour or position is recorded as having been given to her. She was not, in herself, more than any other virtuous woman, except that she was especially chosen to be the mother of Jesus, and to be the kind and loving parent which she was to the most wonderful Child that ever grew up in a home.

We notice further that throughout our Lord’s public life He was ever careful to call Mary ‘woman,’ never ‘mother.’ Even when He was dying on the cross He addressed her thus. The Greek, Hebrew, and Latin each had a word for ‘mother,’ as well as for ‘woman.’ But the Scripture says ‘woman,’ not ‘mother.’ He *never* used the term ‘Lady,’ which is so much used in the Roman Catholic Church. Let us follow the Scripture.

While Jesus always spoke respectfully to His mother, He nevertheless made it clear that neither she nor anyone else had any part in the work of salvation. No mere human *could* assist in that work, and the Scriptures are careful to point out that no assistance or dictation in any form was permitted. When Jesus stepped out of His home life at Nazareth and began His public ministry, a new relationship was established. From that time on His supernatural parentage was emphasized. For He was the only begotten Son of the Father in heaven. He rebuked the mistaken tendency which seeks to exalt the human relationship at the expense of the divine, the physical at the expense of the spiritual.

## 12. THE PROTESTANT ATTITUDE TOWARDS MARY

As evangelical Protestants we honour Mary, the mother of our Lord, with the honour the Scriptures give her as 'blessed among women.' No other member of the human race has received such high honour as was conferred upon Mary in that she was chosen to be the mother of the Saviour of the world. She was truly a woman of virtue, and of extraordinary faith. She fulfilled admirably the office assigned to her. She was the chosen vessel to bring the Bread of Life to a sin-cursed world. But she was only the vessel, not the Bread of Life. We cannot eat the vessel; rather it is the Bread of Life that we need. It is not Mary the Jewish maiden, but Jesus the Son of God whom we need as Saviour.

We honour Mary, and all generations shall call her 'blessed,' She believed the word of God and accepted the message of the angel Gabriel. But we do not deify her, nor worship her, nor pray to her, and we are bound to protest strongly when Christ is dethroned and Mary is elevated to that place which belongs to Him alone. We worship *with* her the Son of God, but we do not worship *her*, nor worship *through* her, as if she were a mediator. It is important that all understand the difference between the matter of honouring Mary, and the grossly unscriptural practice of *worshipping* her. We are constantly reminded of the words of Jesus: 'Whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother' (Matt. 12:50).

Roman priests say that they honour Mary, and accuse Protestants of failing to do so. There is certainly the danger that in revolting against the recognized evil of Mariolatry, we may neglect to give Mary the distinguished and honoured place which the Scripture itself accords her. And we should be on guard against that. But the priests do her a grave injustice in that they impose too much responsibility upon her. Peter, the alleged first pope, did not do that. He did not even mention her in any of his sermons or in his two letters. As is characteristic of Protestants, he said much about Christ as the only Saviour from sin, but he did not present Mary as a mediator. To present her in that capacity is to rob God of part of His glory and to palm off a counterfeit salvation upon the people. There is no record in Scripture of anyone ever calling on Mary for salvation.

The false estimate of Mary's position on the part of the Roman Catholic Church is based in large measure on a mistaken interpretation of the words of Jesus spoken on the cross, when He said to John, 'Behold, thy mother.' Romanists say that these words were addressed to all men, present and future, and that He was committing all men to Mary as her sons. The truth, however, is that the New Testament is unmistakably clear on this point, and that the Lord committed His mother to John's care for the remainder of her natural life, and that He laid upon John as an individual the responsibility to serve as a son to her. It reads:

‘When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by whom he loved, he said to his mother, Woman, behold, thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold, thy mother! and from that hour the disciple took her unto his own home’ (John 19:26, 27).

The natural meaning of these words is that they were addressed to Mary and to John as individuals, that from that time forward Mary should look upon John, the beloved disciple, as her son, as the one who in her life would take the place of Jesus, and that John should assume the duties of a son and care for Mary with filial affection, that he should comfort her in her loneliness, as a true son would. And that Mary and John so understood those words is clear from the immediately following verse, which reads: ‘And from that hour the disciple took her unto his own home’ (v. 27).

This, then, is the Mary we honour—not a weeping statue of stone, not a half-goddess, nor a ‘Queen of Heaven,’ but the humble servant of God, who found favour with Him and became the mother of Jesus.

### **13. WERE THERE OTHER CHILDREN IN THE FAMILY OF JOSEPH AND MARY?**

The Scriptures tell us that Jesus was virgin-born. But what of the family of Joseph and Mary after the birth of Jesus? Did Joseph and Mary have other children? Or was Jesus the only Child? The answers to these questions pointedly divide Roman Catholics and Protestants.

In Matthew 13:54-56 we read:

‘And coming into his own country he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, “Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter’s son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joseph, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us?”’

Mark also names the brothers of Jesus and mentions his sisters (6:3).

The natural meaning of these verses is that there were other children in the family of Joseph and Mary. There were four sons; and there were at least two daughters, for the term is in the plural. Presumably there were three or more daughters, for the term used is ‘all.’ When there are only two we say ‘both,’ not ‘all.’ And the reference in John 7:5, ‘For even his brethren did not believe on him,’ also finds its most natural meaning in other sons of Joseph and Mary. It was self-evident that the people at large did not believe on Him, but here John says that even His own brothers, the members of His own family, did not believe on Him.

A prophecy about Christ in Psalm 69, ‘I am become a stranger unto my brethren, And an alien unto my mother’s children’ (v. 8), also finds its natural fulfilment in the attitude of

Christ's brothers towards Him. That this is a Messianic psalm prophetic of the coming and work of Christ, is clear from a number of New Testament references in which it is applied to Him. Compare verses 4, 8, 21, and 25 with John 15:25; 2:17; Rom. 15:3; Matt. 27:34; and Acts 1:20, in which other elements of the psalm are fulfilled. Luke's statement concerning Mary, 'And she brought forth her firstborn son' (2:7), implies that there were other sons born after Jesus. Acts 1:14 refers to 'Mary the mother of Jesus,' and 'his brethren,' who are mentioned in addition to the disciples.

These would in fact have been half-brothers and half-sisters of Jesus since they were sons and daughters of Joseph and Mary, while He was the Son of Mary only. James, the half-brother of the Lord, became the leader of the church in Jerusalem and presided at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:13, 19). And two of the books of the New Testament, James and Jude, were written by the sons of Joseph and Mary.

The Roman Catholic Church attempts to explain these away as cousins, and therefore not children of Joseph and Mary at all. But the Greek has another word which means cousin, *anepsios*, as in Colossians 4:10: 'Mark, the cousin of Barnabas.'

Another reference indicating the same is Matthew 1:24, 25: 'And Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took unto him his wife; and knew her not till she brought forth a son: and he called his name Jesus.' All that the Scripture says is that Joseph knew her not *until after* the birth of Jesus. The inference is that, after the birth of Jesus, Mary became wholly and completely the wife of Joseph, that they then lived as normal husband and wife, and, taken in connection with the other references that we have cited, that other children were then born into their family.

The Scriptures affirm that Mary was a virgin until after Jesus was born. Nothing beyond that is needed to safeguard the Deity of Christ and the purity of Mary. What more is needed to prove that Jesus was virgin-born? What more do we need to prove that Joseph was not the father of Jesus? In going beyond that and teaching the 'perpetual virginity' of Mary, the Roman Catholics go beyond Scripture and set up man-made doctrine which has no authority.

The priests make repeated references to 'the Virgin Mary.' They acknowledge that Joseph and Mary were husband and wife and attempt to portray them as the ideal human family, but deny that they lived in a normal marriage relationship. But such an unnatural relationship is absurd on the face of it, and nowhere in Scripture is approval ever given for such an abnormal relationship. Such an arrangement would have been contrary to nature and a frustration for both parties. The priests must either give up the idea of Mary's perpetual virginity, or give up the idea that Joseph and Mary represent the ideal human family.

Behind Rome's insistence on the perpetual virginity of Mary, of course, is the desire to justify the celibate state of the priests and nuns. Rome teaches that the single state is holier

than the married state, that there is something inherently unclean and defiling about marriage. Says one Roman Catholic writer concerning the Virgin Mary: 'It cannot with decency be imagined that the most holy vessel which was once consecrated to be a receptacle of the Deity should be afterwards desecrated and profaned by human usage.' According to this teaching, a woman's body is 'desecrated and profaned' when she becomes a mother in the normal course of family life! A nun is holier than the mother of lovely children! And since Rome thinks of marriage as unholy and unclean, and since she has set herself to maintain the holiness, even the sinless perfection, of Mary, she finds herself obliged to teach that Mary always remained a virgin.

#### 14. THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

The doctrine of the 'Immaculate Conception' teaches that Mary herself was born without sin, that from the very first moment of her existence she was free from the taint of original sin. It holds that while all the rest of mankind are born into an inheritance of original sin, Mary alone, by a special miracle of God, was excepted. The original decree setting forth this doctrine was issued by pope Pius IX, on December 8, 1854, and reads as follows:

'We declare, pronounce and define that the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, at the first instant of her conception was preserved immaculate from all stain of original sin, by the singular grace and privilege of the Omnipotent God, in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of mankind, and that this doctrine was revealed by God, and therefore must be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful' (From the papal bull, *Ineffabilis Deus*, quoted in *The Tablet*, December 12, 1953).

Many Protestants misunderstand this doctrine and assume that it relates to the virgin birth of Christ. It relates, however, to Mary's own birth, and has therefore no direct reference to the virgin birth of Christ.

Side by side with the doctrine that Mary was born without sin, there developed the doctrine that she did not commit sin at any time during her life. Then, as one link reached out for another, they gave her the attribute of impeccability, which means that she *could not sin*, that her nature was such that it was impossible for her to sin! All of this was a natural outgrowth of their worship of Mary, a further step in her deification. Their Mariolatry demanded it! They sensed that if they were to give her the worship that is due to our Lord, she must be sinless.

But this doctrine, like the other distinctive doctrines of the Roman system, completely lacks any Scriptural support, and in fact is directly opposed to the Scripture doctrine of original sin. The Bible teaches that all men, with the single exception of Christ who was deity incarnate and pre-existent, are sinners. Mary herself acknowledged her need of a Saviour, for she said:

‘My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour’ (Luke 1:46,47).

Note particularly Mary’s words, ‘my Saviour.’ No one other than a sinner needs a Saviour, for no punishment or evil in any form can be inflicted upon a sinless person. Roman Catholics will have to take Mary’s word or accuse ‘Our Lady’ of lying. For in those words she confessed that she was a sinner in need of a Saviour. That should settle once and for all whether or not a Christian should pray to her. Mary was certainly an admirable character, but she was not sinless, and she was only human. It was, therefore, necessary for her to be born again of the Spirit and to participate in the redemption provided by her Son.

The Scriptures say clearly: ‘All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God’ (Rom. 3:23); ‘Therefore, as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto *all* men, for that *all* sinned’ (Rom. 5:12);

‘For as in Adam *all* die. . . .’ (1 Cor. 15:22); ‘If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. . . . If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us’ (1 John 1:8, 10); ‘There is none righteous, no, not one’ (Rom. 3:10). Scripture gives us no warrant for excluding Mary from such comprehensive statements as these.

Further, Scripture tells us that after the birth of Jesus Mary brought the two offerings prescribed in the law, one, a burnt-offering (symbolizing complete surrender of the will to God), and the other a sin-offering (a sacrifice acknowledging sin) (Luke 2:22-24; Lev. 12:6-8). The last time Mary is mentioned in the New Testament she is praying *on the same plane* as other needy Christians, not being prayed to by them (Acts 1:13, 14).

The doctrine of the immaculate conception has had a long and varied history. It was unknown to the apostolic church, and it was not even a matter of discussion until several centuries after the death of Mary. It did not become an official doctrine until the year 1854, more than eighteen centuries after Christ was born of the virgin Mary, and so is one of the later doctrines of the Roman Church. The Council of Ephesus, 431, used the expression, ‘Mother of God,’ but its purpose was to emphasize the deity of Christ, not to set forth a doctrine concerning Mary. But popular opinion reasoned that since the birth of Christ occurred without any taint of sin, Mary herself must have been without sin, even without original sin, which is the lot of all other human beings.

Augustine, who was admittedly the greatest theologian of the ancient church, contradicts the idea of immaculate conception, for he expressly declares that Mary’s flesh was ‘flesh of sin’ (*De Peccatorum Meritis*, ii. c. 24); and again that ‘Mary springing from Adam, died because of sin; and the flesh of our Lord, derived from Mary, died to take away sin.’ He expressly attributed original sin to Mary in his *Sermon on Psalm 2*. The doctrine was opposed by Chrysostom, Eusebius, Ambrose, Anselm, most of the great medieval

schoolmen, including Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventura, Cardinal Cajetan, and also by two of the greatest of the popes, Gregory the Great, and Innocent III.

Thomas Aquinas says that while Christ did not contract original sin in any way whatsoever, nevertheless 'the blessed Virgin did contract original sin, but was cleansed therefrom before her birth' (*Summa Theol.* III, ad 2; Quest. 27, Art. 1-5); and again that, 'It is to be held, therefore, that she was conceived in original sin, but was cleansed from it in a special manner' (*Compendium Theol.*, p. 224). Geddes MacGregor, in his book, *The Vatican Revolution*, says:

'So strong was St. Thomas (Aquinas') opposition to the doctrine that it became almost a point of honour throughout the Dominican Order to oppose the notion as theologically untenable. The Franciscans, however, following Duns Scotus, were more inclined to foster the notion, and the Jesuits, later on, made it one of their special concerns to do so. If pope Pius IX was right, let alone infallible, it seems regrettable that the learned theologians of Christendom should have been left for eighteen hundred years with such a marked lack of guidance on the subject, that they not only erred on it but erred almost in proportion to their stature as the leaders of the Church's intellectual life, the luminaries in the firmament of her mind' (p. 9; Beacon Press, Boston; Macmillan & Co., Ltd., London and Toronto).

The dispute between the Dominicans and the Franciscans became so bitter that pope Sixtus IV eventually took a hand and prohibited further discussion, without deciding the question in favour of either side. The Council of Trent, though called primarily to deal with the problems arising out of the Protestant Reformation, was asked by pope Pius IV to make a pronouncement, but left the matter untouched,

Nevertheless, the idea that Mary was sinless continued to gain ground. Members of the Society of Jesus soon began to propagate the doctrine anew, and it was largely through their work that it was decreed by pope Pius IX, 'the infallible successor of Peter,' in 1854, and was officially ratified by the docile Vatican Council of 1870 (which council also ratified the decree concerning the infallibility of the pope in matters of faith and morals).

Most of the theologians of the Middle Ages opposed the doctrine because they were unable to harmonize it with the universality of original sin. Most of them held that, if Mary were not a partaker of the sin and apostasy of the race, she could not be the point of contact between Deity and humanity as was required for the human nature of Christ. Hence in this case, even tradition, the usual refuge of the Roman Church in matters of doctrine, contradicts this papal dogma.

So, Mary is now placed on a plane of absolute equality with her adorable Son, Jesus Christ, so far as sinlessness is concerned. Like the other doctrines of Romanism, this one is said to be based on 'the unanimous consent of the fathers.' Though the dispute in reality

continued for centuries and was at times bitter, it is accepted by all Roman Catholics today, for the official pronouncement by the pope leaves them no other choice. For along with the decree there was issued this condemnation of any who dare to disbelieve it:

‘Therefore, if some shall presume to think in their hearts otherwise than we have defined (which God forbid), they shall know and thoroughly understand that they are by their own judgment condemned, *have made shipwreck concerning the faith*, and fallen away from the unity of the Church; and, moreover, that they, by this very act, subject themselves to the penalties ordained by law, if, by word, or writing, or by other external means, they dare to signify what they think in their heart.’

What a flagrant example of false doctrine and ecclesiastical tyranny! That is the very thing that Peter condemned when he forbade ‘lording it over your charges’ (Confraternity Version, 1 Peter 5:3). The Council of Trent pronounced its anathemas primarily against Protestants who dared to differ from its decrees. But the anathemas pronounced by the later councils have been directed primarily against their own people, in order to force them into line.

But why should any Roman Catholic embrace that doctrine when the greatest teachers in his own church rejected it? Indeed, why should anyone believe it if the Bible does not teach it?

## 15. THE ASSUMPTION OF MARY

The latest addition to the long list of Roman Catholic beliefs (‘inventions’ would be a more accurate term) came on November 1, 1950, with the *ex cathedra* pronouncement by pope Pius XII that Mary’s body was raised from the grave shortly after she died, that her body and soul were reunited, and that she was taken up and enthroned as Queen of Heaven. And to this pronouncement there was added the usual warning that ‘anyone who may henceforth doubt or deny this doctrine is utterly fallen away from the divine and Catholic faith.’ That means that it is a mortal sin for any Roman Catholic to refuse to believe this doctrine.

According to tradition, Mary’s assumption was on this wise:

‘On the third day after Mary’s death, when the apostles gathered around her tomb, they found it empty. The sacred body had been carried up to the celestial paradise. Jesus Himself came to conduct her hither; the whole court of heaven came to welcome with songs of triumph the Mother of the divine Lord. What a chorus of exultation! Hark how they cry, “Lift up your gates, O ye princes, and be ye lifted up, O eternal gates, and the Queen of Glory shall enter in.”’

This is the type of account that might be expected from a medieval monk who was not satisfied with the information given in the Bible concerning Mary, and who undertook to

describe the events as he imagined they might have happened. Here we are told that Mary was not only received into heaven, but that she was raised to a pre-eminence far above that which it is possible for any of the saints to attain. Because of her alleged co-operation in the passion of her Son, she is assigned a dignity beyond even the highest of the archangels. She was crowned Queen of Heaven by the eternal Father, and received a throne at her Son's right hand.

Thus Mary's body was miraculously preserved from corruption, and her resurrection and ascension are made to parallel Christ's resurrection and ascension. And she, like Him, is said to be enthroned in heaven where she makes intercession for the millions of people throughout the world who seek her assistance. This was a natural consequence of the 1854 pronouncement of the immaculate conception of Mary—a supernatural entrance into life calls for a supernatural exit from life. A mysterious halo of holiness falls over her entire being. Whereas the glorification of the saints will take place at the end of the world, her glorification has already taken place.

Pope Pius XII was called the 'Marian pope' for his work in promulgating this doctrine of the assumption of Mary and in declaring her Queen of Heaven. By his decree a twelve-month period was set aside for this purpose, involving Marian congresses, special services, and pilgrimages to Rome (which naturally brought huge revenues to the Vatican), with the avowed purpose of turning the eyes of the world more intensively towards Mary—which inevitably meant a proportionate turning away from Christ.

To a Protestant the most amazing thing about the doctrine of the assumption of Mary is that it has no Scripture proof whatever. Not one shred of evidence can Roman Catholics find in the Bible about Mary's death, burial, location of her grave, or when or how she ascended to heaven. And yet this troubles the Roman Church not in the least. Pope Pius XII made the pronouncement with the utmost confidence, relying on an alleged original 'deposit of faith' given to the apostles by Jesus Christ—but which, we note, did not come clearly to light until some nineteen centuries later. The early church fathers, who were closest to those events, knew nothing at all about such an ascension. One marvels that such unscriptural, unhistorical, and unfounded teachings could be embraced by any people and treated as if they were unchallengeable Scripture truth.

All that the Roman Church pretends to have from an early date supporting this doctrine is an apocalyptic legend, contained in a book, *In Gloriam Martyrum*, written by Gregory of Tours, southern France, in the sixth century. On the face of it, it is a mere fairy tale. This book narrates how as Mary lay dying with the apostles gathered around her bed, Jesus appeared with His angels, committed her soul to the care of Gabriel, and her body was taken away in a cloud. As Edward J. Tanis appropriately remarks, 'There is no more evidence for the truth of this legend than for the ghost stories told by our grandfathers' (*What Rome Teaches*, p. 26). But this curious medieval folklore has now been made an

official doctrine of the Roman Church, and any member who refuses to accept it is declared by papal decree to be ‘utterly fallen away from the divine and Catholic faith.’

Here we have a typical example of how Roman Catholic doctrines develop. Millions of people are required to believe in the bodily assumption of Mary without the church furnishing any Scriptural or historical proof, and they do so without the slightest protest. Not even in the schools of learning is there any voice raised to demand proof for such a doctrine. Whether Scriptural or unscriptural, historical or unhistorical, scientific or unscientific, reasonable or unreasonable, every member of the church is under obligation to accept it and believe it. This shows the baneful effect of the kindred doctrines that the pope is infallible in his *ex cathedra* statements, and that the average church member is not to try to reason out his faith but to accept implicitly whatever the church teaches.

The doctrine of the assumption of Mary is merely one of the so-called ‘logical conclusions’ that the Roman theologians have drawn to support their system. Since Mary was sinless, it is illogical, we are told, to assume that her body remained in the grave. But the answer is: *If Mary was sinless, why did she have to die at all?* Death is the penalty of sin. And where there is no sin there can be no penalty. God would be unjust if He punished the innocent. Either Mary was sinless and did not die, or she did have sin, she died, and her body remains in the grave.

Rome has so built up the Mary role that it has become an indispensable part of the present-day church, so much so that if Mary were placed back in the position given her in Scripture, it would change the whole character of that church. Some have even suggested that the Roman Catholic Church should be called the ‘Marian Church,’ because in her life and practice she gives first place to Mary.

Following the *ex cathedra* pronouncements concerning the immaculate conception and the bodily assumption of Mary, there remains one major link to complete the process to which the Roman Catholic Church is committed in regard to Mary, that of her co-redemption with Christ. This doctrine has been under discussion for several years. Some prominent churchmen have indicated that the next official pronouncement will declare that Mary, though technically not divine, is nevertheless associated with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in matters of salvation, and that she is the ‘Mediatrice of all Graces,’ or ‘Co-redemptrix with Christ.’ At the present rate we eventually shall have in heaven no longer a Trinity but a Quartet! Thus in every age Rome moves forward deliberately in the formulation of her doctrines.

## **16. ROME’S PURPOSE IN EXALTING MARY**

In the development of this section extensive use has been made of an article, *The Secret Purpose of Mariolatry*, by Dee Smith, published in *Christian Heritage*, December, 1958.

In the Roman Catholic Church so much of myth and legend has been added to Mary’s person that the real Mary has been largely forgotten. Although there are but few references

to her in the Bible, she is there presented as a sublimely courageous character. In no other event is her true character brought out so clearly as in her vigil at Calvary. When most mothers would have been in a state of collapse, Mary persisted through a long and agonizing ordeal which only the most valiant spirit could have endured.

What a contrast there is between this noble, heroic woman and the gaudily-dressed doll that we see in the Roman Catholic Church! Instead of the candid and forthright gaze of one conscious of the dignity and self-respect of her womanhood, the 'Blessed Virgin' shrinks in servility with lowered head and lowered eyes, as if ashamed of it. One searches the empty face for a single trace of such character as must have graced the one chosen to nurture the Christ. The astute observer soon realizes that this insipid caricature decked out in superfluous finery has no relationship at all to the Mary of Scripture, and is nothing more than a sheer fabrication, a fiction promoted with ulterior purposes.

What, then, is the purpose of the hierarchy in promoting this particular type of mannequin? In what way does she serve their interests?

It is obvious that the Blessed Virgin represents a model for Roman Catholic women, or to put it more accurately, a straitjacket in which the clergy would like to fasten them. She represents the type of woman most fitted to sustain clerical control over the minds of the Roman masses. Her outstanding qualities are humility, obedience, pliability—abject submission to authority. It is this ideal that the Roman Church wishes to instil—indeed must instil—in Roman Catholic womanhood if it is to retain its hold on the people and maintain the services rendered in its many institutional enterprises such as schools and hospitals which for the most part are run with unpaid labour.

The most important service rendered by this caricature of the Blessed Mary is that of maintaining the control of the Roman clergy over Roman Catholic women. For the promotion of the church programme it is absolutely essential that they remain spineless, mindless, 'meek and mild,' as Mary is pictured, willing to accept dumbly a half-life in which their role is merely to bear and to drudge. In Roman Catholic countries this control remains as complete today as ever it was at any age in the past. In countries freed from the Roman yoke any deviation from this norm is due to the good fortune of those women in being born in a Protestant country in which truly Christian influences make for the general uplift of woman-kind. The hierarchy exacts a service from the women of the church that it cannot obtain from the men, yet ironically its contempt for woman-kind is coupled with a full awareness that its whole power-system rests upon the Catholic woman, and that if she ever raises her bowed head, the world-wide political machine will lose its efficiency and collapse irreparably.

In Roman Catholic countries, where women can be kept in total ignorance, the priests, who are educated and intelligent men, have never hesitated to play upon their emotions, to instil fear into their souls, and to encourage superstition, as that suited their purpose. In enlightened countries common knowledge prevents much of that deception, and Roman

Catholic women to a large extent share with their Protestant sisters the blessings of a common culture.

It is well known that the Roman Catholic clergy in all countries urge their people to produce large families. This serves a double purpose. First, it keeps both mothers and fathers so fully occupied, the women in caring for the children, and the fathers in making a living, that they have little opportunity to look around and make undesirable comparisons between the ethics of their creed and that of the Protestant countries. And, secondly this large family programme serves to plug the hole in the dyke left by the defection of a large number who leave their church.

As an alternative to her child-bearing services for the glory of Rome, the Catholic woman is offered the privilege of becoming a holy drudge within the church, namely, a nun in a convent. Here again the Blessed Virgin plays a key role, that of recruiting officer. Add to this the masterly publicity job that has been done on the Roman Catholic girl from infancy to make the nun an object of holy glamour, almost a replica of the Blessed Virgin, and it is somewhat surprising to learn that in recent years the Roman Church is finding it increasingly difficult to persuade American girls to enter convents. It has become so difficult in fact that the Roman Church has been obliged to import sisters from Europe to meet the need for teachers and nurses.

In concluding the article previously mentioned, Dee Smith says:

‘Presiding over the two functions of Roman Catholic womanhood, the child-bearing programme and the unpaid labour pool, stands the puppet figure of the Blessed Virgin, at once the instigator and the patroness.

‘Compared with her services in insuring the cushioned privilege and power of the hierarchy by subjugating the Roman Catholic women, the enormous wealth brought to Rome’s exchequer by the financial exploitations of Mariolatry is merely incidental. Yet it is worth a glance.

‘From the sale of “holy” pictures, leaflets, scapulars, candles burned before her altars, fees for masses, and so on, the staggering intake at commercialized shrines such as St. Anne de Beaupré, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and others, a steady stream of gold flows into hierarchical coffers. One might almost paraphrase the Roman title, “Mother of God” to “Minter of Gold.”

‘But all this is as nothing beside the Blessed Virgin’s vital and indispensable function in maintaining the status quo. Without the inspiration of the Blessed Virgin, the Roman Catholic woman could not be kept at her business of child-bearing and drudging. Without the subjection of the Catholic woman, without her submissive acceptance of the yoke of Mary caricatured by the Roman

Church, the all-powerful, self-indulgent ambitious men who constitute the Roman hierarchy would not be able to use their power as a weapon against human liberties and human rights.

‘Without doubt, the devotion to the Blessed Virgin constantly impressed upon the Roman population by its clergy is inspired not by piety, but by expediency. For the clergy, devotion to Mary is not merely a matter of dollars and cents, but of survival. Their sinecure depends on it. That is the secret purpose of Mariolatry.’

What, then, is the remedy for this situation, this entire problem of Mariology and Mariolatry? It is, indeed, very simple. Let the Roman Catholic people *read the Bible*, particularly the New Testament. There they will find the living, compassionate, redeeming Christ, with very little said about Mary. It is not without reason that the Roman priesthood has striven so hard to keep the Bible from the people, and that even now the people are strictly forbidden to read any Bible except one that contains the approved set of explanatory notes.

#### **FOOTNOTE**

\* A graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary (Th.B., 1928; ThM., 1929), where he studied Systematic Theology under Dr. C. W. Hodge, his books include: *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, *Roman Catholicism*, *Studies In Theology*, *Immortality*, *The Millennium* and *A Harmony of the Gospels*.

## Part 10

# PURGATORY

1. [Rome's Teaching concerning Purgatory.](#)
2. [The Terrifying Aspect of Purgatory.](#)
3. [The Money Motive in the Doctrine of Purgatory.](#)
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### 1. ROME'S TEACHING CONCERNING PURGATORY

The Roman Catholic Church has developed a doctrine in which it is held that all who die at peace with the church, but who are not perfect, must undergo penal and purifying suffering in an intermediate realm known as purgatory. Only those believers who have attained a state of Christian perfection go immediately to heaven. All unbaptized adults and those who after baptism have committed mortal sin go immediately to hell. The great mass of partially sanctified Christians dying in fellowship with the church, but who nevertheless are encumbered with some degree of sin, go to purgatory where, for a longer or shorter time, they suffer until all sin is purged away, after which they are translated to heaven.

The Roman Catholic Church holds that baptism removes all previous guilt, both original and actual, so that if a person were to die immediately after baptism he would go directly to heaven. All other believers, except the Christian martyrs but including even the highest clergy, must go to purgatory to pay the penalty for sins committed after baptism. The sacrifices made by the martyrs, particularly those that reflect honour upon the church, are considered adequate substitutes for the purgatorial sufferings.

The doctrine of purgatory is not based on the Bible, but on a distinction which Rome makes by dividing sin into two kinds. This distinction is clearly set forth by Dr. Zacchello, who says:

‘According to Roman teaching, a person can commit two kinds of sin against God: *mortal and venial*. By mortal sin is meant a grave offence against the law of God or of the church. It is called “mortal” because it kills the soul by depriving it entirely of sanctifying grace. Venial sin is a small and pardonable offence against God and the laws of the church. Then, this confusing and unscriptural doctrine continues: Two kinds of punishment are due to mortal sin, eternal (in hell forever), and temporal (in purgatory). Eternal punishment is cancelled by the sacraments of baptism and penance, or by an act of perfect contrition with promise of confession. Temporal punishment is not cancelled by these sacraments, but by works of penance, by almsgiving, by paying the priest to say mass, by indulgences, etc., which reduce the temporal punishment for mortal sins that would have to be suffered in purgatory. Thus even if all mortal sins of a Roman Catholic are forgiven in confession by a priest, and he does not perform enough of these “good

works”, he will go to purgatory and remain there in torture until his soul is completely purified’ (*Secrets of Romanism*, p. 101).

The doctrine of purgatory rests on the assumption that while God forgives sin, His justice nevertheless demands that the sinner must suffer the full punishment due to him for his sin before he will be allowed to enter heaven. But such a distinction is illogical even according to human reasoning. For it manifestly would be unjust to forgive a criminal the guilt of his crime and still send him to prison to suffer for it.

The Roman Catholic people are taught that the souls of their relatives and friends in purgatory suffer great torment in the flames, that they are unable to help themselves, that not even God can help them until His justice has been satisfied, and that only their friends on earth can shorten or alleviate that suffering. Purgatory is supposed to be under the special jurisdiction of the pope, and it is his prerogative as the representative of Christ on earth to grant indulgences (i.e., relief from suffering) as he sees fit. This power, it is claimed, can be exercised directly by the pope to alleviate, shorten, or terminate the sufferings, and within limits it is also exercised by the priests as representatives of the pope. It is, of course, impossible but that power of this kind should be abused even in the hands of the best of men. Vested in the hands of ordinary men, as generally must be the case, or in the hands of mercenary and wicked men as too often has happened, the abuses were bound to be appalling. The evils that have flowed from this doctrine, and which are its inevitable consequences, make it abundantly clear that it cannot be of divine origin.

## **2. THE TERRIFYING ASPECT OF PURGATORY**

Since none but actual saints escape the pains of purgatory, this doctrine gives to the death and funeral of the Roman Catholic a dreadful and repellent aspect. Under the shadow of such a doctrine death is not, as in evangelical Protestantism, the coming of Christ for His loved one, but the ushering of the shrinking soul into a place of unspeakable torture. It is no wonder that millions of people born in the Roman Catholic Church, knowing practically nothing about the Bible but believing implicitly in the doctrines of their church, should live and die in fear of death, in fear of spending an unknown number of years in the pain and anguish of that place called purgatory. How tragic that these people live in fear and servitude to the priests, who, they are taught to believe, hold in their hands the power of life and death, when all the time Christ has paid redemption’s price *in full*. Few, if any, of them know that their own Roman Catholic Bible says: ‘Wherefore, because children have blood and flesh in common, so he in like manner has shared in these; that through death he might destroy him who had the empire of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver them, who throughout their life were kept in servitude by the fear of death’ (Heb. 2:14,15, Confraternity Version). These words, ‘Kept in servitude by the fear of death,’ describe the spiritual state even of devout Roman Catholics. All their lives they are kept in bondage through fear of this imaginary purgatory.

The sufferings in purgatory are said to vary greatly in intensity and duration, being proportioned to the guilt and impurity or impenitence of the sufferers. They are described as being in some cases comparatively light and mild, lasting perhaps only a few hours, while in others little if anything short of the torments of hell itself, and lasting for thousands of years. They differ from the pains of hell at least to this extent, that there is eventually an end to the sufferings in purgatory, but not to those in hell. They are in any event to end with the last judgment. Hence purgatory eventually is to be emptied of all its victims.

As regards the intensity of the suffering, Bellarmine, a noted Roman Catholic theologian, says:

‘The pains of purgatory are very severe, surpassing anything endured in this life.’

The Manual of the Purgatorial Society, with the imprimatur of Cardinal Hayes, says:

‘According to the Holy Fathers of the Church, the fire of purgatory does not differ from the fire of hell, except in point of duration. “It is the same fire,” says St. Thomas Aquinas, “that torments the reprobate in hell, and the just in purgatory. The least pain in purgatory,” he says, “surpasses the greatest suffering in this life.” Nothing but the eternal duration makes the fire of hell more terrible than that of purgatory.’

And in another book with the imprimatur of archbishop Speilman (now cardinal), Bellarmine is quoted as saying:

‘There is absolutely no doubt that the pains of purgatory in some cases endure for entire centuries’ (John M. Haffert, *Saturday in Purgatory*).

It seems that the Church of Rome has rather wisely refrained from making any official pronouncement concerning the nature and intensity of purgatorial suffering. Books and discourses intended for Protestant readers or hearers speak of it only in the mildest terms. But the Roman Church does not thereby escape responsibility, for it has always allowed free circulation, with its expressed or implied sanction, of books containing the most frightening descriptions, ranging all the way from comparatively mild disciplinary measures to a burning lake of billowing flames in which the souls of the impenitent are submerged. Among their own people and in the hands of the priests the doctrine of purgatory has been an instrument of terrifying power. We are reminded of the remark of Charles Hodge in this connection: ‘The feet of the tiger with its claws withdrawn are as soft as velvet; but when those claws are extended, they are fearful instruments of laceration and death.’

Furthermore, as Dr. Augustus H. Strong has appropriately said:

‘Suffering has in itself no reforming power. Unless accompanied by special renewing influences of the Holy Spirit, it only hardens and embitters the soul. We have no Scripture evidence that such influences of the Spirit are exerted after death, upon the still impenitent; but abundant evidence, on the contrary, that the moral condition in which death finds men is their condition forever. . . . To the impenitent and rebellious sinner the motive must come, not from within, but from without. Such motives God presents by His Spirit in this life; and when this life ends and God’s Spirit is withdrawn, no motive to repentance will be presented. The soul’s dislike for God (we may even say, the sinner’s hatred for God) will issue only in complaint and resistance’ (*Systematic Theology*, p. 1041).

We ask: How can spirits suffer the pains of material fire in purgatory before they have resurrection bodies? In answer to this question the Roman theologians have invented a theory that in purgatory the soul takes on a different kind of body—the nature of which they do not define—in which the suffering can be felt. But that is like the doctrine of purgatory itself, a purely fictitious assumption without any Scripture proof whatever, and in fact contrary to Scripture.

Roman Catholicism is often described as a religion of fear. The doctrine of purgatory is where much of that fear centres—fear of the priest, fear of the confessional, of the consequences of missing mass, of the discipline of penance, of death, of purgatory, and of the righteous judgment of an angry God. L. H. Lehmann tells us concerning his boyhood in Ireland:

‘A sense of constant fear overshadowed everything. Ingrained fear is, in fact, the predominant note running through the life of all children born and reared in Catholic Ireland. Few ever get rid of it completely in after life, even in America. That fear concerns everything in this life on earth, and still more terrible is the fear of the terrors in the life beyond the grave’ (*The Soul of a Priest*, p. 34).

### **3. THE MONEY MOTIVE IN THE DOCTRINE OF PURGATORY**

It is safe to say that no other doctrine of the Church of Rome, unless it be that of auricular confession, has done so much to pervert the Gospel or to enslave the people to the priesthood as has the doctrine of purgatory. A mere reference to the days of Tetzels, Luther, and the Protestant Reformation, not to mention present day conditions in the Roman Catholic countries in Southern Europe and Latin America, where that church has had undisputed ecclesiastical control for centuries, is sufficient to illustrate this point. Every year millions of dollars are paid to obtain relief from this imagined suffering. No exact figures are available. In contrast with the custom in Protestant churches, in which itemized financial statements of income and expenditure are issued each year, Roman Catholic

finances are kept secret, no kind of budget or balance sheet ever being published which would show where their money comes from, how much it amounts to, how much is sent to Rome, how or where the remainder is spent. In this as in other things, the people must trust their church implicitly.

The doctrine of purgatory has sometimes been referred to as 'the gold mine of the priesthood' since it is such a lucrative source of income. The Roman Church might well say, 'By this craft we have our wealth.'

In general it is held that the period of suffering in purgatory can be shortened by gifts of money, prayers by the priest, and masses, which gifts, prayers, and masses can be provided by the person before death or by relatives and friends after death. The more satisfaction one makes while living, the less remains to be atoned for in purgatory.

At the time of death the priest is summoned to the bed of the dying person. He administers extreme unction, and solemnly pronounces absolution. Yet after death occurs money is extracted from the mourning relatives and friends to pay for masses to be said in order to shorten the period of torment in purgatory. The result, particularly among ignorant and uneducated people, has been that the Roman Church sells salvation for money, not outwardly and directly, but nevertheless in reality. All understand that the service of the church in securing the salvation of a soul in purgatory is to be rewarded with appropriate gifts or services. It has well been said that the Roman Church is a huge money-gathering institution, and that everything in Rome has a price tag on it.

It is due in no small measure to this doctrine of purgatory that the Roman Catholic Church has been able to amass large sums of money and to build magnificent cathedrals, monasteries, and convents, even in regions where the people are poor. This has been particularly true in the Latin American countries. It is a common experience in Mexico, for instance, to find in almost every town an impressive Roman Catholic church surrounded by the miserable huts of the natives. The practical outworking of the system has been seen in several countries, e.g., France, England, Italy, Austria, Mexico, and others, when a disproportionately large amount of property fell into the hands of the Roman Catholic Church, sometimes as much as a fourth or a third of all the property of the nation, and had to be confiscated and redistributed by the government in order to redress the economic situation. There is literally no limit to the amount of property that the Roman Church seeks for itself if it is not restrained. Those who contribute money for masses, particularly those who at the urging of the priests leave substantial portions of their estates to the Roman Church so that future masses can be said for them, are helping to keep in being a lucrative and detestable system, which did not become a regular practice in the church until centuries after the time of Christ and which is a disgrace to Christianity.

At this point another question arises. If the pope, or the priest acting for him, really has the power to shorten or modify or terminate the suffering of souls in purgatory, why does he not, if he is a good man, render that service freely and willingly as a Christian service to

humanity? In the hospitals the doctors and nurses try in every possible way to relieve the pain and misery of those who come to them. Why does the pope, or the priest, keep those poor souls suffering horrible pain in the fire, if at any time he can pay all their debt out of his rich treasury of the merits of the saints? Why? Has Romanism an answer?

If any one of us actually had the power to release souls from purgatory and refused to exercise that power except in return for a payment of money, he would be considered cruel and unchristian—which indeed he would be. By all Christian standards that is a service that the church should render freely and willingly to its people. No decent man would permit even a dog to suffer in the fire until its owner paid him five dollars to take it out. The insistence on a money transaction before a soul can be released, and sometimes money transactions over long periods of time, shows clearly the sinister purpose for which the doctrine of purgatory was invented. The plain fact is that if purgatory were emptied and all its suffering souls admitted to heaven, there would be little incentive left for the people to pay money to the priests.

The doctrine of purgatory is a horribly cruel doctrine in that the priests, most of whom are educated, intelligent men, know how flimsy or how utterly lacking is all actual evidence for such a place. Under the pretence of delivering souls from that suffering, large sums of money are wrung from the bereaved at a time when hearts are sore and when they are least able to think logically about such matters.

Says Stephen L. Testa:

‘Purgatory has been called a “a gigantic fraud,” and “a colossal racket,” for it deprives the poor of their last pennies and extorts large funds from the rich in exchange for *nothing*. During the Middle Ages the rich rivalled each other in leaving their estates to the Church, and the poor gave out of their poverty till the Church became the richest landowner in every country. In several countries the Church owned one-half of the land and one-third of all the invested funds. It built great cathedrals and bishops’ palaces and left the poor to live in huts and shanties. You can see even today in Europe and in Mexico great massive cathedrals surrounded by the hovels of the poor, who grovel in misery, ignorance, and wretchedness.

‘But many of those Catholic nations during the last century had their wars of independence, beginning with the French Revolution, and the Church was deprived of its temporal power and the landed properties were seized by the State and partitioned among the poor farmers. In Italy this happened in 1870. But Mussolini restored the temporal power of the pope (in name only) in 1929. However, the church is not the rich land owner that it once was. The spirit of liberty and democracy is fatal to the autocracy and totalitarianism of

the Roman Church' (booklet, *The Truth About Catholics, Protestants, and Jews*, p. 14).

And Dr. Robert Ketcham asks:

'How do you know, Mr. Priest, when to stop praying and taking money from your parishioners for a given case? How do you know when John Murphy is out of purgatory? His getting out is dependent upon the saying of masses paid for by his bereaved ones. If you stop one or two masses too soon, what then? If you keep on saying masses for the fellow after he is out, that is bad. It is bad either way you come at it. I ask seriously, Sir, Mr. Roman Catholic Priest, How do you know when to stop saying masses for a given individual? Do you have some kind of a connection with the unseen world?' (book let, *Let Rome Speak for Herself*, p. 20).

The fact is that Roman Catholic priests admit that they have no way of knowing when a soul is released from purgatory. One former layman of that church, writing on this subject, says that it was the priests' abuse of this doctrine that finally turned him against Roman Catholicism. He tells of an incident that occurred forty-five years after the death of a man in his congregation, when the then officiating priest again asked the widow for money that he might say mass for her husband. A succession of priests in turn had taken money from that widow, always on the pretence of getting her husband out of purgatory. But they had never gotten him out. And there, forty-five years later, they were still extracting money on that fraudulent claim.

We assert in the strongest terms that the practice of saying mass for souls in purgatory is a gigantic hoax and fraud, a taking of money under false pretences, because it purports to get people out of purgatory when actually no such place exists. We would not trust a judge who manipulated the law to make himself rich, nor would we trust a policeman who asked for a bribe. Why, then, should we trust a priest who presents an interpretation, concerning the afterlife, which is not only not in the Bible but which is contrary to the clear teaching of the Bible? Such practice is fraudulent and is designed primarily for only one purpose, that of keeping the people under the power of the priests and controlling their lives and property as far as possible.

#### **4. SCRIPTURE TEACHING**

That the doctrine of purgatory is unscriptural can be shown easily. The Bible says nothing about any such place, and in fact the most devastating arguments against purgatory come from those inspired pages. Christ made not even so much as a passing allusion to purgatory. Instead He said: 'He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, *hath* eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life' (John 5:24). Hence eternal life is already possessed by the soul that believes on Christ and there

can be no possible condemnation of that soul. When Jesus said to the penitent thief on the cross, 'Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise' (Luke 23:43), the clear inference was that at his death he would go immediately to heaven. Christ's words, 'It is finished' (John 19:30), spoken at the end of His suffering on the cross, mean that the work of redemption which He came to perform has been accomplished, finished, not partially, but completely. Furthermore, there is no transfer from one realm to another after death. Those who go to the place of outer darkness cannot cross from that sphere to the other: 'Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, that they that would pass from hence to you may not be able, and that none may cross over from thence to us' (Luke 16 :26).

The apostle John teaches the same: 'The blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from *all* sin. . . . If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from *all* unrighteousness' (1 John 1:7,9). Hence our sins, all of them, are forgiven through the sacrifice of Christ, and none are left to be purged away by human merit. And again: 'And I heard a voice from heaven saying, Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; for their works follow with them' (Rev. 14:13).

Paul's teaching on this subject is quite full. He anticipated no purgatory, but said that to depart was to 'be with Christ,' and that it would be 'very far better' (Phil. 1:23). While we are 'at home in the body,' we are 'absent from the Lord'; but to be 'absent from the body' is to be 'at home with the Lord' (2 Cor. 5:8). To the Philippians he wrote: 'For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain' (1:21). In answer to the question, 'What must I do to be saved?' he gives the straightforward and unqualified answer: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved' (Acts 16:31)—no reference there to confession to a priest, penance, purgatory, or any other thing such as a religion of works attaches. Those who put their trust in Christ's atoning death do not come into judgment: 'There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus' (Rom. 8:1).

Peter, the alleged founder of Romanism, declared: 'Christ also suffered for sins *once*, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God' (1 Peter 3:18). Hence we cannot be made to suffer for that sin a second time. And the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says that God not only forgives, but pledges Himself never to bring our sins to His remembrance: 'And their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more' (10:17).

What a contrast there is between these words of Scripture concerning the state of the righteous immediately after death, and that teaching which would have us believe that the sufferings of purgatory must be endured indefinitely, perhaps even for years! The Roman Church knows to a certainty that this doctrine of purgatory, which is of such great importance to it, is not in the Bible. And that undoubtedly is one of the reasons why through the ages it has kept the Bible from the people.

Purgatory is, therefore, a travesty of the justice of God. God's justice has been fully satisfied *once and for all* by the sacrifice of Christ, and God cannot exact double

punishment, once from Christ, and again from those for whom He died. Hence the redeemed soul goes not to any midway station between earth and heaven, but directly to heaven; and the sacrifice on Calvary was sufficient to 'purge' all our sins without the need of any 'purg'-atory.

A Roman Catholic cannot approach his deathbed and the certain prospect of the dread fires of purgatory with anything other than fear. For as far as he is true to the doctrines of his church he can see only great fires beyond. It is difficult to conceive of a belief so groundless and yet so frightening as that of the doctrine of purgatory. But what a marvellous, glorious thing it is at death to go *straight to heaven!* And what good news it is for Roman Catholics when they learn that there is no such place as purgatory, no suffering for the redeemed soul beyond the grave!

Where, then, does Rome find her authority for the doctrine of purgatory? Four Scripture verses are cited, but not one of them has any real bearing on the subject. They are (Confraternity Version): 'He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire' (the words of John the Baptist concerning Christ) (Matt. 3:11) 'If his work burns, he will lose his reward, but himself will be saved, yet so as through fire' (1 Cor. 3:15); 'And some, who are judged, reprove; and others, save, snatching them from the fire' (Jude 22-23); and 'Christ. . . (who) was brought to life in the spirit, in which also he went and preached to those spirits that were in prison. These in times past had been disobedient when the patience of God waited in the days of Noe while the ark was building. In that ark a few, that is, eight souls were saved through water' (1 Peter 3:18-20).

None of these verses mentions purgatory, nor gives any real ground for believing that such a place exists. 1 Peter 3:18-20 at first seems somewhat plausible. But a closer examination makes it clear that these verses simply tell us that the Spirit through which Christ 'was brought to life' (in the resurrection), which we believe refers to the Holy Spirit, was the same Spirit in which He preached to the people in Noah's day. The preaching referred to by Peter was long since past. It occurred while the ark was in process of construction; and the tragic thing about it is that only eight souls responded to that preaching. Those eight, and only those, were saved through water. Those who refused the testimony of the Spirit of Christ as He spoke through Noah were 'those spirits that were in prison' (the American Standard Version translates more accurately: 'the spirits in prison'), that is, in the prison house of sin, or in hell, at the time Peter wrote. And they still are imprisoned. These verses are, in brief, a warning against disobedience to God and rejection of the Gospel, but they have no bearing on the doctrine of purgatory. Thus the four passages cited by Roman Catholics surely are a very slender cord on which to hang so heavy a weight.

But Rome bases her doctrine of purgatory primarily on a passage in 2 Maccabees, which is a Jewish book written after the close of the Old Testament. It is an apocryphal writing,

and is not acknowledged by Protestants as having any authority. In order to show how flimsy this evidence is we quote this passage in full:

‘And the day following, Judas (Maccabeus) came with his company, to take away the bodies of them that had been slain, and to bury them with their kinsmen, in the sepulchres of their fathers. And they found under the coats of the slain some of the donaries of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbiddeth to the Jews: so that all plainly saw, that for this cause they were slain. Then they all blessed the just judgment of the Lord, who has discovered the things that were hidden. And so betaking themselves to prayers, they besought him, that the sin which had been committed might be forgiven. But the most valiant Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves from sin, forasmuch as they saw before their eyes what had happened, because of the sins of those that were slain. And making a great gathering, he sent twelve thousand drachmas of silver to Jerusalem for a sacrifice to be offered for the sins of the dead, thinking well and religiously concerning the resurrection. For if he had not hoped that they that were slain should rise again, it would have seemed superfluous and vain to pray for the dead. And because he considered that they who had fallen asleep with godliness, had great grace laid up for them. It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from sins’ (12 : 39—45, Douay Version).

But these verses really do not teach the doctrine at all. Nowhere in this passage is there any mention of fire in which souls are tormented. All that is mentioned is prayers for the dead, from which the Roman Catholic theologians infer, first, that such prayers are proper, and secondly, that such prayers can be effective for the salvation of the dead. Furthermore, from the Roman Catholic viewpoint, these verses prove too much, for they teach the possible salvation of soldiers who had died in mortal sin, that of idolatry. And that contradicts Roman Catholic doctrine, which is that those dying in mortal sin go straight to hell and are permanently lost. They do not go to purgatory, where they can be aided by the prayers of people still on earth. Surely one who had never heard of purgatory would not learn about it from this passage. The word ‘purgatory’ is not found here. This, again, is a precarious passage on which to build such an important doctrine.

## **5. HISTORY OF THE DOCTRINE**

The germ of what afterward grew into the doctrine of purgatory is to be found in the idea of a purification by fire after death among the ancients, long before the time of Christ, particularly among the people of India and Persia. It was a familiar idea to the Egyptian and later to the Greek and Roman mind. Plato accepted the idea and gave expression to it in his philosophy. He taught that perfect happiness after death was not possible until a man had made satisfaction for his sins, and that if his sins were too great his sufferings would have no end. Following the conquests of Alexander the Great, Greek influence spread through all

the countries of western Asia, including Palestine. We have seen that it found expression in 2 Maccabees. The Rabbis began to teach that by means of sin offerings children could alleviate the sufferings of deceased parents. Later Jewish teachers divided the underworld into two abodes—Paradise, a place of happiness, and Gehenna, a place of torment.

We need only read church history to discover how this doctrine developed by slow processes into its present form. In the early Christian era, following the Apostolic age, the writings of Marcion and the Shepherd of Hermas (second century) set forth the first statement of a doctrine of purgatory, alleging that Christ after His death on the cross went to the underworld and preached to the spirits in prison (I Peter 3 : 19) and led them in triumph to heaven. Prayers for the dead appear in the early Christian liturgies and imply the doctrine, since they suggest that the state of the dead is not yet fixed. Origen, the most learned of the early church fathers (died A.D. 254), taught, first, that a purification by fire was to take place after the resurrection, and second, a universal restoration, a purifying by fire at the end of the world through which all men and angels were to be restored to favour with God.

In the writings of Augustine (died A.D. 430) the doctrine of purgatory was first given definite form, although he himself expressed doubt about some phases of it. It was, however, not until the sixth century that it received formal shape at the hands of Gregory the Great, who held the papal office from A.D. 590 to 604. Thereafter eschatology entered upon what we may term its mythological phase, during the period of history known as the Dark Ages. The invisible world was divided into heaven, hell, and purgatory, with the imagination attempting to portray as vividly as possible the topography and experiences of each region. The doctrine was proclaimed an article of faith in 1439, by the Council of Florence, and was later confirmed by the Council of Trent, in 1548. But does any intelligent person believe that if such a place as purgatory is described in the Bible it would have taken the church fathers 600 years to discover it, and another 1,000 years to confirm it? At any rate the Protestant Reformation swept away those creations of terror and fancy, and reverted to the Scriptural antithesis of heaven and hell. The Eastern Orthodox Church incidentally, does not teach the doctrine of purgatory.

The following paragraph by Dr. Charles Hodge shows the influence that this doctrine had in the lives and thinking of all classes of people during the Middle Ages:

‘It was Gregory the Great who consolidated the vague and conflicting views circulating through the church, and brought the doctrine into such a shape and into such connection with the discipline of the church, as to render it the effective engine of government and income, which it has ever since remained. From this time onward through all the Middle Ages, purgatory became one of the prominent and consistently reiterated topics of public discussion. It took firm hold of the popular mind. The clergy from the highest to the lowest, and the different orders of monks vied with each other in their zeal for its

inculcation, and in the marvels which they related of spiritual apparitions, in support of the doctrine. They contended fiercely for the honour of superior power of redeeming souls from purgatorial pains. The Franciscans claimed that the head of their order descended annually into purgatory, and delivered all the brotherhood who were detained there. The Carmelites asserted that the Virgin Mary had promised that no one who died with the Carmelite scapulary upon their shoulders, should ever be lost. The chisel and pencil of the artist were employed in depicting the horrors of purgatory, as a means of impressing the public mind. No class escaped the contagion of belief. The learned as well as the ignorant, the high and the low, the soldier and the recluse, the sceptic and the believer were alike enslaved. From this slavery, the Bible, not the progress of science, has delivered all Protestants. . . . All experience proves that infidelity is no protection against superstition. If men will not believe the rational and true, they will believe the absurd and the false' (*Systematic Theology*, III, pp. 769—70).

Dr. Harris says:

'It is well to remember that the doctrine of purgatory which rests like a heavy burden upon the heart of every Roman Catholic was not taught by any of the early church fathers and had a very slow growth until the fifth century. Its beginnings in prayers for the dead and a difference in status between the martyred dead and the ordinary Christian departed may be found as early as A.D. 200 in Tertullian. Mention of the penal fires comes much later, and the masses for the poor souls in purgatory still later. The doctrine of purgatory is another one of those foreign growths that has fastened itself like a malignant tumour upon the theology of the Roman Catholic Church' (*Fundamental Protestant Doctrines*, V. p. 7).

And Alexander Hislop, in his exhaustive study of the origin of Roman Catholic doctrines, finds that the doctrine of purgatory was adopted from paganism—from Babylonian, Greek, and Roman mythology:

'In every system except that of the Bible the doctrine of a purgatory after death, and prayers for the dead, has always been found to occupy a place. Go wherever we may, in ancient or modern times, we shall find that Paganism leaves hope after death for sinners, who, at the time of their departure, were consciously unfit for the abodes of the blest. For this purpose a middle state has been feigned, in which, by means of purgatorial pains, guilt unremoved in time may in a future world be purged away, and the soul be made meet for final beatitude. In Greece the doctrine of a purgatory was inculcated by the

very chief of the philosophers (Plato). . . . In pagan Rome, purgatory was equally held up before the minds of men.

‘In Egypt, substantially the same doctrine of purgatory was inculcated. But when once this doctrine of purgatory was admitted into the popular mind, then the door was opened for all manner of priestly extortions. Prayers for the dead ever go hand in hand with purgatory; but no prayers can be completely efficacious without the interposition of the priests; and no priestly functions can be rendered unless there be *special pay* for them. Therefore, in every land we find the pagan priesthood “devouring widows’ houses,” and making merchandise of the tender feelings of sorrowing relatives, sensitively alive to the immortal happiness of the beloved dead’ (*The Two Babylons*, pp. 167—8).

## 6. CONCLUSION

As we have indicated, there is surprisingly little revealed in Scripture concerning the intermediate state. This has led some to resort to conjecture and imagination in order to fill out the picture that revelation has given only in the barest outline.

The Roman Catholic theologian Newman cites the doctrine of purgatory as one of the clearest instances of ‘development’ from a slight Scriptural germ. But in reality it is an instance of the development from a germ of that which was never in it to begin with—as if from a mustard seed one could derive an oak tree.

In defence of this doctrine Roman Catholics lay considerable stress upon the fact that the custom of praying for the dead prevailed early and long in the church. Such prayers, it is said, take for granted that the dead need our prayers, and that they are not immediately in heaven. But the fact is that prayer for the dead is merely another superstitious practice which is entirely without Scriptural support. That was one of the early corruptions introduced into the church from heathenism. It will not do to argue from one corruption to support another.

One thing that has given the doctrine of purgatory a certain amount of plausibility is the fact that we all are sinners and do not attain perfect holiness in this life, while heaven is a place of perfect holiness where nothing evil can enter. The question naturally arises, How is the soul cleansed from the last remnants of sin before it enters heaven? Since this deals with something that is outside the realm of our experience it might seem reasonable to believe that there would be a place of further purification. In this case the Bible is our only trustworthy source of information. But a careful examination of all the passages relating to this subject shows that there are only two abodes for the dead: a heaven for the saved, and a hell for the lost. And in response to the question as to how the Christian is made ready for heaven, the Bible teaches that perfect righteousness is not to be had by any process at all, but only through faith in Christ (Gal. 2:16). We are not justified by the works of the law. As

expressed in the Westminster standards: 'The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness.' And if it be doubted that holiness can be attained in a single moment, let it be remembered that recovery from disease is ordinarily a process, but that when Christ said, 'I will; be thou made clean,' even the leper was cleansed in an instant (Matt. 8:3).

Belief that a man can maintain contact with the dead, and that he can influence them for good or bad, has been a common element in the pagan religions. When the Israelites came into the land of Canaan, Moses strictly charged them that they were not to follow the customs of the land in making gifts to or sacrificing for the dead, nor were they to allow any marks to be made in their flesh to appease or facilitate contact with the spirits of the dead. In Deuteronomy 26:13-14 we read: 'And thou shalt say before Jehovah thy God, I have put away the hallowed things (objects of heathen veneration and worship) out of my house. . . . I have not eaten thereof in my mourning, neither have I put away thereof, being unclean, nor given thereof for the dead.' The Roman practice of gifts for the dead and prayers to and for the dead (to Mary and the saints and for deceased relatives and friends) is not far removed, if indeed it is removed at all, from such customs.

Mr. Norman Porter, of Belfast, Northern Ireland, tells of a conversation that occurred during a visit to a Roman Catholic monastery in connection with a course of instruction offered on Roman Catholic beliefs. 'I asked the priest, "Sir, when you die, where do you hope to go?" He replied, "I hope that when I die I shall go at least to the lowest place in purgatory." That was his hope. I said, "Tell me, when the pope dies, where will he go?" He said, "He will be just as I am. He hopes that he will go to purgatory." I said, "The so-called Vicar of Christ, the man who has claimed for himself the right to represent Christ on earth is going to purgatory?" He said, "Yes." I then said, "Sir, when do you get out of purgatory? When will you be in heaven?" He answered, "I don't know." So not even the Roman priests know when a soul escapes from this mysterious place. What a message for a perishing world!'

Furthermore, the doctrine of purgatory represents God as a respecter of persons, which the Bible says He is not. Because of money, a rich man can leave more for prayers and masses and so pass through purgatory and into heaven more speedily than many a poor man. But the Bible teaches that God's judgment is based on character alone, not on outward circumstances of wealth, position, or special standing.

This doctrine turns to commercial gain the sorrow of relatives and friends for their departed loved ones, and prolongs indefinitely the hold of the priest over the guilty fears and hopes of people which otherwise would end at death. It is not difficult to imagine the anguish in the heart of a devout Roman Catholic who accepts the teachings of his church and believes that his father or mother, son or daughter, is suffering in the flames of purgatory. Millions of people are steeped in that superstitious system, and those who sincerely believe it will do almost anything to provide relief. It is not strange that the Roman Church accumulates wealth.

What a striking contrast there is between a Protestant and a Roman Catholic funeral! For the Protestant, death is his promotion to the glory-land, his coronation. He has gone to heaven to be with Christ who has preceded us to the Father's house. We gather not primarily to mourn a loss, but to celebrate a victory. The Scriptures are read, and the words of Christ comfort our hearts: 'Let not your hearts be troubled: believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.' We read, too, such words of Paul as these: 'For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain having the desire to depart, and be with Christ; for it is very far better'; '. . . willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord.' Christian hymns about heaven are sung, such as: 'Safe in the arms of Jesus'; 'O think of the home over there'; 'When we all get to heaven'; 'And I shall see Him face to face, and tell the story, "Saved by grace"'; 'Beyond the sunset'—hymns which speak of heaven as our home. Then words of comfort and consolation are spoken to the bereaved family, words of inspiration and warning to the congregation, urging them to accept Christ as Saviour and to walk in His way as He is the way that leads to heaven.

But how different is the Roman Catholic funeral! We quote the words of Stephen L. Testa as he describes a funeral that he attended recently:

'It was a high requiem mass, with three priests officiating, all in black robes, chanting a dirge of penitential psalms in Latin, in lugubrious tones which heighten the wailing and crying of the bereaved family especially if they come from Latin countries. The friends of the family read the prayer on the prayer card given to them at the door by the undertaker, praying to Jesus to have mercy on the soul of the deceased and release it soon from the "devouring flames" (of purgatory) where it is supposed to be imprisoned. At one point during the mass the priest will sprinkle the casket with holy water and pronounce the "absolution of the dead," and then he will fumigate it with sweet-smelling burning incense, walking around the casket or catafalque, mumbling Latin prayers.

'No hymns about heaven are sung. It is a fact that *Catholic prayer books have no songs about heaven.*<sup>1</sup> And no sermon or words of consolation are spoken by the priest to the bereaved family, for the whole service is intended to appease God, that He may have mercy on the soul of the deceased and deliver him soon from the flames of purgatory. If any words are spoken in English it is to induce the friends of the bereaved family to pay for more requiem masses to be said in the future, . . . for the refreshment and repose of that soul in purgatory.'

The strong public sentiment that is found everywhere against the obtaining of money under false pretences should apply to the Roman Catholic priests who extort money from deceived relatives for prayers and masses which they pretend will better the condition of the dead. And the church that maintains this species of dishonesty should be held in disrepute and contempt by all honest people, regardless of denominational differences.

Our conclusion, therefore, after an extensive survey of the doctrine of purgatory is that it is not in the Bible, that it is a human invention, and that it is contrary to what the Bible teaches. Redeemed souls are cleansed, not by the fires of purgatory, but by the blood of Christ and in this present life; for the Bible says, ‘The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from *all* sin’ (1 John 1:7)—thereby eliminating once and for all any need for such a horrible place as purgatory. We do not say that any person who believes in purgatory cannot be a Christian. Experience shows that Christians as well as unbelievers sometimes are very inconsistent; they may accept, without thinking it through, a doctrine or theory that is contrary to what the Bible teaches and to what their hearts know to be true. How thankful we should be that we are not under the false teaching of a misguided church or priesthood that threatens us with the torments of purgatory, but that instead we have the assurance that at death we go immediately to heaven and enter into its joys!

## FOOTNOTE

\* A graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary (Th.B., 1928; ThM., 1929), where he studied Systematic Theology under Dr. C. W. Hodge, his books include: *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, *Roman Catholicism*, *Studies In Theology*, *Immortality*, *The Millennium* and *A Harmony of the Gospels*.

<sup>1</sup> The new Catholic hymnal of 1965 includes Protestant hymns, even ‘Ein’ feste burg’.