

Come Out Of Her, My People!

Rev 18:4

Was God Calling Me?

Rene Valdes

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Philippine Copyright 2007
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Second printing, October 2007
First Printing, March 2007

ISBN 978-971-691-641-6

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Printed on Demand by centralbooks
927 Quezon Avenue, Quezon City
Philippines 1104

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The Good News NEVER Told, © 2005

Text Evangelism, Year 1, © 2005

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Dedication

To Bible-reading Catholics everywhere,
To all who, in seeking the Truth, are beset with disturbing
questions,
To all who feel trapped in dilemmas,
But yearn to obey only Him who is Lord,
May you insist on the narrow path of obedience,
And experience the exhilaration
of coming into
God's marvelous light.

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*JER 20:9 ...His Word is in my heart
like a fire,
a fire shut up in my bones.
I am weary of holding it in;
indeed, I cannot. [NIV]*

This book has been a burden in my heart,
And writing it
Was a simple matter of obedience
To God's sovereign leading,
And a joy to have been used
As His instrument
In accomplishing His purpose.

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Chapter 1

The Searcher's Whys

PSA 119:2 Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. [NIV]

For many Catholics of my age, in the twilight of their years, the past half-century has been a period of sometimes bewildering change in the teachings that earlier provided for us our spiritual moorings. Compare what we were earlier taught with what our practices are now.

When I was a young boy, I remember being made to believe that if I walked down a street and realized I was approaching a Protestant chapel on my side of the street, I was to cross the street to the other side, to avoid coming near something which at the very least was contaminating, or at worst downright dangerous. It was rather like the way the priest and Levite, in Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, crossed over to the other side of the street upon encountering the near-dead body of the robber's victim, to avoid the possibility of even just their shadows passing over the victim and thereby rendering themselves unclean.

I remember too that, as a young boy, when my family went to Sunday Mass, we occupied a special pew that bore our family name deeply carved into the wood, and which was provided with extensible metal fences across the ends of the pew, to prevent undesirable and presumptuous

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intruders from entering our private, privileged space, no matter that they were church-going fellow Catholics.

And when the Mass came to the part of the Gospel, and the priest mounted the ornate pulpit to deliver his sermon, that was the signal for my father, and the many other respectable men of the town, to rise and take their young boys, their successors-in-training, myself included, to the outside of the church, and there under the convenient shade of a tree, discuss the important news of the day, while the priest thundered his apparently irrelevant message to all the ladies faithfully remaining inside the church.

Thankfully, my grandchildren today are no longer taught to avoid Protestant chapels, nor taken to private pews, nor taught to appreciate the great outdoors during homilies. Thankfully, things have changed.

But perhaps a more significant change in the teachings we receive these days is on the matter of reading the Bible. When I was young, the Bible was, unbelievably, off-limits to all lay people, and was allowed reading only to priests, and perhaps nuns. Ordinary people were *not* to read the Bible, as it was too complex and deep for the ordinary, ill-educated layman's mind. The Bible was not to be our source of guidance; suffice it for all to rely on priests to tell us what to believe in. The priests were the gifted ones, the educated select, the only ones qualified to probe God's Scriptures. Any attempt of any layman to read the Bible was bound to lead to dangerous misinterpretation of the truths of our faith, and very probably to catastrophic doctrinal error.

This notwithstanding, when my wife and I were married, we prided ourselves in purchasing, as our first item of conjugal property, an expensive and fancy bible, complete with gold edges and a leather cover. However, true to our earlier training, after our initial admiring inspection of it, we promptly returned it to its box, and hid it in a dark closet where it dutifully stayed for the first thirty years of our married life.

But times did change, and the Church's spiritual teachings were adjusted.

Suddenly Catholics were allowed access to the forbidden world of the Word. This was done rather suddenly, and I have no memory of a priest formally announcing from his pulpit that most incredible of news, that the Bible was now "allowed reading" for the general public, and that we were no longer considered intellectual or spiritual nincompoops. Rather, this new age dawned upon us when we joined the Catholic Charismatic Movement, which then first encouraged us to read the Bible. What a refreshing breath of fresh air!

In truth, that was an earthshaking turnabout for us. What a sudden change in direction!

So down from the dark closet our still brand-new and unread Bible came, and we embarked on an unaccustomed reading adventure. Gingerly we tiptoed through the unfamiliar pages, unsure of our footing. What puzzling words we encountered! What incomprehensible expressions of long ago! And how many puzzling and seemingly *non-sequitur* statements we encountered!

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But in other ways, what a joy it was to read! I re-discovered the familiar childhood stories of the Creation, of Abraham, Joseph, Samson, Solomon, etc., and I was delighted to realize that the stories were “still there”, and in fact available in greater detail than when first I was taught them by my mother.

Later on, in my adult years, my membership in the Catholic Charismatic Movement further whetted my appetite, when I was encouraged to have a daily regimen of bible reading. I had a new-found hunger for Scripture, and soon enough, my curiosity on the childhood bible stories was completely satisfied, and I turned to more serious study of other parts of the Bible.

And almost immediately, questions arose in my mind.

Questions such as those posed in my earlier book, “The Good News Never Told”.

Why was God’s great free gift of salvation never taught to us? Why were we taught that, contrary to the clear teaching of the Bible, we were to *earn* salvation?

Why were we not taught to tithe, when God clearly said that when we don’t, we are *robbing* no less than the Lord, and that we are effectively shutting up the windows of heaven which were poised to rain down blessings on us?

And now, newer, additional questions:

Why do we call buildings where we worship as “church”, when the Bible says *we* are the church?

COL 1:18 “He is the Head of the body made up of his people - that is, his Church” [TLB]

Why was it considered dangerous, for centuries, to allow ordinary Catholics to read the Bible when it assures us that the Holy Spirit will not allow us to go astray?

JOH 16:13 “When the Holy Spirit, who is truth, comes, he shall guide you into all truth. [TLB]

Why do we favor formula prayers, repeated over and over again, over conversational ones, when Jesus Himself said,

MAT 6:7 “Don't recite the same prayer over and over as the heathen do, who think prayers are answered only by repeating them again and again...” [TLB]

Why do we designate as saints certain good people who have died, when the Bible calls *all* believers saints, as Paul did in his letter to the Romans and to the Corinthians:

ROM 1:7 To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. [NIV]

2CO 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia: [NIV]

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In fact, we are cautioned against judging people prematurely, and labeling them as good or otherwise.

1CO 4:5 “So be careful not to jump to conclusions before the Lord returns as to whether someone is a good servant or not.” [TLB]

At face value, questions such as these provided me with not insubstantial dilemmas. But these were the questions on subjects of lesser import, and could be set aside without being too untrue to ourselves.

There were, however, larger questions which were difficult to ignore, and raised more serious issues, and which called for more deliberation. These I had to examine, and to them I needed to devote more of the study that they deserved, to allow me to seek out the truth. For God Himself gave me this assurance:

PSA 119:2 Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. [NIV]

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Chapter 2

Where Have All The Shepherds Gone?

1PE 5:2-3 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers - not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. [NIV]

From the beginning, Jesus taught that He was a shepherd who took good care of his flock. He called Himself a shepherd, and laid down the rule that the good shepherd would go to the extent of dying for his sheep. He said,

JOH 10:1 "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." [TLB]

Jesus wanted us to know that He took his shepherding seriously. In His well-known parable, He emphasized that even one lost sheep was important to Him, and that He would search far and wide for such a lost individual, and rejoice upon finding it.

LUK 15:3-5 "If you had a hundred sheep and one of them strayed away and was lost in the wilderness, wouldn't you leave the ninety-nine others to go and search for the lost one until you

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found it? And then you would joyfully carry it home on your shoulders.” [TLB]

Drawing a parallel, Jesus then reveals the unbounded joy and celebration in Heaven over a sinner who repents and returns to the fold.

*LUK 15:7 “Well, in the same way **heaven will be happier over one lost sinner who returns to God than over ninety-nine others who haven't strayed away!**” [TLB]*

There are many, I know, who would shake their heads in disbelief over this statement, saying that it makes little sense to jeopardize the safety of ninety-nine to try and save one individual. But clearly Jesus wanted to make a point. He would go to great lengths to care for His sheep. That was the essence of being a good shepherd.

Not content with that parable, He launched into another.

*LUK 15:8-9 “Or take another illustration: **A woman has ten valuable silver coins and loses one. Won't she light a lamp and look in every corner of the house and sweep every nook and cranny until she finds it?**” And then won't she call in her friends and neighbors to rejoice with her?” [TLB]*

And again He stressed the heavenly celebration.

*LUK 15:10 “**In the same way there is joy in the presence of the angels of God when one sinner repents.**” [TLB]*

The point remained the same. He was a searcher of the lost, who were joyfully found and returned to the fold.

Jesus not only taught that He was a good Shepherd. He practiced it. The Gospel accounts of how He treated sinners are astonishing. At the very beginning of His ministry, He chose a tax collector, a known sinner, as one of His apostles, a choice which immediately scandalized the critical Pharisees.¹

On another occasion, a woman caught in adultery and brought face-to-face with Jesus was given a relatively mild rebuke. *“Has no one condemned you?”* He asked. And when the woman replied *“No”*, He very gently assured her,

JOH 8:11 “Neither do I. Go and sin no more.”
[TLB]

And I remember the story of Peter and his denials. Here was a man who committed a truly grievous sin, vigorously denying the very Lord he had, not much earlier, sworn to stand by. Yet when Jesus later confronted the penitent Peter at the Sea of Galilee, there was no finger-wagging from Him. The sinner was rather given a chance to change, as Jesus gently asked him,

JOH 21:15 “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these others?” *[TLB]*

I cannot read the Gospels without being impressed by the sheer kindness and caring of Jesus. Here was a man who actively, not passively, sought out sinners to bring them forgiveness and reconciliation. As He Himself said,

¹ Mark 2:14-16

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MAT 9:13 “For I have come to urge sinners, not the self-righteous, back to God.” [TLB]

Having declared the principles of good shepherding, having practiced what He taught, and having taught the lessons well to His disciples, Jesus then instructed them to

MAT 28:19 “Therefore go and make disciples in all the nations.” [TLB]

I now ask myself: ***In the ensuing centuries, how well did His followers shepherd the flock?***

The evidence would seem to me to be negative, often astonishing in its extent.

For instance, how shall I reconcile myself to the 11th to 13th century Crusades, intended originally by Church Authorities to free Jerusalem from the forces of Islam? Over a span of more than 200 years, *Christians went to war* against Muslims. They slew one another, and set aside God’s teachings to be gentle with unbelievers.² Why were Jesus’ teachings to love unbelievers into His kingdom thrust aside?

How was I to interpret the historically infamous 12th-century Inquisitions, intended to fight heresy?

And I must hasten to explain that whereas the modern-day understanding of heresy is the unforgivable departure from the teachings of Holy Scripture, the old sin of heresy was more often than not the simple persistence of a faithful

² 2Timothy 2:24

minority, a remnant, to faithfully obey Biblical teachings, rather than the teachings of Rome!

In an incredible departure from the clear teachings of Jesus to search for lost sinners and joyfully bring them back to the fold, Church Authorities established official Inquisitors who mercilessly tracked down suspected heretics, often used unspeakable torture to extract confessions, and imprisoned those they found guilty, executed them, and confiscated their possessions. Why were the teachings of the Lord to heal, to forgive, and to bring sinners to peaceful reconciliation with God disobeyed?

Such were past successors of Christ. *What about present-day Catholic shepherds? Do they follow the Lord's teachings on shepherding?*

But perhaps a necessary prior question might be: Are there present-day lost sheep for Catholic shepherds to search for?

At face value, the answer would seem to me to be an unavoidable and emphatic “Yes”. All I have to do is look around me and see the incredible breakdown of morality, the common acceptance of evil, and the widespread practice of graft and corruption. How can I blink away the dismal corruption label applied to our country? In 2006, we ranked a poor Number 121 (where Number 1 was the least corrupt) out of a field of 163 nations in perceived corruption³? We seem to have become a wicked nation, a nation of lost sheep. I must ask what this would say about our Catholic shepherds.

³ http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2006

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A further consideration are the puzzling natural calamities afflicting the country with surprising regularity. How can I miss the astonishing list of earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, droughts, locusts, political instability, etc.? And why does no one seem to make the connection between the unending calamities besetting the nation and the sinfulness of the nation?

Many strongly maintain that there is no connection between the calamities and our possible sinfulness. No one seems to take note of what God's Word says about this sort of situation. In many, many places in the Old Testament, I see story after story of how His people sinned, and how in His anger He allowed invasions, or pestilence, or hunger to afflict them. Over and over, He invites them to repent and return to Him. Typically He said,

AMO 4:9 "I sent blight and mildew on your farms and your vineyards; the locusts ate your figs and olive trees. And still you wouldn't return to me, says the Lord." [TLB]

I can almost hear God sigh in frustration at the sinfulness and insistence of His people that they were not in danger of His wrath, as He said,

ISA 59:1-2 Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. [NIV]

I could apply the above to our own case. For a country that is ostensibly Catholic and professes discipleship under

Christ, our seemingly absolute lack of a sense of repentance is remarkable. It is bad enough that we, as individuals, do not seem interested in returning to the Lord. *But why do our spiritual leaders seem to show little interest in mounting a nationwide, organized, sustained effort to finally lead the country to repentance?*

How often we like to quote that passage in Second Chronicles, in which God promised Solomon and the Israelites forgiveness of sins, and healing, for their repentance.

2CH 7:14 "If my people will humble themselves and pray, and search for me, and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear them from heaven and forgive their sins and heal their land." [TLB]

But in praying that this promise now apply to us, if indeed we can assume we are God's people, why do we miss the point that for it to be possible for the entire nation ("my people") to become united in repentance, we need to be *led*? In the absence of strong national, Catholic, spiritual leadership, is it any wonder we see only lukewarm, symbolic, occasional and disorganized demonstrations of remorse, rather than sustained national penitence, contrition and atonement?

Another important point and concern: *Why do we more commonly perceive our Catholic spiritual leaders as superiors, rather than as shepherds?*

Is my general observation of their behavior correct? Do I rightly observe them normally requiring the flock's obedience, rather than their providing it with gentle guidance? Is it because they are generally wealthier than

the many poor in their flock? Is it the size of their dwellings that commonly exceed those of the poor? Is it their expectation that sinners clean themselves up before approaching them, rather than actively seeking out the lost who are dirtied with sin, and gently guiding them back into the cleansing forgiveness of our Lord?

I could not help recounting my own experience during that period in my life when I was lost, when I did not even believe in the existence of God. I sought the help of shepherds, but found no comfort or guidance from them. As I recounted in my previous book, *The Good News Never Told*:

A priest we did see, a Jesuit professor from my school days. Then several more. Even some nuns. But not a single one of them gave me any answers to the thousand questions of my heart. They talked about deep-sounding doctrines. I was receiving cold theology from unsmiling priests. No answers to my silent yearning for the warmth of the love of ... someone.

Must lost sheep find their way back into the fold rather than be sought out?

Why do Church Authorities continue in the practice of excommunicating sinners, in effect declaring them beyond salvation, condemned and unworthy of the effort to seek them out?

And why do Church Authorities seem oblivious to the dismal quality of sermons priests render at Sunday Masses? This is a common complaint of my friends. I remember that when my wife and I, upon my retirement,

first moved from Manila to Baguio City, we spent *two full years* searching every Sunday for a Mass that offered substantive sermons to feed our hungry souls. Only after two years did we finally find a church that would biblically teach us about our God. I now have to ask if this problem is the reason that a number of Catholic friends have jumped over the wall into born-again Christian churches which offer so much more food for souls.

Another point: We love to quote the statistic that our country is 80% Catholic. Is this still valid? Does anyone truly believe this? Has anyone made a recent study to ascertain its validity? I would not be surprised if the actual figures turned out to be vastly different from popular assumptions.

What is our common perception of our Catholic shepherds? An interesting story comes to mind.

A bishop was invited to dinner at the home of one of his flock, and during the meal, the young son of the family proudly shared his dream to become a priest when he grew up. Pleased at the young man, the bishop asked the boy what led him to such an admirable decision. With the innocence of childhood, the boy replied, "Because wherever priests are invited, the food is always good."

I note with sadness that apparently, even children perceive shepherds as those who must be fed, rather than those who must feed us. This cannot be in accord with Jesus' teaching for shepherds to feed their sheep.

Feeding the flock is a God-given duty to shepherds, for which they will be held accountable, Scripture tells us.

*ACT 20:28 "And now beware! Be sure that you **feed and shepherd God's flock** - his church, purchased with his blood - for **the Holy Spirit is holding you responsible as overseers.** [TLB]*

But the opposite has become the norm. How has it come to this?

I can still clearly recall how, a few years ago, at an assembly of our prayer meeting group, the head of the group worriedly discussed the coming birthday party to be tendered by the parish lay leadership in honor of the parish priest, declared that our tiny and unwealthy group *had* to contribute some food toward the priest's party.

It is my impression that such mandatory honoring of parish priests is not an exception, but rather the rule, as I suspect many parishioners will agree.

Considering the rather sorry state of shepherding in our country, I ask, *is anyone in authority holding himself accountable for this situation?*

Should anyone hold himself accountable? From a reading of Scripture, it would seem so to me. For it seems that God is painfully aware of the sorry state of shepherding at certain times of history, and without question, God was not pleased at all. He used surprisingly strong words to describe His disappointment over performance-deficient shepherds in Israel. In the book of Ezekiel, we read a lengthy discourse on under-performing shepherds.

*EZE 34:2-9 "Son of dust, prophesy against the shepherds, the leaders of Israel. Say to them, 'The Lord God says to you: **Woe to the shepherds who***

feed themselves instead of their flocks. Shouldn't shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the best food and wear the finest clothes, but you let your flocks starve. You haven't taken care of the weak, nor tended the sick, nor bound up the broken bones, nor gone looking for those who have wandered away and are lost. Instead, you have ruled them with force and cruelty. So they were scattered, without a shepherd. They have become a prey to every animal that comes along. My sheep wandered through the mountains and hills and over the face of the earth, and there was no one to search for them or care about them. "Therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: As I live, says the Lord God, you abandoned my flock, leaving them to be attacked and destroyed, and you were no real shepherds at all, for you didn't search for them. You fed yourselves and let them starve; therefore, I am against the shepherds, and I will hold them responsible for what has happened to my flock. I will take away their right to feed the flock - and take away their right to eat. I will save my flock from being taken for their food." [TLB]

Present day Catholic shepherds seem to me to have lost their way. What a dilemma for our shepherds, and for the sheep. How have we strayed so far from God's Word?

God wants His shepherds to feed His flock, caring for it willingly and not grudgingly. Peter reminded the church leaders of his day,

1PE 5:2-3 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers - not because you must, but because you are willing, as God

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*wants you to be; not greedy for money, but **eager to serve**; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. [NIV]*

Chapter 3

The Rape Of Celibacy

GEN 2:18 And the Lord God said, "It isn't good for man to be alone; I will make a companion for him, a helper suited to his needs." [TLB]

By any measure, the worldwide priestly sex scandals are to me an amazing phenomenon, astonishing in their depth and scope. In agony are not only the victims, but also associated communities, and Catholics at large who feel understandably betrayed.

While initially, I thought, or hoped, that the problem might have been local in scope, publications all over the world soon revealed it was very widespread. Typical of these publications was the Boston Globe, which wrote over a period of a year between January 6, 2002 and January 9, 2003, forty one separate reports of sex abuses and accompanying attempts at cover-up, some of which were headlined as follows.⁴

Jan 6/02	CHURCH ALLOWED PRIEST ABUSE FOR YEARS
Feb 24/02	CHURCH HID IN CLOAK OF SILENCE

⁴ Search: boston globe abuse cover-ups, or go to:
http://www.boston.com/globe/spotlight/abuse/extras/coverups_archive.htm

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Mar 23/02	SPEAKING OUT COSTS PRIEST
Apr 9/02	FOR 10 YEARS, CARDINAL IGNORES SEXUAL MISCONDUCT OF SUBORDINATE PRIEST
May 18/02	PRIEST'S SEXUAL MISCONDUCT REWARDED WITH PROMOTION
Jun 5/02	TOP OFFICIALS OF ARCHDIOCESE KNEW ABOUT PRIESTS' MISCONDUCT
Aug 28/02	PRIEST ACCUSED OF MOLESTING ALTAR BOY REASSIGNED, NOW IN CHARGE OF ALTAR BOYS
Nov 23/02	ARCHDIOCESE ASKS JUDGE TO BAR PUBLIC ACCESS TO FILES OF PRIESTLY MISCONDUCT
Dec 4/02	ARCHDIOCESE BENT ON SECRECY, DECEPTION, ON PRIESTLY BEHAVIOR
Jan 9/03	CHURCH OFFICIALS ADMIT KEEPING NAMES OF ACCUSED PRIESTS SECRET TO AVOID SCANDAL

I could not escape feeling the intensity of the Boston sex scandal.

The Catholic News, in its issue of August 30, 2002 ⁵, reported a similar situation in France, and that the Church in Europe was getting ready to fight clergy sex abuse. It reported that 118 priests were under investigation for pedophilia, of which 30 were convicted and 11 were jailed.

The scandals have been so widespread that the Pope found it necessary to make a public statement. The BBC News ⁶

⁵ <http://www.cathnews.com/news/208/172.php>

⁶ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1945056.stm>

reported on April 23, 2002 from the U.K. that the Pope condemned US Church sex abuse, telling American cardinals that there was “no place in the Roman Catholic Church for priests who sexually abused children.”

The problem of sex abuse became so pervasive that Pope John Paul II, in the first message he ever delivered over the internet, apologized to victims. As reported by CNN ⁷ on November 23, 2001, from the Vatican:

“Pope John Paul II, in his first message sent to the world via the Internet, has apologized to victims of sexual abuse by priests and other clergy.”

Despite the Papal apologies, however, scandals continue unabated, with priests seemingly uncontrite, or incapable of being faithful to their vows.

Thus the BBC, in a report on July 13, 2004⁸, published an article on more priestly sexual misconduct, this time in Austria. It reported that priests were photographed fondling and kissing trainee priests, and that pornographic images were found on the seminary computers. Austrian Cardinal Hans Hermann Groer had earlier resigned in 1998 amid allegations that he had molested young boys.

I could only throw up my hands in horror and despair. What is going on? Has celibacy been raped?

⁷ <http://www.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/europe/11/22/pope.apology/>

⁸ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3887033.stm>

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Do we no longer heed Christ's strong words against those who would scandalize little children?

MAT 18:6 But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. [NIV]

How has it come to this? What started it all?

Where is the root of the problem? What is the history of celibacy as a requirement for the priesthood?

In situations like these, I have found that it is often more informative and useful to seek an opinion from one who espouses a position different from that of the establishment. A Catholic married priest, Fr. John Shuster of the U.S., has prepared an interesting history.⁹ Here are some highlights from a lecture he gave, saying:

That history fully supported a married priesthood. For the first 1200 years of the Church's existence, priests, bishops and 39 Popes were married.

That the married priesthood began in AD 313, when the Roman emperor Constantine legalized Christianity within the Roman Empire.

⁹ <http://www.rentapriest.com/web/? p=1018&newsId=25>

That Romans, members of the local ruling elite, converted to Christianity and became priests and moved into positions of leadership in the Church.

That the Roman practice of abstaining from marital relations before a battle found its way into liturgical practice. Priests likewise abstained from intimacy with their wives the night before celebrating Mass.

That in 366, Pope Damasus declared that priests could continue to marry, but that they were not allowed to have sexual relations with their wives!

That this led to even stricter rules. In 1074, Pope Gregory VII declared that anyone must first pledge celibacy before being ordained.

That in 1139, legislation that effectively ended optional celibacy for priests came from the Second Lateran Council under Pope Innocent II.

That is a brief history of how **celibacy became mandatory in 1139**.

What happened *after* the celibacy law was passed in 1139? Were at least the Popes celibate?

Not at all, it seems. I examined this listing offered at this website.¹⁰

¹⁰ <http://www.bessel.org/popes.htm>

POPE WHO FATHERED CHILDREN AFTER THE
CELIBACY LAW OF 1139

Pope	Year of Papacy	Notes
Innocent III	1184 - 1192	Several children
Alexander VI	1492 - 1503	2 grandchildren were Cardinals
Julius	1503 - 1513	Three daughters
Paul III	1534 - 1549	One daughter, three sons
Pius IV	1559 - 1565	Three sons
Gregory XIII	1572 - 1585	One son

The celibacy law seemed to have been followed more in the breach than in the observance.

Church authorities now continue to be in favor of celibacy. Married priests, and many who are unmarried, are against it. Who is right?

Many arguments have been advanced, but sadly, those favoring celibacy are usually based on “what the Church teaches” rather than on *what God says*. So few of us seem to be interested in asking what God thinks about the whole problem.

What does God say in Scripture? A simple search turns up surprising results.

Jesus Himself said that some refuse to marry for the sake of the Kingdom, obviously talking about a voluntary situation. He said,

*MAT 19:12 “Some are born without the ability to marry, and some are disabled by men, and **some refuse to marry** for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven...” [TLB]*

That celibacy is a gift from God is clearly stated by Paul in his letter to the Corinthians.

*1CO 7:7 “I wish everyone could get along without marrying, just as I do. But we are not all the same. God gives some the gift of a husband or wife, and **others he gives the gift of being able to stay happily unmarried.**” [TLB]*

I came to realize that it is a gift, and like all gifts, it is given to selected recipients, not to all.

In his letter to Timothy, Paul laid out the rules for pastors, stipulating the limitation that he must have only one wife, not that he must have no wife at all.

*1TI 3:2 “For a pastor must be a good man whose life cannot be spoken against. **He must have only one wife.**” [TLB]*

The apostles in general seem to have been married, and brought their wives with them along on their evangelical trips. Paul asked the following question.

*1CO 9:5 “**If I had a wife, and if she were a believer, couldn't I bring her along on these trips**”*

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just as the other disciples do, and as the Lord's brothers do, and as Peter does?" [TLB]

I was surprised to realize that apparently, Peter himself had a wife!

Paul even argued that the successful marriage of a priest should serve as proof of his qualification to successfully pastor church members.

1TI 3:5 If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church? [NIV]

Then, of course, I had earlier read that God Himself, from the very moment of creation, clearly saw that it was not good for a man to be alone, and needed a helper beside him.

GEN 2:18 "And the Lord God said, "It isn't good for man to be alone; I will make a companion for him, a helper suited to his needs."" [TLB]

And so I see that according to God's Word, celibacy is a gift!

Even Pope John Paul II, writing in his encyclical *Ecclesia in Europa*,¹¹ agrees in Paragraph 35 of that document, that celibacy is a gift.

¹¹ Search: Vatican ecclesia in europa, or go to http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_20030628_ecclesia-in-europa_en.html

*Celibacy is not merely an ecclesiastical discipline imposed by authority; rather it is **first and foremost a grace, a priceless gift of God for his Church...***

Of course I also noted that in the same paragraph, in a most confusing way, he makes the contrary statement that it is also an *obligation for priests!*

Celibacy is esteemed in the whole Church as fitting for the priesthood, obligatory in the Latin Church...

I asked myself, does the Bible ever talk about forbidding marriage? Only in regard to false teachers in the latter times, before the second coming of Christ - our present times! - when they will teach that marriage is wrong.

*1TI 4:1, 3 But the Holy Spirit tells us clearly that **in the last times some in the church will turn away from Christ and become eager followers of teachers with devil-inspired ideas. They will say it is wrong to be married and wrong to eat meat, even though God gave these things to well-taught Christians to enjoy and be thankful for. [TLB]***

The puzzling question in my mind was that, if God says celibacy is a gift, and like all gifts, is necessarily given to some but not to all, why have Church Authorities made it mandatory for all priests?

God, having stated His position on the matter, and His will, as always, being for our own good, and we, having clearly contravened it, *is it any wonder now, I asked myself, that our celibate priesthood is in chaos, that the rule of celibacy is widely disobeyed, and as a result, the whole world swirls in vitriolic controversy over it? Is it*

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any wonder we must now grapple with the horror of violated altar boys, raped nuns, and even bewildered, sexually-active priests whose vocations are now in tatters?

To me, Scripture seems so clear that priestly celibacy is a gift. Church Authorities seem to have chosen a contrary position. Have they in effect chosen to be wiser than God? How convicting Paul's statement in Corinthians would now seem to be.

1CO 3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God. As it says in the book of Job, God uses man's own brilliance to trap him; he stumbles over his own "wisdom" and falls. [TLB]

What a dilemma, I came to realize, we have entrapped ourselves in. How did we stray so far from God's teachings?

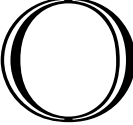
It now seems so penetrating, that statement of God where He acknowledged man's need for a companion.

GEN 2:18 And the Lord God said, "It isn't good for man to be alone; I will make a companion for him, a helper suited to his needs." [TLB]

Chapter 4

Church Report Card: Grade of 33%

*MAT 28:19 Therefore go and **make disciples in all the nations**, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [TLB]*

ver 2000 years ago, Jesus gave His church its marching orders, the Great Commission. He commanded his apostles to make disciples of all nations.

Faithful to their mission, the once timid apostles, now strengthened by the Holy Spirit, sallied forth and began to boldly teach all about the Good News of the Lord, that forgiveness of sins was available to all who came to the Lord.

The book of Acts records the surprising achievements of the Lord's disciples. Thousands were converted to Christianity,¹² and this despite the fact that this was before the use of mass-communications systems!

So effective were the early Christian leaders that by the 4th century, the known world then was pretty much Christianized. In a relatively short span of 300 years, the Great Commission of our Lord was effectively completed.

¹² Acts 2:41

And then it sputtered.

In the ensuing centuries, as world population increased and unknown lands discovered, the proportion of Christians, followers of Christ, relative to entire populations steadily declined. Whatever efforts were exerted by Church leaders to continue executing the Great Commission proved ineffective.

So what is the score today? If someone were to take a census of Christians worldwide and analyze the extent of the success now of the Great Commission, we would be astounded by the statistic.

How many followers of Christ are there in the world today? In a March 10, 2003 report on Islam, Time Magazine had occasion to compare the spread of Islam to the spread of Christianity. It tasked its researchers to estimate the number of Christians (Catholics and born-again Christians) worldwide, and they came up with an estimate of about 2 billion.

In comparison, we know that the population of the earth is slightly above 6 billion.

Comparing the two numbers, we therefore come to an astonishing conclusion:

The whole world is only about 33% Christianized!

I blink a moment, and take another look at those numbers. *Only 33%, after 2000 years of evangelization?* Are those numbers real? But how could they be in error? And even if they suffered from some error, they could not be that far

off. What could corrected numbers show? That the world is more than 33% Christianized? That the figure is closer to 40%? Shall we say 60%?

The Great Commission would still be far from accomplished.

Can we argue that while the project has not been completed, it continues to be pursued, and has merely suffered some delays, albeit massive delays?

But surely it can be counter-argued that even the simplest of projects, say the building of a house, is normally subjected to a timetable which identifies the targeted completion date of the construction. A house should be expected to be finished in, say, six months? One year? A large one might require 2 years?

A larger project like say, the construction of a long bridge might take many years. A mission to send a man to the moon was targeted for completion within a decade of its start. The Great Wall of China took several hundreds of years to build.

Still, is 2000 years to achieve a 33% result in Christianization reasonable?

I asked myself: If we were to stand before the Lord today, and He asked us to explain this colossal failure, what could we offer by way of an explanation? Shall we argue that it was the best we could do? Shall we plead insufficiency of resources? Shall we ask for more time? But how much more time do we need, I asked myself. Shall we point to someone else as the culprit? *What could we say?*

Incidentally, there is this interesting additional thought we can consider. It had always been taught to me that the Catholic faith was the true faith, the primary one, and that all others are dim copies of it. In the light of this claim of Catholicism, should I then ask if it takes primary responsibility for the dismal record of the evangelization of the world?

And if we argue that it is better to light a candle rather than curse the darkness, and that we should forget about asking embarrassing questions as to accountabilities, but rather move forward from this embarrassing position, are we not still forced, I thought, to face very difficult questions, such as the following?

1. What are we going to do to make up for lost time? What plans have been made to overcome the massive deficit in Christianization?
2. What timetable has been set for the final completion of the Great Commission?
3. Who is taking responsibility for the entire worldwide program?

For surely God will call someone to account for this. In the book of Hebrews, Paul warned:

HEB 13:17 ... your spiritual leaders ... their work is to watch over your souls, and God will judge them on how well they do this. [TLB]

I asked myself, how did we fail so badly in the job of evangelization?

It was all of two thousand years ago when our Lord Jesus first gave us the command:

*MAT 28:19 Therefore go and **make disciples in all the nations**, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [TLB]*

Chapter 5

Augsburg - An Old Treasure Unearthed, Reburied

EPH 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - [NIV]

It is a most significant matter, I realized, that when Jesus said,

*LUK 24:47 ... this message of salvation should be taken from Jerusalem to all the nations: **There is forgiveness of sins for all who turn to me.** [TLB]*

what He meant was that forgiveness of sins was a free gift. *All men had to do was to repent of their sins, submit to the Lordship of Christ alone, and receive His forgiveness and deliverance.* Salvation was intended to be free, and was not something that needed to be earned.

This, of course, was the essence of the Good News of Jesus.

And as if to ensure we do not miss the point, the New Testament repeats the message over and over again in a remarkably large number of passages: Salvation is a free gift of God. To verify this, I only needed to examine Bible verses such as the following:

MAR 16:16 *Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. [NIV]*

LUK 7:50 *Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." [NIV]*

JOH 3:16 *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. [NIV]*

JOH 5:24 *"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. [NIV]*

ACT 16:31 *They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved - you and your household." [NIV]*

ROM 3:27-28 *...our acquittal is not based on our good deeds; it is based on what Christ has done and our faith in him. So it is that we are saved by faith in Christ and not by the good things we do. [TLB]*

ROM 4:4-5 *...being saved is a gift; if a person could earn it by being good, then it wouldn't be free - but it is! It is given to those who do not work for it. For God declares sinners to be good in his sight if they have faith in Christ to save them from God's wrath. [TLB]*

ROM 4:15 But the fact of the matter is this: when we try to gain God's blessing and salvation by keeping his laws we always end up under his anger, for we always fail to keep them. The only way we can keep from breaking laws is not to have any to break! [TLB]

ROM 10:9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. [NIV]

*GAL 3:21 ...If we could be saved by his laws, then God would not have had to give us a different way to get out of the grip of sin - for the Scriptures insist we are all its prisoners. **The only way out is through faith in Jesus Christ [TLB]***

*EPH 2:8-9 For it is **by grace you have been saved, through faith** - and this not from yourselves, **it is the gift of God** - not by works, so that no one can boast. [NIV]*

I was convinced that no thinking and sincere Catholic whose heart is open to God's Word can read those verses without being thoroughly persuaded of the message of God's free gift of salvation.

Nowhere in the Bible, I found out, is it ever taught that we have to earn our salvation through good works, which should be the *fruit* of our salvation, rather than a *requirement* for it.

Jesus Himself, hanging on the cross, promised the penitent thief that he did not have to do anything to earn

salvation, but that his trust in Him would be sufficient to immediately get him to Heaven!

*LUK 23:43 Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."
[NIV]*

That is the Good News of God. *But the Good News has been turned into the Bad News, I sadly concluded..*

Incredibly, Church Authorities, throughout the centuries, have resisted the true teaching of the Lord. For 2000 years, the Catholic faithful have been taught that salvation must be earned through much hard work. This is what had been drummed into me from the time of my youth.

I remember being taught about the need for indulgences, novenas, pilgrimages, walking on knees, Holy Week flagellations, and countless other devotions designed to gain us precious points for our entry into heaven.

Incredibly, no Church Authority has taken a strong stand against these practices which, I now know, are clearly contrary to Scripture.

Thank God, there have been some church leaders, over the centuries, who have raised questions about this aberrant teaching. Chief of them was Martin Luther in the 1500's, who took the strong position that the Bible clearly taught that good works are *not a requirement* for salvation, but are instead a *consequence* of it. The ensuing Reformation movement pursued this thought.

The response of Church Authorities, as I know from history, was less to give serious consideration to the possibility of correcting an error, but more to reinforce its traditional position about the rock-solid unity of the Church. Thus was born the Counter-Reformation, and from then till the recent past, the teaching of *earned* salvation continued to be the official teaching of Church Authorities.

Thank God, while Church Authorities have been ostensibly unconcerned over the conflict with Scripture these past 500 years since the time of Luther, behind the scenes, a wonderful movement was taking place in Augsburg, Germany. I discovered that, unknown to most Catholics, in the late 1990s, an attempt was made toward reconciliation of the Lutheran and Catholic viewpoints. I was surprised to discover that the Catholic Church was active in these efforts.

A serious study was authorized by the heads of the Lutheran and Catholic churches, to attempt a fresh dialogue between the two opposing views regarding salvation. Special delegations, one for the Catholic side, and the other for the Lutheran, were appointed to discuss the centuries-old dispute. The delegation heads were no less than Cardinal Edward Cassidy, appointed by the Pope himself, John Paul II, on the Catholic side, and Bishop Christian Krause of the Lutheran World Federation.

After years of intensive discussion, an agreement was finally reached on October 31, 1999, and a formal *Joint*

Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification¹³ was signed¹⁴ in the presence of a hundred international journalists, declaring essentially that, as Christ taught 2000 years ago, salvation is free!

What a momentous occasion! What a triumph of the Holy Spirit, I thought! At long last, after a 500-year dispute, Catholics agreed with their Lutheran counterparts that Scripture was right regarding salvation.

The precious gift of God of free salvation was unearthed, and rediscovered by Catholics!

Key statements in the Declaration, and their paragraph numbers, were the following:

19. We confess together that all persons depend completely on the saving grace of God for their salvation.

22. We confess together that God forgives sin by grace

25. We confess together that sinners are justified by faith

31. We confess together that persons are justified by faith in the gospel "apart from works prescribed by the law" (*Rom 3:28*).

¹³ Search: vatican joint declaration faith, or go to http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html

¹⁴ Time Magazine, July 6, 1998, page 40

37. We confess together that good works - a Christian life lived in faith, hope and love - follow justification and are its fruits.

The key statement of greatest significance I found in Paragraph 15 (emphasis mine):

15. *Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works.*

What earthshaking statements! What a significant milestone in my understanding of the gift of salvation! This fundamental principle of my faith was finally made clear!

Today, therefore, there is no longer any argument between Catholics and Lutherans on the subject of salvation. The issue has been settled! God's Word wins!

But strangely, today, years after that momentous 1999 event, no grand announcement has been issued from the Vatican, and no priest has been instructed to boldly proclaim from Sunday pulpits this new view of a basic principle of salvation. What a puzzle for me!

The most that the Vatican has done is to post the Joint Declaration on the website shown in an earlier Footnote, # 13.

Why?

Because of this strange ecclesiastical silence, all of God's Catholic flock continues to walk in darkness. There are about a billion Catholics all over the world today who, presumably due to past official Catholic teaching, are all still heroically struggling to earn their way to salvation. In the light of the liberating findings of the Augsburg declaration, I ask, who will take responsibility for redirecting the thinking of these one billion lost sheep? What is being done to correct the colossal error of the past?

Imagine the immensity of that situation. There are still a billion Catholics struggling heroically but vainly to attain a gift already given free by the Savior! A billion people groping in darkness, when there is available Light!

I say, what a dream situation for Satan!

But we hear only that strange and deafening silence from our spiritual leaders. What could be the reason?

I realize there are hidden reasons for the behavior of our Church Authorities. When I sit down and reflect on the issue, it becomes fairly easy to come to some conclusions. I can imagine that Church Authorities are very hesitant to declare that salvation is free, as they will need to explain a few other things.

Would not the Paragraph 31 statement that all are **“justified by faith in the gospel apart from works prescribed by the law”** raise questions on the past teachings regarding *indulgences*? Would this not have to be reversed?

Would not the same Paragraph 31, now require a review of the teaching on *Purgatory*?

Also, what would now be the view of Church Authorities of the books of the *Apocrypha*, the 6 extra books in the Catholic Bible *which were belatedly declared, in the Council of Trent of 1546¹⁵, in response to the growing Reformation Movement caused by Martin Luther, to be legitimate additions to what then became the Catholic Bible?* Now that Martin Luther's thesis is no longer an issue, will the past addition of books to the original Canon of Scripture be reviewed and reversed?

But would Church Authorities undertake the necessary backpedaling and admission of wrong, something they have not been good at for centuries?

The Catholic Church is truly at a dilemma. It is hanging fiercely on to a tiger by the tail. It needs to officially agree that salvation is a free gift. But in so doing, it will be required to do nothing less than admit fallibility on a long-held doctrine. But – the Catholic Church no longer infallible? Unheard of! With such an admission, the long held claim to rock-solid stability of the Church would fall apart. Truly a momentous dilemma!

But would the Church not have to humbly accept its error, considering that God said:

¹⁵ The Canon of Scripture, p. 59, Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem, Zondervan Publishing House

1JO 1:8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. [NIV]

But if they don't announce the Declaration, all the work that led to it would be rendered such an utter waste. Would it not mean, among other things, that we will continue the practice of *not* leading Catholics into a state of salvation whereby their eternal destiny is made secure? Would we instead insist on continuing the centuries-old practice of doing nothing for their secure salvation while they are alive, but instead, when they are dead, intensely praying for them, hoping that after their death, we can somehow help them to be delivered from possible damnation, somehow changing the mind of God about His judgments of men at their deaths? But I know that Scripture says that *after we die, judgment comes*, which means that death marks the end of our probationary period here on earth, after which there can be no more appeal.

HEB 9:27 Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment... [NIV]

Shall we belittle Jesus' statement that it is of the greatest importance to tell everyone, while they are alive and able to make a choice, to turn away from sin and undergo rebirth, as an absolute requirement, a *sine qua non*, without which it is impossible to enter the kingdom of heaven?

JOH 3:3 Jesus replied, "With all the earnestness I possess I tell you this: Unless you are born again, you can never get into the Kingdom of God." [TLB]

I ask this question: *After free salvation has been rediscovered and unearthed, will Church Authorities now allow God's tremendous gift to be reburied in obscurity?*

Do we need to be reminded that God said,

*LUK 24:47 ... this message of salvation should be taken from Jerusalem to all the nations: **There is forgiveness of sins for all who turn to me.** [TLB]*

What a dilemma for a billion Catholic sheep and their shepherds!

*EPH 2:8-9 For it is **by grace you have been saved, through faith** - and this not from yourselves, **it is the gift of God; not by works, so that no one can boast.** [NIV]*

Chapter 6

The Ten Commandments, Or Nine

EXO 20:4-6 "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. [NIV]"

The Ten Commandments. They are so fundamental to our upbringing. What Catholic is not expected to know them?

From early childhood I was taught them, and was required to commit them to memory.

Woe to me then, if asked, “What is the Fourth Commandment?” and I would not be able to immediately reply,

“Honor your father and your mother!”

Without fail, I was expected to know which exactly was the 5th, the 7th, the 1st, etc. I could not be excused from knowing, by memory, all ten of the Commandments, which I was taught to memorize as follows:

1. I am the Lord thy God; thou shall have no strange Gods before me.
2. Thou shall not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.
3. Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day.
4. Honor your father and your mother.
5. Thou shall not kill.
6. Thou shall not commit adultery.
7. Thou shall not steal.
8. Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor.
9. Thou shall not covet thy neighbor's wife.
10. Thou shall not covet thy neighbor's goods.

Then suddenly, in my adult years, I was allowed to read the Bible.

I casually explored the unfamiliar pages, and noted with growing wonderment how much of it I did not know about.

In Exodus 20 I suddenly came upon the familiar Commandments. How good it felt to discover the familiar words. "I am the Lord, your God!" That was the opening statement.

But as I read through the passage, I could not help but note that the Commandments, as written, are far longer than what I was taught to memorize. So much seemed to have been left out.

Even more puzzling, when I tried to number the bible passages to correspond to the Commandments that I knew, I kept stumbling on the attempt to assign the familiar numbers. Why couldn't I assign the numbering as I knew them?

There were still more puzzles as I read toward the end of the listing. Where were the 9th and 10th? Why did it seem that our 9th and 10th had been combined by the Bible into one commandment?

To state the questions in graphic form, and to understand the puzzle better, I listed down the known list of the 10, and alongside it, the Bible's continuous list, uninterrupted from Verse 2 to Verse 17. This was the result.

<u>As Traditionally Taught To Us</u>	<u>In Scripture</u>
1. <i>I am the Lord thy God; thou shall have no strange Gods before me.</i>	1. <i>EXO 20:2-3 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me." [NIV]</i>
Omitted!	2. <i>EXO 20:4-6 "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them;</i>

	<p><i>for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. [NIV]</i></p>
<p>2. <i>Thou shall not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.</i></p>	<p>3. <i>EXO 20:7 "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name. [NIV]</i></p>
<p>3. <i>Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day.</i></p>	<p>4. <i>EXO 20:8-11 "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your</i></p>

	<p><i>gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. [NIV]</i></p>
<p>4. <i>Honor your father and your mother</i></p>	<p>5. <i>EXO 20:12 "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you. [NIV]</i></p>
<p>5. <i>Thou shall not kill.</i></p>	<p>6. <i>EXO 20:13 "You shall not murder. [NIV]</i></p>
<p>6. <i>Thou shall not commit adultery.</i></p>	<p>7. <i>EXO 20:14 "You shall not commit adultery. [NIV]</i></p>
<p>7. <i>Thou shall not steal.</i></p>	<p>8. <i>EXO 20:15 "You shall not steal. [NIV]</i></p>
<p>8. <i>Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor.</i></p>	<p>9. <i>EXO 20:16 "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. [NIV]</i></p>
<p>9. <i>Thou shall not covet thy neighbor's wife.</i> 10. <i>Thou shall not covet they neighbor's goods</i></p>	<p>10. <i>EXO 20:17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or</i></p>

	<i>maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." [NIV]</i>
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Now the dilemma is more clearly seen!

Someone seems to have removed the commandment prohibiting the making of idols, and describing God as jealous, and expanded the single commandment not to covet anything, into two separate commandments prohibiting the coveting of wives and of goods!

But as it stands, our traditional list seems to include only 9 of God's original 10 Commandments!

Incredible!

Now, why?

Why was Scripture not simply followed and taught as is, but rather modified? What was the objective of the modification?

Who dared change God's Word?

I am unnerved to realize that God's commandments were altered, especially when I realize that, in another part of the Bible, God said,

DEU 4:2 Do not add other laws or subtract from these; just obey them, for they are from the Lord your God. [TLB]

It seems even more disconcerting when I realize how many, many chapters in the Old Testament are devoted to expressions of God's abhorrence of idolatry, and to His exhortations against the practice of it. I reflect on these many verses:

*ISA 44:9, 13, 16, 19 All who make idols are **nothing**, and the things they treasure are worthless. Those who would speak up for them are blind; they are ignorant, to their own shame. The carpenter measures with a line and makes an outline with a marker; he roughs it out with chisels and marks it with compasses. He shapes it in the form of man, of man in all his glory, that it may dwell in a shrine. Half of the wood he burns in the fire; over it he prepares his meal, he roasts his meat and eats his fill. He also warms himself and says, "Ah! I am warm; I see the fire." No one stops to think, no one has the knowledge or understanding to say, "Half of it I used for fuel; I even baked bread over its coals, I roasted meat and I ate. Shall I make a detestable thing from what is left? **Shall I bow down to a block of wood?**" [NIV]*

*ISA 46:5, 7, 9 "To whom will you compare me or count me equal? To whom will you liken me that we may be compared? They lift it (the idol) to their shoulders and carry it; **they set it up in its place, and there it stands. From that spot it cannot move. Though one cries out to it, it does not answer; it cannot save him from his troubles. Remember... I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me.** [NIV]*

*HOS 13:2 Now they sin more and more; **they make idols for themselves from their silver**, cleverly fashioned images, all of them the work of craftsmen... [NIV]*

*NUM 31:1 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Take vengeance on the Midianites for leading you into **idolatry**...." [TLB]*

*2KI 21:11 "Because **King Manasseh** has done these evil things and is even more wicked than the Amorites who were in this land long ago, and because he **has led the people of Judah into idolatry**... [TLB]*

*JER 5:23 "But **my people have** rebellious hearts; they have turned against me and **gone off into idolatry**. Though I am the one who gives them rain each year in spring and fall and sends the harvest times, yet they have no respect or fear for me. [TLB]*

*EZE 8:17 "Have you seen this?" he asked. "Is it nothing to the people of Judah that **they commit these terrible sins, leading the whole nation into idolatry, thumbing their noses at me and arousing my fury against them?** [TLB]*

*MIC 1:5 And **why is this happening? Because of the sins** of Israel and Judah. **What sins? The idolatry** and oppression centering in the capital cities, Samaria and Jerusalem! [TLB]*

Indubitably, God despised idolatry among His people!

Idolatry is the single sin most frequently discussed in the Old Testament.

I cannot read the Old Testament without coming to the conclusion that God wanted His people to detest idolatry, to worship only Him, and moreover, to always, without ceasing, think of Him and keep Him in mind all the time.

DEU 6:4 Hear, O Israel...Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. [NIV]

I note that this preoccupation with Him was to be taught to children of the Chosen People, so that they in turn will likewise keep Him, and only Him, in mind.

DEU 11:19 Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. [NIV]

God clearly wanted us to have no obsession but Him. We are not to be obsessed about anything else, whether about our work, or wealth, or health, or possessions, or even our families.

God is the only legitimate obsession!

So why did someone - and it had to be one from among Church Authorities - omit God's commandment prohibiting idolatry, and reminding His people that He is a jealous God?

Are Church Authorities not obligated to teach God's Word as it is written, without dishonoring it in any way by their editing?

More to the point, was the Second Commandment eliminated, to prevent questions and discussions on the many statues we as Catholics venerate?

Was this what Jesus was referring to when He said,

MAR 7:8 For you ignore God's specific orders and substitute your own traditions. [TLB]

The Ten Commandments, it had always been clear to me, are a venerable Scriptural teaching, held sacred through centuries of Judeo-Christian teaching. Why had they been edited? Who dared do so, and teach the unauthorized modification to countless generations through centuries of Catholicism?

I take an earthly analogy. Supposing a foreign friend of mine asked me for a copy of our nation's Constitution for his study. Would he be pleased if, without my telling him, I truncated a part of it which I did not think much of, and handed him the edited copy which I represented as complete? Would this be honoring the nation – or my friend?

Now, I ask myself, are we to edit God's Ten Commandments, and eliminate and totally disregard the second one, and trivialize and simply not pay any attention to it?

*EXO 20:4-6 "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; **for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God**, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. [NIV]*

Chapter 7

Lifestyles of the Rich and Powerful

LUK 9:2-3 ... and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal. "Don't even take along a walking stick," he instructed them, "nor a beggar's bag, nor food, nor money. Not even an extra coat. [TLB]

When I read through the Gospels, it takes little reflection to realize the remarkable frugality which marked the earthly life of the King of Kings, the Creator of the universe who owned it all, while He was here on earth.

At His birth there was no room for His parents at the inn¹⁶. As a baby He was clothed in the most modest of swaddling clothes¹⁷. During His youth He was a helper to His foster father, a simple carpenter, and later became one Himself. During His ministry He had nowhere to lay His head¹⁸ and took whatever shelter He was offered for the night. At His death He had to be buried in a tomb not of His own.

¹⁶ Luke 2:7

¹⁷ Luke 2:12

¹⁸ Mat 8:20

I note that to the rich young man who had ambitions of being His follower, He had sobering advice for him to discard his possessions as a requirement for perfection.

MAT 19:21 Jesus told him, "If you want to be perfect, go and sell everything you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." [TLB]

To His apostles He preached the necessity of the virtue of servanthood.

MAR 9:35 He sat down and called them around him and said, "Anyone wanting to be the greatest must be the least - the servant of all!" [TLB]

At another time, When His disciples were quarrelling as to who among them might later be closest to the seat of power, He reminded them,

MAR 10:43 ... but among you it is different. Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant. [TLB]

So thoroughly did He separate Himself from all earthly possessions and other trappings of the rich and powerful that Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, would later describe Him in awestruck words,

PHI 2:6-7 ...who, though he was God, did not demand and cling to his rights as God, but laid aside his mighty power and glory, taking the disguise of a slave and becoming like men. [TLB]

When He sent His apostles out to bring His message to the world, He made sure to instruct them to live this life of frugality, saying,

MAT 10:9-10 "Don't take any money with you; don't even carry a duffle bag with extra clothes and shoes, or even a walking stick; for those you help should feed and care for you. [TLB]

Thus, I came to the conclusion, did the Lord intend His disciples, shepherds and successors, to bring the kingdom of God to men.

Now I ask: *How faithfully have Christ's successors followed His instructions?*

If we were to test the lifestyles of present-day shepherds, would they pass the Master's test?

Our findings from such an analysis will prove remarkable, and in many instances, downright astonishing.

On the matter of simple honorifics, for instance, when someone innocently addressed Jesus as "Good Master...", He remarked,

MAT 19:17 "When you call me good you are calling me God," Jesus replied, "for God alone is truly good.." [TLB]

Jesus would accept no honorifics. In light of this Scripture, it seems amazing to me that our present-day

Church Authorities now feel entitled to being addressed by various titles, as Your Eminence, Your Holiness, etc. In the days of Jesus, neither He nor His apostles had any such titles. Why do shepherds now seemingly value these earthly honorifics, I ask?

It is noteworthy that Jesus had this to say, when He noted how much the Pharisees enjoyed being called “Rabbi” or “Master”.

MAT 23:7-8 How they enjoy the deference paid them on the streets and to be called 'Rabbi' and 'Master'! Don't ever let anyone call you that. For only God is your Rabbi and all of you are on the same level, as brothers. [TLB]

I have to ask: How would God feel about the titles accorded our religious leaders today?

I note another example. While Peter, after he had been infused with the Holy Spirit and had started to boldly declare to people the Good News of Jesus, was being held in high regard by the people, he staunchly rejected any display of excessive deference to him. On one occasion, a man named Cornelius, in welcoming Peter, was overcome with such high respect for him that he knelt before him. Peter’s reaction was instant and sharp. Luke recounts the incident:

ACT 10:25-26 As Peter entered his home, Cornelius fell to the floor before him in worship. But Peter said, "Stand up! I'm not a god!" [TLB]

Peter would have none of it!

In the light of this, I need ask: Why are Catholics today expected to kneel before the successor of Peter? And why does present-day Peter readily accept this honor, where 2000 years ago, he abhorred it?

And why does no Church Authority seem to be interested in reviewing Scripture and accepting the reminder to behave in accordance with the teaching of the Word of God?

But while the foregoing examples of how far we seem to have strayed from God's Word are remarkable, I found them less surprising than the astounding *lifestyles* of present-day apostolic successors.

For perspective, I remind myself how generally humble the original apostles' lives were. Peter was a fisherman, and so was his brother Andrew. Two other brothers were similarly fishermen, James and John, and so was Philip. Mathew was a tax collector, possibly the most affluent of the 12. Simon was a political activist. All the rest were of unknown occupations, but in all likelihood all were simple men.

I consider now the known means of the present-day Church Authorities, and the Church in general. While I can find no central source of information on what the Church in general is now worth (it appears to be a tightly-guarded secret), I can catch a glimpse of its vast worth from a variety of sources. Bear in mind that these snippets of information apparently represent only the tip of an enormous iceberg.

The Time magazine issue of June 3, 2002, in an article entitled “Can a Church go broke?” on the priestly sexual-abuse issue, discussed the ways Catholic Church Authorities in the U.S. were shoring up their finances to ensure they could afford to pay the millions required to cover up the sex scandals. In this article, the vast wealth of *some* dioceses is revealed. The value of some of listed assets is as follows:

Providence, U.S.A. diocese	
real estate:	\$ 44,000,000
Of which Providence	
Aldrich Mansion:	\$ 22,000,000
Detroit diocese Golf &	
Conference Center:	\$ 18,000,000
Boston diocese Catholic Television:	\$ 31,000,000
Chicago Cardinal’s residence:	\$ 10,000,000
Boston Cardinal’s home:	\$130,000,000

Residences worth tens of millions of dollars! I must ask how shepherds can live in such magnificent mansions, so differently from their poor sheep.

The matter of Church income is another astonishment to me. The same Time issue reports that in the US, the Catholic Church collects revenues totaling around \$7.5 *billion* annually.

Time continues that even the expenses of the Church are huge. Consider the amounts they expect to pay out *for sexual abuse compensation alone*.

Milwaukee -	\$ 450,000
Santa Fe, New Mexico	\$25,000,000
Boston	\$30,000,000
Dallas	\$31,000,000

The Ottawa Citizen, in its issue of June 26, 2000, reports that:

All the properties of the 16 Catholic dioceses in the province of Ontario were recently assessed, for insurance purposes, at a value of \$3.2 billion.

The Canadian Centre for Philanthropy estimates they take in more than \$2.5 billion a year in donations.

Clearly I was not looking at poor fishermen here!

This glimpse above inevitably leads me to ask where all that vast wealth came from. The first apostles were very poor men. Their present massive wealth had to have a starting point. When did that happen, and where, and how? The story, I found out, is an incredible one.

The wealth apparently had its beginnings with the rule of Emperor Constantine (274-337AD), a pagan king who was generally known to have converted to Christianity, and who subsequently and purportedly authored the famous “**Donation of Constantine**”.

This infamous document, explains the Catholic Encyclopedia¹⁹, was:

¹⁹ Search: catholic encyclopedia donation of Constantine, or go to <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05118a.htm>

... understood, since the end of the Middle Ages, as a forged document of Emperor Constantine the Great, by which large privileges and rich possessions were conferred on the Pope and the Roman Church.

The Donation conferred upon the Pope not just rich possessions, I found out, but also a crown, a cloak, and other appurtenances of the rich and powerful.

The Pope was to enjoy the same honorary rights as the emperor, among them the right to wear an imperial crown, a purple cloak and tunic...

In effect, this was the fork in the road which marked the point in history when the Church first embraced worldliness.

The Church did not so much Christianize the emperor. Rather, the emperor had secularized the Church!

All effort was apparently made to ensure the acceptance by all that the document was genuine.

The document concludes with maledictions against all who dare to violate these donations and gave the assurance that the emperor had signed it with his own hand and placed it on the tomb of St. Peter.

Present-day historians, however, have no doubt that the document was a great hoax, a forgery! The Catholic Encyclopedia report continues, with the statement that:

The document is without doubt a forgery, fabricated somewhere between the years 750 and 850.

So now I could see that the Donation was clearly the origin of the “States of the Church” or the “Papal States”, those vast territorial possessions of the Church.

Most investigators accept as the earliest possible date the pontificate of Stephen II (752-757), establishing a connection between the forgery and the historical events that led to the origin of the States of the Church.

Others estimate its origin in the pontificate of Adrian I (772-795), speculating that this Pope hoped to extend the secular authority of the Roman Church over a great part of Italy and to create a powerful ecclesiastical State under the papacy.

Incredibly, while the Donation was purportedly written sometime between the years 750 to 850, it was first used by a Pope to the advantage of the Church only in 1054. It remains a mystery to me that a document granting such immense powers and wealth to the Popes was left unused by them for 200 years! Obviously it was a latter-day invention of about 1054, purportedly written much earlier in the period 750 to 850.

The first Pope who used it in an official act was Leo IX, in a letter of 1054.

I found it a sad commentary that historians now suspect that the forger was from Rome itself.

This false document was composed in favour of the Popes and of the Roman Church, therefore Rome itself must have had the chief interest in the forgery.

It was an incredible realization for me that analyses of the document seem to point to the hunger of the Popes for secular power! I found this astonishing and totally contrary to the teachings of our Lord that His apostles were to become the servants of all! The Encyclopedia maintains that:

It was intended principally to support the claims of the Popes to secular power in Italy...

In the end, the Donation of Constantine was shown to be a fake, an outright forgery.

In the year 1440, Lorenzo Valla proved conclusively that the document was a forgery.

The Encyclopedia reports that, perhaps not surprisingly, even after the Donation was proved a fake, some Church officials continued to attempt to defend it.

... long after its authenticity was disputed in the fifteenth century, its validity was still upheld by the majority of jurists who continued to quote it and use it as authentic

As shocking as the Donation of Constantine is, I know of no well-known admission by Church Authorities of its perpetration, of the extent of the lands fraudulently acquired under its false powers, nor an accounting of it, nor remorse for the extensive scandal it has caused, nor determination to right the wrong and return lands wrongfully acquired.

And so I now see that the Donation of Constantine was the starting point of the vast wealth of the Church.

How vast were these territorial holdings? The Catholic Encyclopedia²⁰, in the section on the Papal States, gives us an indication. It states that:

...the Pope was the largest landowner in Italy.

More specifically, the Columbia Encyclopedia²¹, in its article on the Papal States, states that:

During the period from 754 to 1870, a territory ruled by the Popes was called the States of the Church or the Pontifical States. The territory varied in size at different times; in 1859 it included c.16,000 sq mi (41,440 sq km)

I asked myself: What would the value be of this area possessed by the Church in 1859, of 41,440 square kilometers or 414,400,000 square meters? Without going into a speculation of the present value of land in that area, suffice it to say that, if it were to be valued at a miniscule \$1 per square meter, that area would have been worth \$400 million in 1859 money!

Perhaps this would have been a bit more than Jesus would have allowed His apostles to possess!

²⁰ The Papal States - <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14257a.htm>

²¹ Papal States - <http://www.bartleby.com/65/pa/PapalSta.html>

The Donation of Constantine, that incredible document, ultimately led to the improbable situation where the present successor of Peter the poor fisherman now has a literal castle, the Castel Gandolfo, a magnificent residence set amidst beautiful gardens on the shores of a lovely lake.

I must contrast this to the utter simplicity of our Lord when He walked the earth, and which He described in these convicting words,

MAT 8:20 Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." [NIV]

After my further research, I came to realize that the church is so wealthy in worldly terms it even has its own financial scandals!

When I read the astonishing report of Time Magazine in its issue of March 9, 1987, I cannot but wonder in amazement how an Archbishop could publicly be reported as being the subject of an arrest warrant, for an accusation as serious as "accessory to fraudulent bankruptcy".

Archbishop Paul Marcinkus, 65... heads the Istituto per le Opere di Religione, commonly known as the Vatican Bank... Last week a Milan judge named Marcinkus in an arrest warrant as an "accessory to fraudulent bankruptcy" in connection with the 1982 collapse of the Banco Ambrosiano, then Italy's largest private banking group... The Vatican Bank was a shareholder in Banco Ambrosiano...

In a related 2002 newspaper report on the Banco Ambrosiano scandal of Italy, where the head of that bank

was murdered, the Evening Standard of London said of son Carlo Calvi of his father Roberto Calvi's suspected murder²²:

Intriguingly, Mr (Carlo) Calvi says he already knows most of the names and why the killing was ordered...

... a scandal that involved the Vatican and the highest level of government... (his father) was murdered to guarantee his silence. It has been suggested that he was killed by the Mafia because he had lost money that the bank had been given for laundering. Mr Calvi said his father had been moving money for the Vatican's own bank... The diversion of funds was to allow the Vatican to pursue political aims in countries where the Catholic Church had an interest.

They were paying off politicians in places like Argentina, Peru...It was something the Vatican did not want revealed.

I asked myself: *How did Church Authorities get involved with Italy's infamous Mafia?* The story of Mr. Calvi I found mind-boggling in its ramifications.

Church Authorities of today have exactly the same trappings of wealth as the rich and powerful of the world. They have land, gold, jewels, financial scandals, palaces, armed guards, thrones, crowns, scepters, robes, titles. It is

²² Search: keith dovkan's a son's quest for truth, or go to <http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/news/londonlife/articles/7053419?source=Evening%20Standard>

astonishing, and my mind recoils at the grotesqueness of the situation.

Even after the Lateran Treaty of 1929 established the Vatican City and effectively limited the landholdings of the Pope to more modest proportions, the Vatican still holds sway over 44 hectares today. The Vatican is an independent country, over which the Pope is the absolute ruler, effectively a dictator, with absolute powers in all government areas, in the executive, legislative, and judicial. In our present-day politics, the Pope, with his sweeping powers, would be quickly classified as a dictator.

The simple instructions of Jesus to “Go make disciples of all nations...” has turned into a complex, worldwide “Business of Church” strongly characterized with Pharisean traits.

How can I possibly reconcile the present wealth of our Catholic leaders with these words of our Lord?

MAT 10:9-10 "Don't take any money with you; don't even carry a duffle bag with extra clothes and shoes, or even a walking stick; for those you help should feed and care for you. [TLB]

Can present-day Church Authorities give up their wealth, and revert to following the humble Jesus as He taught His disciples the manner in which to work among His flock?

1JO 2:15 Stop loving this evil world and all that it offers you, for when you love these things you show that you do not really love God; [TLB]

How can the present princes of the Catholic Church justify their purple robes, in the light of what Jesus said in criticism of the Pharisees?

MAR 12:38 "Beware of the teachers of religion! For they love to wear the robes of the rich and scholarly, and to have everyone bow to them as they walk through the markets." [TLB]

But Church Authorities continue to speak of "The Church of the Poor", as reported in the Philippine Daily Inquirer of September 29, 2003.

But how can our spiritual leaders, living in a world of billions of poor people, have the moral authority to preach, from their Vatican offices set amidst the splendid trappings of wealth, the virtue of humility, and exhort the rich to share their wealth? How can the Pope convincingly exhort the flock with words such as he used in his Christmas message, as reported by the Philippine Daily Inquirer of December 24, 2002:

POPE: GIVE TO THE POOR, REJECT COMMERCIALISM

Pope John Paul II on Sunday reminded the faithful of the true meaning of Christmas and urged them to reject the mindless consumerism accompanying the Yuletide season.

Recalling the Gospel account that the infant Jesus was born in a simple manger, the 82-year-old Pope said that...

I reflected that presumably, after the message was delivered, the good Pope repaired to his splendid quarters somewhere along the gilded halls of the Vatican.

How would Church Authorities now reconcile themselves to the words of Jesus who said,

*MAT 19:21 ... "If you want to be perfect, **go and sell everything you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.**" [TLB]*

How, I asked, can they require their priests to take vows of poverty, while they themselves simultaneously live the lifestyles of the rich and powerful?

I thought it interesting that in the Philippines, the rich and powerful have often been crooked politicians. Government authorities have always struggled to bring them to court, as proof of wrongdoing was always easy to deny, and difficult to obtain. That is, until an imaginative way was devised: the *Lifestyle Check*, to compare known income to visible and observable lifestyles. Authorities now simply took pictures of politicians' lavish mansions, multiple cars, reviewed immigration records of overseas holidays taken, and *voila*, the missing proof was suddenly very evident and undeniable.

If now militant Christians were to subject Catholic leaders to lifestyle checks, would they pass scrutiny based on the Lord's standards?

*Indeed, would Church Authorities survive a **holiness-check** of God?*

I could not help concluding that they seem to have emulated the Pharisees more than they have the Lord. But the Lord pointedly warned us not to be like the Pharisees.

*MAT 23:-1, 5-7 Then **Jesus said** to the crowds, and to his disciples, "**Everything they do is done for show. They act holy** by wearing on their arms little prayer boxes with Scripture verses inside, and by lengthening the memorial fringes of their robes. And **how they love to sit at the head table at banquets and in the reserved pews in the synagogue! How they enjoy the deference paid them on the streets and to be called 'Rabbi' and 'Master'!** [TLB]*

In contrast to the Pharisees of old, are there any exceptional Christians at all, any outstanding Catholic whom we can point to as having followed the example of the Lord in simple lives of service?

One such person who comes close to the example of the simple Jesus was Mother Teresa.

Here is one Catholic who seems to have uniquely understood the teachings of our Lord regarding servanthood. Here is a person who came, not to be served, but to serve. Here is one who, in teaching people about God, brought with her no purse or a change of tunics. Here is one who was servant to all. Here is one who shunned wealth and gold and position and power and large homes and the flowing robes of the rich. Here is one who lived with the poor, and was herself poor.

But is it not ironic that Mother Teresa, the one shepherd who understood the need to be a good shepherd, shunning riches and all the trappings of the rich and powerful, *was beatified in Rome, the center of ecclesiastical wealth and power, in ceremonies rich in ritual and pomp and circumstance?*

Was she then a perfect Christian? The Bible tells us that, like all men and women, she too was a sinner, and needed to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. We pray that she had done so, and had not relied on her good works to bring her to heaven, a Scriptural principle we earlier saw in the chapter on Augsburg.

But woefully, there is such a dearth of simple shepherds in the world of Catholic leaders. How many more can anyone point to? A handful at most. We do celebrate the uncommon priests who live simply, and those admirable priests of great potential who reportedly have declined promotions which required allegiance to other than their Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

In our present world, my observation indicates that many shepherds have chosen to live lifestyles of the rich and powerful. How have they strayed so far from the example set by Jesus? Have His teachings become irrelevant?

What a dilemma for our shepherds, and for us the sheep!

LUK 9:2-3 ...and He sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal. “Don’t even take along a walking stick,” he instructed them, “nor a beggar’s bag, nor food, nor money. Not even an extra coat. [TLB]

Chapter 8

Messenger Into Message?

*2CO 1:1 ...This letter is from me, **Paul**, appointed by God to be **Jesus Christ's messenger**...[TLB]*

From my reading of the Bible, I know that from ages past, it had always been the intent of God to send messengers to His people. He prophesied the coming of John the Baptist, the messenger to announce the coming of the Messiah, and the Messiah Himself, who in turn was to be the messenger of God the Father.

*MAL 3:1 "Listen: **I will send my messenger before me to prepare the way. And then the One you are looking for will come suddenly to his Temple - the Messenger of God's promises, to bring you great joy. Yes, he is surely coming," says the Lord Almighty. [TLB]***

I have also known that the value of paying close heed to the message of God, as delivered faithfully by His messengers, the prophets of old, has always been stressed in Scripture.

*2PE 1:19 So we have seen and proved that what the prophets said came true. **You will do well to pay close attention to everything they have written, for,***

*like lights shining into dark corners, **their words help us to understand many things that otherwise would be dark and difficult...** [TLB]*

Paul was another such messenger, and about himself he often said,

*TIT 1:1 From: **Paul, the slave of God and the messenger of Jesus Christ...**[TLB]*

Paul in his day considered himself as nothing less, and nothing more, than *a messenger of Jesus Christ*.

I am aware that in subsequent ages, but in the days before the advent of telegraphs, telephones, or electronic messaging, messengers were men on foot, or much later on, on horseback. Messages were written, and sent on to their intended recipients via the messengers who traversed long, arduous miles.

Necessarily, the messenger had a single purpose: to hand-carry the message. He had no other mission, and certainly had no authorities, certainly not for changing the message in any way, or worse, for losing the message and making up his own and substituting it for his master's.

The faithfulness and reliability of a messenger was always of great importance. Thus I read in Proverbs:

*PRO 26:6 **To trust a rebel to convey a message is as foolish as cutting off your feet and drinking poison!** [TLB]*

In the Old Testament, I see many examples of faithful messengers: When the Israelites were being besieged by

the Medianites, a prophet arose to give them God's message.

JDG 6:8 the LORD sent a prophet to the people of Israel; and he said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I led you up from Egypt, and brought you out of the house of bondage... [RSV]

When David sinned with Bathsheba, God raised up the prophet Nathan, who announced to David that he was the guilty man.

2SA 12:7,9 "You are the man. Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul... Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have smitten Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have slain him with the sword of the Ammonites. [RSV]

True prophets - and it must be acknowledged that there were false ones - were always true to their role as messengers. They never presumed to edit the message or give their own, but always ensured they were speaking the message of God.

"Thus says the Lord..." was their consistent greeting.

New Testament messengers, I can see, were also true to their role as bringers of messages. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a messenger was dispatched to bring news of the great event.

LUK 2:10 ... the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you the most joyful news ever announced, and it is for everyone! [TLB]

Non-angelic messengers of the New Testament behaved similarly. John the Baptist was the best known of these. He recognized his standing as inferior to that of the source of his message.

JOH 3:30 He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less. [TLB]

In similar fashion, I see that Paul emphasized that what he was preaching were not his own ideas, but those of the Lord.

*2CO 4:5 We don't go around preaching about ourselves but **about Christ Jesus as Lord.** [TLB]*

In another instance, Paul made sure he gave his listeners the assurance:

*2CO 4:2 We do not try to trick people into believing - we are not interested in fooling anyone. **We never try to get anyone to believe that the Bible teaches what it doesn't.** All such shameful methods we forego. We stand in the presence of God as we speak and so **we tell the truth**, as all who know us will agree. [TLB]*

Still on another occasion, Paul said,

GAL 1:12 For my message comes from no less a person than Jesus Christ himself, who told me what to say. No one else has taught me. [TLB]

From Scripture, I see that God Himself often emphasized that prophets were to ensure their messages were truly from Him.

*DEU 18:20 But any prophet who **falsely** claims that his message is from me, shall die. [TLB]*

Jesus Himself said that His words were not His own, but the Father's.

Jesus was indeed the messenger of God the Father, and Jesus was careful to give us not His words but the Father's.

*JOH 7:16 So Jesus told them, "**I'm not teaching you my own thoughts, but those of God who sent me.**" [TLB]*

I am astonished to realize how often Jesus emphasized the point that He was God's messenger.

*JOH 8:26 ... **I say only what I am told to by the one who sent me; and he is Truth.**" [TLB]*

He continued:

*JOH 8:28 ... **I have not been telling you my own ideas, but have spoken what the Father taught me.**" [TLB]*

As if to hammer home that point, once more He stated:

100 Come Out Of Her, My People!

JOH 12:49 For these are not my own ideas, but I have told you what the Father said to tell you. [TLB]

I see that even the Holy Spirit, when He was to come, was described by John as one who would say only what He was asked to say.

JOH 16:13 When the Holy Spirit... comes, he shall guide you into all truth, for he will not be presenting his own ideas, but will be passing on to you what he has heard... [TLB]

Finally, Jesus Himself said that no messenger can be greater than the author of a message.

JOH 13:16 How true it is that a servant is not greater than his master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends him. [TLB]

In contrast, I see that present-day Catholic messengers of our Lord seem to be extremely casual with the messages they are tasked to carry. I see much evidence to show that they bring, not so much the message of the Lord, but increasingly, their own.

Where prophets of old always prefaced their messages with “Thus says the Lord...” nowadays, incredibly, the frequent greeting I notice is “The Church teaches...”

But the Church is us! As Scripture teaches,

COL 1:18 He is the Head of the body made up of his people - that is, his Church - which he began... [TLB]

So, to be completely accurate, I am amazed to realize that when Church Authorities say, “The Church teaches...” the meaning would have to be “We, the Church, teach the following to us, the members of the Church”, a circular phrase which would be convoluted and not very logical.

I must therefore conclude that what is truly meant is closer to “Church Authorities teach...”

But Church Authorities were to be the messengers of the Lord, the shepherds who were to teach His flock.

So it is a deep dilemma for me, a sincere Catholic, when I encounter a passage such as the following paragraph 16 of the papal encyclical which we had earlier seen, *Ecclesia in Europa*²³:

*I express my great esteem for the presence and activity of the different apostolic associations and organizations... **They are able to be both the messenger and the message** for people who otherwise would not encounter the Church.*

Various apostolic associations were apparently intended to play the dangerous dual role of being both the messenger and the message. Moreover, the objective seems to have

²³ Search “encyclical ecclesia in europa” or go to:
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_20030628_ecclesia-in-europa_en.html

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been not to encounter God, but to encounter the Church. Why so?

Equally puzzling and disturbing is the seeming current penchant to substitute “Church” for “God” in the statements of Church Authorities.

Thus, in the Philippine Daily Inquirer issue of December 9, 2003, I see in a report of the conferring of the Lakandula Award to President Gloria Arroyo, an authority from the Church was quoted as saying to the President,

“I pray that you will be true to your promise... that you will always be a loving and **obedient daughter of the Holy Catholic Church.**”

The President was not reminded that she was a child of God, but of the Church, and no obedience to Him was called for. Obedience was due the Church (Authorities). It would appear that I, as another Catholic, would be expected to be obedient not to God but to the Church.

Equally puzzling is the Philippine Daily Inquirer headline of January 2, 2004:

Pope calls for international order based on UN goals.

This is surprising to me, as a thinking Catholic. It appears to me that the Pope, the *messenger of Christ*, had called for the adoption of a standard which was not his Master’s, but the UN’s. Am I to deduce that the U.N.’s goals are now superior to those of my Lord?

Then I note the 2005 Christmas message of the Manila Archbishop²⁴, which began with the words,

“According to Confucian wisdom, ‘the exemplary person helps to bring out the best in others.’ Christmas came 500 years after Confucius spoke those words, and Jesus, the very heart of Christmas, did exactly what the wise man from China said.”

Was I correctly reading that the good Archbishop preferred to quote and glorify Confucius more than his Lord and Master? Was Jesus merely doing what a wise man from China had earlier said? Was I correctly reading that God’s messenger was effectively prefacing his message with “*Thus says Confucius...*”?

But he, I noted, was not the only Archbishop to express preference for Church teaching over God’s teaching. Dr George Pell, the Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, in writing against the modern acceptance of homosexuality, correctly objected to its practice, but not because God’s law was violated, but because the *Church’s teaching* was. Here is an excerpt of an edited version of his statement made at St Mary’s Cathedral on May 21 2002 (emphasis mine).²⁵

A person who publicly defines himself at any given time as supporting or practicing activities **contrary to church teaching** in a serious matter is not entitled to receive Holy Communion. This would apply, for example, to a married person openly

²⁴ The Philippine Star, December 25, 2005, p.1

²⁵ <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2002/05/20/1021882023741.html>

living in or advocating adultery. Similarly, persons who openly declare that active homosexuals should be able to receive communion take a position which is **contrary to the teaching and discipline of the universal church.**

The **church's view on sexuality** I have explained many times before. It is clear and unequivocal, and derives from **natural moral law**, which we believe is unchanging. Such **moral law** governs all people everywhere, in the same way, regardless of the circumstances under which they live. God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve and important consequences follow from this.

I do not seek these confrontations and I rarely speak publicly on these matters. However, this incident allows me to explain the centrality of the **Catholic teaching on marriage** and family. I will continue to dialogue privately and publicly with those who think differently.

Our Judeo-Christian religious tradition allows men and women sexual expression within the bounds of family life, a sexuality which is life-giving. **Homosexual acts are contrary to the natural law;** they close the sexual act to the gift of life. These teachings are givens from our Christian point of view.

We have had these protests before. Probably they will be with us for quite a time yet. I will pray for the protesters. I do not promise to speak publicly on the theme at every protest. But the protesters must

realize that **the church's teaching on this matter cannot, will not, change.**

Although human weakness is universal and God's mercy infinite, the path to happiness and heaven for a Catholic does not lie in seeking to reinterpret what is right and wrong. Rather, **one should commit oneself, in good faith, to the church and its teachings** and follow these teachings as closely as possible.

I searched in vain for any passionate expression of the good Archbishop that God's holy name was dishonored, that God abhorred homosexuality²⁶, and that as a messenger of God, he would not permit his Lord to be disobeyed. No such sentiment. The *Church* had been violated; he would not stand for that.

I note with sadness that the modern culture of relegating the message of God's Word to the sidelines seems to have seeped down to the level of our parishes, where Sunday homilies are seldom about the Gospel passages read, but often about everything else that is human wisdom, often including stories about the latest popular movie. God's Word often appears to be made increasingly irrelevant.

A most striking example of this occurred at the 2003 New Year's Eve Mass which I attended at a parish church in Baguio City, in northern Luzon. Unbelievably, the priest who gave the homily spent his time, not in an enlightening discourse of the Gospel reading, but in an astonishing 25-minute

²⁶ Leviticus 18:22, Leviticus 20:13, Romans 1:27

exhibition of his skills as a *magician*, making objects disappear! I personally witnessed the horrible event! Only in the last 5 minutes of his time did he make passing remarks on the sacred Gospel. God's flock, myself excepted, was duly entertained, but hardly edified.

And how about the priest who said Mass on January 21, 2006 at a wake that I attended in Manila. Perhaps in an attempt at consoling the grieving family and assuring them that the deceased was not in Hell, he made the astonishing announcement that when Jesus rose from the dead, He descended into Hell and emptied it of its inhabitants, and that therefore there was now no one in Hell!

I must ask myself in dismay how God's messengers can deliver such grossly erroneous statements, completely contrary to the clear teachings of Scripture!

If Hell is no longer eternal punishment for sinners, why would Jesus have taught about it when He said:

*MAT 5:29 If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is **better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.** [NIV]*

*MAT 10:28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, **be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.** [NIV]*

I note that we pay lip service to honoring God's Word, but in reality trivialize it. At the start of Masses, we often

approach the altar reverently holding high aloft the Missal containing God's Word. At the Gospel, we exhort the faithful to stand up to honor it. We make the sign of the cross thrice, over our foreheads, our lips, and our hearts, and only then do we start to read God's holy Word.

And then we irreverently push it aside, as we listen to the priest give us homilies not based on God's holy wisdom in the Gospel just read, but on his weak human wisdom!

It is not surprising to me therefore that many of the faithful, aware of the paucity of divine wisdom in Sunday homilies, are driven to go homily-hunting Sunday after Sunday until they find a church where they can find reasonably enriching food for their starving souls, homilies anchored on God's Word.

How are we Catholics to find truly nourishing teachings for our souls, delivered by messengers who will not alter God's Word?

The absurdity of a messenger taking upon himself the authority of the source of the message may be illustrated by this hypothetical example I now present of a messenger of a king.

Supposing a distant powerful and wealthy king decided to say, celebrate his warrior son's recent victory over an evil enemy, and so sent his messenger to his subjects to invite them to a free grand feast honoring his son.

Supposing then that the messenger, enterprising but unwise, decides that he could save his master much

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expense, discards the written invitations, and announces to the king's subjects that they were invited to a \$1000-a-plate celebration?

Supposing the king's subjects, puzzled and displeased at the costly invitation, questioned the messenger, posing many justifiable questions.

“Are you sure the king wanted us to pay an entrance fee of \$1000?”

“Of course I'm sure”

“But there is no written invitation saying so.”

“Nevertheless, you can trust me.”

“But how do we know you're trustworthy?”

“Because I have declared it so, that I am absolutely trustworthy.”

Anyone reading the foregoing would conclude that the messenger had taken an absurd position, and was presumptuous in assigning to himself authorities that he was not entitled to, and certainly was not trustworthy.

A further example. I know from personal experience that God's Catholic messengers have always taught His flock that God has made His home in Tabernacles in Church buildings.

But God had said,

*ACT 7:48 However, **God doesn't live in temples made by human hands.** 'The heaven is my throne,' says the Lord through his prophets, 'and earth is my footstool...' [TLB]*

God further declared,

*1CO 3:16 Don't you realize that **all of you together are the house of God,** and that **the Spirit of God lives among you in his house?** [TLB]*

The same message is repeated by God in,

*1CO 6:19 Haven't you yet learned that your **body is the home of the Holy Spirit** God gave you, and that **he lives within you?** [TLB]*

And again in the letter of Paul to the Ephesians,

*EPH 2:22 And **you also are joined with him and with each other by the Spirit and are part of this dwelling place of God.** [TLB]*

Are we the faithful to believe that the messengers are correct, that God resides in tabernacles, or are we to believe God's Word that He lives in us?

As a puzzled Catholic, I have often wondered that if Christ truly resided inside tabernacles, then *it necessarily follows that He does **not** reside in the spaces between tabernacles!* But if so, how is that reconciled with the concept of God's omnipresence?

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JER 23:24 Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?" declares the LORD. "Do not I fill heaven and earth?" declares the LORD. [NIV]

PSA 139:8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. [NIV]

As a matter of principle, I know that messengers are not to alter the messages they carry. In similar vein, I read in passage after passage in the Bible, that God says that Scripture must be *kept intact*, with no one to add to or subtract from it.

DEU 4:2 Do not add other laws or subtract from these; just obey them, for they are from the Lord your God. [TLB]

He also said,

DEU 12:32 Obey all the commandments I give you. Do not add to or subtract from them. [TLB]

He repeats the message when He said,

PRO 30:5-6 Every word of God proves true. He defends all who come to him for protection. Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you, and you be found a liar. [TLB]

In the very last book of the Bible, God reminds us yet again,

*REV 22:18 And I solemnly declare to everyone who reads this book: **If anyone adds anything to what is written here, God shall add to him the plagues described in this book.** [TLB]*

Moreover, God said more than once that in following the various commandments He gave us in Scripture, we are not to turn aside to the right or to the left.

*DEU 5:32 So be careful to do what the LORD your God has commanded you; **do not turn aside to the right or to the left.** [NIV]*

*DEU 17:11 Act according to the law they teach you and the decisions they give you. **Do not turn aside from what they tell you, to the right or to the left.** [NIV]*

*DEU 17:19-20 It is to be with him, and **he is to read it all the days of his life** so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and **not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left** [NIV]*

*DEU 28:14 **Do not turn aside from any of the commands I give you today, to the right or to the left, following other gods and serving them.** [NIV]*

*JOS 1:7 Be strong and very courageous. **Be careful to obey all the law** my servant Moses gave you; **do not turn from it to the right or to***

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the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. [NIV]

JOS 23:6 "Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left. [NIV]

Now I ask, can there be any doubt that God wanted His messengers to tread the straight and narrow to ensure we strictly abide by the words of the Bible?

I note the deep displeasure that Jesus expressed at man's attempt to edit His commands. He warned,

MAT 15:5 ... by your man-made rule, you nullify the direct command of God...[TLB]

Again, in the same vein, Jesus said,

MAR 7:8 For you ignore God's specific orders and substitute your own traditions. [TLB]

And so it goes.

Why do Catholic messengers, in many instances, insist on their proud position which seems contrary to God's teaching, leading to dilemmas for the listening Catholic faithful?

Instead of listening to human wisdom, I learn from God's Word that His flock is to immerse itself in Scripture, and be assured that God will unerringly guide it in its study of His Word.

JOH 16:13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth...[NIV]

The Holy Spirit is to guide God's flock into all truth!

And yet the Church established the centuries-old and venerable Teaching Magisterium, which I am taught is alone authorized to teach the faithful in all matters spiritual, contrary to the clear teaching of the Bible about the primary teaching role of the Spirit of God!

From Scripture, I note that God wanted to ensure the purity of His message to His flock. To this end He sent His Holy Spirit.

1JO 2:27 But you have received the Holy Spirit, and he lives within you, in your hearts, so that you don't need anyone to teach you what is right. For he teaches you all things, and he is the Truth, and no liar; and so, just as he has said, you must live in Christ, never to depart from him. [TLB]

But Church Authorities insist on their unchanging, apparently erroneous doctrines.

I pose the question: *Is it ever possible that God in the Scriptures is wrong, and the messengers right?*

Is it possible that the messengers are right in their traditional Catholic Catechism teaching that the reason that we are here on earth is "to know Him, to love Him, to serve Him, and to be happy with Him forever", leading to the necessary conclusion that the early hermits had it right in earning their right to heaven by sitting on flagpoles all

their lives, disregarding the need to attend to the needs of their fellow men? Am I also expected to agree with the concept of contemplative nuns, confined and isolated in their quarters, unmindful of, if prayerful about, the world and people around them?

Am I to disregard what Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love God with our whole heart, mind, strength, *and our neighbor as ourselves?*²⁷

Were the messengers right in teaching God's flock for centuries, this generation included, *not* to read God's Word which only Church Authorities were properly educated to read and understand and interpret, when God's Word clearly states,

*JOSH 1:8 Do not let **this Book of the Law** depart from your mouth; **meditate on it day and night**, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.*
[NIV]

Thank God, I note that there are exceptions to the seeming rule that messengers have become the message. I must salute, admire, and appreciate those who remain faithful to Christ's teachings, and who effectively still preface every teaching with "Thus says the Lord..." Thank God for the priest who acknowledged to his Baguio City recollection audience that over the centuries, Christ's teachings have been "encrusted with layer upon layer of man's opinions."

So many of our present-day practices are in conflict with what the Bible says. Messengers were meant to faithfully

²⁷ Mark 12:30-31

relay the message of God, but they don't seem interested in doing that.

The faithful are in a dilemma, myself included.

I wonder: How many of today's messengers can say to the flock of God, as Paul did,

2CO 1:1 Dear friends: This letter is from me, Paul, appointed by God to be Jesus Christ's messenger [TLB]

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Chapter 9

God's Word: Shall We Revere It Or Not?

MAT 4:4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" [NIV]

If you have read this far, you must necessarily have implied some trust and belief in Scripture, the Word of God, which I have been quoting extensively. But to be honest, I must admit that we often have many questions about Scripture. Is it truly God's Word? If so, how do we know? Is it trustworthy, or possibly tainted with error? So many hold that it contains all the answers to our moral questions. Is this so?

We must now delve into deep theological questions, about which most of us have sadly not been taught too much.

To begin with, I must state a common difficulty in our understanding of Scripture. We struggle with the claim that it is God's Word because it says so. To the layman, that is immediately a classic example of illogical circular reasoning. It is self-serving, and many will see the point that anyone can write a book which claims the authorship of God.

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But any such book would certainly and quickly be debunked. Any such book would quickly lose its following.

But it is precisely in the incredibly large following of the Bible that it establishes itself as a very unique and different book, astonishing in its ability to survive centuries of men's most persistent efforts to destroy it, in the incredible number of copies that mankind has needed and demanded throughout history, making it the all-time best-seller in the world.

As author Wayne Grudem observes,²⁸ the Bible is remarkably historically accurate, internally consistent, , has a majestic beauty and a profound depth of teaching unmatched by any other book, contains prophecies that have unquestionably been fulfilled, has influenced the course of human history more than any other book, has continued changing the lives of millions of individuals throughout history, has brought salvation to countless numbers, and claims hundred of times over to be God's very words.

It is simply unmatched, and its remarkable history prompts us to take notice that this is no ordinary book, and therefore should command our respect.

The Authority of Scripture

Scripture is very authoritative, and scholars recognize this authority. We are taught that:

²⁸ Systematic Theology, Wayne Grudem, Inter-Varsity Press, p 78

All the words in Scripture are God's words, and to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God Himself.²⁹

In the Old Testament, prophets very often began their messages with the phrase, "Thus says the Lord..." This phrase appears a remarkable number of times in the Bible, more than 400, from the book of Exodus to the book of Zechariah. This tells us that many words in the Bible are direct messages of God.³⁰

In the New Testament, we read similar statements telling us that every word of Scripture is God's.

*MAT 4:4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but **on every word that comes from the mouth of God.**'" [NIV]*

2TI 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, [NIV]

Peter emphasized this divine origin of Scripture, when he declared that prophecy, i.e., God's Word in general, is always of the Holy Spirit.

2PE 1:20-21 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. [NIV]

²⁹ Ibid, p 73, 81

³⁰ Ibid, p 74

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In His desire to tell us the truth about Himself, *God gave us not just Scripture, but Jesus, who is truth Himself.*

*JOH 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and **the truth** and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. [NIV]*

He also arranged to give us the Holy Spirit, who would guide us to *all truth.*

JOH 16:13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. [NIV]

But we must note carefully that, as authoritative as the words of Scripture are, **the Bible's truths are acceptable only to believers.**

JOH 10:27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. [NIV]

For unbelievers, Scripture is difficult to understand and downright foolish!

1CO 2:14 The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. [NIV]

If therefore we will not accept every word of Scripture, we are essentially unbelievers!

Jesus, faced with unbelief in words of the Old Testament, had this rebuke:

LUK 24:25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! [NIV]

Similarly, Peter commanded all to believe in the words of the Old and New Testaments.

2PE 3:2 I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles. [NIV]

Moreover, **God** also **emphasized, repeatedly, not to tamper with Holy Scripture!**

DEU 4:2 Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you. [NIV]

DEU 12:32 See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it. [NIV]

PRO 30:6 Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar. [NIV]

REV 22:18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. [NIV]

Recognizing the Authority of Scripture, **that it alone is the Word of God**, also leads to the necessary recognition that **the Bible is the only standard that we must use to guide our Christian lives. To be pleasing to God,**

everything that we do must pass the test of compliance with the teaching of Scripture.

What happens when we choose to trust human wisdom rather than Scripture? God anticipated this, and gave us stern and repeated words of warning,

PSA 118:8 It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. [NIV]

PSA 146:3 Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. [NIV]

ISA 2:22 Stop trusting in man, who has but a breath in his nostrils. Of what account is he? [NIV]

JER 17:5 This is what the LORD says: "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD. [NIV]

Does God expect us to diligently study Scripture? Yes indeed.

JOSH 1:8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night [NIV]

Does God expect us to revere His Word in Scripture? Indeed He does. Who is esteemed by God? He who ***trembles*** at every word of Scripture!

ISA 66:2 "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my Word. [NIV]

The Inerrancy of Scripture

A different question may occur in our minds: Is the Bible capable of making errors? Or is it in fact free of error? Scholars tell us of The Inerrancy of Scripture, which teaches us that:

*Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact. The issue is truthfulness, and means that the Bible always tells the truth concerning everything it talks about.*³¹

Hence the Bible says:

*2SAM 7:28 O Sovereign LORD, you are God! **Your words are trustworthy**, and you have promised these good things to your servant. [NIV]*

*TIT 1:2 ...a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which **God, who does not lie**, promised before the beginning of time, [NIV]*

*HEB 6:18 God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which **it is impossible for God to lie**, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. [NIV]*

All the words of Scripture are completely true and without error. God does not lie.

³¹ Systematic Theology, Wayne Grudem, Inter-Varsity Press, p 90, 91

NUM 23:19 God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? [NIV]

PSA 12:6 And the words of the LORD are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times. [NIV]

PRO 30:5 "Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. [NIV]

God's words are, in fact, the standard for truth. We see this from the fact that His Word is not merely referred to as "true", but as "truth" itself. If therefore the Bible is God's Word, and is truth itself, and no other book is God's Word and contains this truth, it follows that it alone must be our only standard for truth.³²

JOH 17:17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. [NIV]

The Bible and God's inerrant Word will never be acceptable to proud men. **To believe in the Bible's inerrancy does require much humility**, an admission of the frailty of our human minds. God Himself reminded us that:

1CO 3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness"; [NIV]

³² Ibid, p 83, 90

Is it possible at all that there are errors in Scripture? **But to hold that the Bible on one hand is God's Word, yet on the other hand, is not inerrant, is to run into these serious problems:**³³

Did therefore God deliberately speak falsely to us in certain parts of the Bible?

If it was right for God to say so, how can it be wrong for us read so?

If certain parts are in error, how then can we trust God in anything? If some of His words are untrustworthy, we can conclude that He is capable of lying to us. If then we are right in disobeying that part of Scripture, there could be no end to our possible disobedience.

If we can use our minds to pass judgment on God's Word, are we then a higher standard of truth than God Himself? Do we know truth more certainly and more accurately than God Himself?

An acceptance of possible error in minor matters in Scripture would open the possibility of doubt of truthfulness in even the major doctrines. It will be the bursting of our dam of faith, and we would live in a world that has no secure spiritual moorings, tossed to and fro in a sea of uncertainties.

Far more reasonable therefore is to simply believe what God said:

³³ Ibid, p 100

PSA 12:6 And the words of the LORD are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times. [NIV]

PRO 30:5 "Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. [NIV]

JOH 17:17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. [NIV]

The Sufficiency of Scripture

Let us consider one last question on Scripture: Can it truly supply all the answers we need to answer all our moral questions? In answer, Bible scholars tell us of The Sufficiency of Scripture, which teaches that:

Scripture contains all the words of God that we need for salvation, and for trusting and obeying Him perfectly.³⁴

We gather this from the following verses:

2TI 3:15 ... the holy Scriptures... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. [NIV]

IPE 1:23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. [NIV]

The Sufficiency of Scripture also tells us that the Bible is sufficient for equipping us to live the Christian life.

³⁴ Ibid, p 127

2TI 3:16-17 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.
[NIV]

It also assures us that we can become blameless in God's eyes if we simply observe what Scripture tells us.

PSA 119:1 Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD. [NIV]

This means that to be morally perfect in God's sight, we need do nothing more than what God commands us in Scripture! Of course, this assumes the indwelling of Christ in us, as without such, becoming morally perfect in God's sight would be not only difficult, but impossible to do!

We see therefore that it is possible to study Scripture alone, systematically, and find the answers to all our moral questions, say about marriage and divorce, or the responsibilities of parents to children, or the relationship between a Christian and civil government. The writings of even the most respected scholars, while they may be helpful, will not be absolutely necessary on these matters.³⁵

It should be noted that after the different prophets added their writings to Scripture (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, etc.), and the Old Testament was completed, and after the New Testament writers such as Matthew, Mark,

³⁵ Ibid, p 128

Luke, John, Paul and others had finished their work **by about the year 90 AD, God added no further writings to the Bible which then comprised 66 Books. Christianity thus used the 66-Book Bible for the next 1500 years, during which it underwent no changes.** (There were many other early writings by various authors, but the great majority of Church leaders agreed that they were not God's Word.) Only in about the year 1500 did the Vatican decide to add 7 more books from long available writings, only in response to Martin Luther's desire to reform the Church which had strayed so far from Biblical teaching.³⁶

*But for the Catholic Church, i.e., man, to add to God's genuine Word would be tantamount to policemen, tasked to identify which currency is genuine and truly minted by a central bank, deciding by themselves to pronounce known counterfeit currency as genuine.*³⁷

Adding to the books of the Bible without God's authorization is emphatically and repeatedly prohibited by God, as we have seen.

Holy Scripture is **sufficient** for us, as it contains the words of God that we need for our salvation, and for trusting and obeying Him perfectly. It is **authored by God Himself**, and it is **free of error**. We rejoice in revering Scripture! We rejoice in reminding ourselves that God said,

ISA 66:2 "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my Word. [NIV]

³⁶ Ibid, p 59

³⁷ Ibid, p 59

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Chapter 10

The Questions Thus Far

DEU 5:32 So be careful to do what the LORD your God has commanded you; do not turn aside to the right or to the left. [NIV]

What am I, a sincere, Bible-hungry Catholic to believe? How am I to reconcile the many gaps between what I am taught to practice with what I read in the Bible? How am I to get my many questions answered? How am I to ask questions of my spiritual superiors in the establishment, whose teachings I am bound to question? What sincere, non-self-serving answers can I expect?

Where am I to turn to? What true shepherds can I rely on? Where are the Christ-like shepherds I need so badly? Will I be condemned for feeling lost? Can I, as the lost sheep, hope to be searched for and found? Will there be rejoicing at my being brought back into the flock, as the Lord promised?

Will I find kindness from a shepherd from whom I can comfortably expect sincere and understanding answers to my many questions?

Why has Church history seemed so rife with questionable practices? Why do Church Authorities seem so nonchalant about the 11th-century Crusades that saw the execution of tens of thousands of non-believers, and the 12th-century Inquisitions that witnessed the burning of further tens of thousands of alleged heretics, as Joan of Arc was accused of being, acts so utterly devoid of the love that Jesus taught so earnestly? Why were those who simply insisted on bowing to God rather than to Rome immediately branded as heretics deserving of burning at the stake?

Why do present-day shepherds seem so politically inclined, periodically advising the government on political matters, and seemingly so negligent of their own duties to shepherd, and to steer wayward sheep to right paths? Why do they exhibit un-shepherd-like behavior resulting in a citizenry so mired in unrighteousness that they have earned for the country an official label as one of the most corrupt?

Why do we fail to see a national state of alarm, and a corresponding call to national repentance, led by national shepherds, as prophets of old did, exhorting all sheep under their care to follow their lead, until the malady of national corruption is healed and the nation is cleansed of its wickedness?

Why are shepherds seemingly so immune from *accountability* for their sheep? Why is no one held to account for the sheep's miserable spiritual welfare? If a supposedly Catholic country conducts itself in such an obviously wicked way that it earns the label of extremely corrupt, should not the highest-ranking spiritual leader hold himself accountable for the decadent moral state of

the country? After all, if the economy of a country is in a miserable state, is it not usually taken for granted that the political head of the country be held accountable?

Is the modern-day Catholic then essentially a sheep without a shepherd, wandering alone among the fellow lost, being fed not with the truths of the Lord but with food pre-digested by Catholic shepherds, receiving messages not of God but those edited by the messengers? Is the lost sheep expected to find his own way back to the Shepherd?

In the widespread scandal pertaining to priestly sex practices, why has it been so difficult for Church Authorities to make an admission of obvious guilt, preferring instead to pay millions to victims to minimize the scandal? Why is there a public perception that the “rock-solid unity” of the Church seems to be more important than the honest search for innocence or guilt?

In the analysis of what has gone wrong, why have there been a profusion of statements about “what the Church teaches”, and a dearth of questions about what *God* in His Scripture teaches?

Why has it been difficult for Church hierarchy to follow the marital example of Peter himself, the married apostle?

Why has it been so difficult for Church hierarchy to accept that God had ordained celibacy as a free gift, given to some and not to all?

If the Lord, 2000 years ago, commanded us to make disciples of all nations, how do we explain away the unsatisfactory statistic that 2000 years later, only one-third

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of the earth's population, 2 of the earth's 6 billion people, has been told of Jesus?

Why is there no alarm expressed among Church Authorities that there exists this massive problem? Why has no one in authority taken responsibility for this global problem?

Why is there no urgent program undertaken to catch up? Why is there no timetable set?

Why is it that years after the 1999 conclusion of the Augsburg meeting between Catholics and Lutherans, at which a Joint Declaration was duly signed by a Catholic Cardinal and a bishop of the Lutheran World Federation, agreeing that we are saved by faith and not by works, our present Church Authorities still have not publicly announced this earth-shaking development, nay, shouted it from the housetops?

Why is the Catholic flock still in darkness regarding this liberating teaching of Christ about free salvation? Why are we Catholics still struggling to earn salvation, walking on our knees, flogging our backs, and literally crucifying ourselves every Holy Week?

Why won't our shepherds lead us away from this darkness, into God's marvelous light?

What could be the reason that such an important matter as God's Ten Commandments are edited in our Catechisms, and differ from God's Word? In effect, we have been taught only Nine Commandments. Why has one been omitted?

Even assuming that there was a good reason for Church Authorities to make the edit, why was the revision not announced and explained to the flock earlier, instead of quietly waiting for the sheep to discover the discrepancy on their own?

Why has the sin of idolatry seem to have been minimized, contrary to God's teaching in the Old Testament that repeated over and over again how God abhorred idolatry?

Why has the Lord's example of humility, simplicity and detachment from things earthly seem to have been entirely set aside by the present-day successors to His apostles?

Why do we now see the unbelievable situation where Church Authorities are living lives of the rich and powerful?

Why do they reside in virtual mansions or larger? Why are they clothed in the purple clothing of the rich?

Why have they adopted the trappings of earthly kings, and acquired for themselves thrones, crowns, possessions, lands, and titles?

Why are they living so unlike the sheep of their flock? Why does their flock perceive them as superiors, not shepherds?

Why do we now learn that they were once involved in centuries-long deceptive acquisition of vast lands through the forged Donation of Constantine? Or in present-day bank scandals?

Why have present-day messengers of God seem to have disobeyed His instruction not to add or subtract from His message, and fed God's flock with edited messages about salvation?

Why do present-day messengers of God no longer say "Thus says the Lord..." and instead prefer "The Church teaches..."?

Why is it that Jesus, who repeatedly said, "I am not teaching you my own thoughts, but those of God who sent me..." is no longer emulated by present-day messengers?

Why is the role of the Spirit in teaching God's children all Truth now minimized?

In many ways, the innumerable questions that arose from my reading of the Bible, led inexorably to the question as to why Church Authorities, in particular, the Popes, have over the centuries issued teachings so contrary to, and seemingly in such open rebellion against, God's teachings.

Why did they do this? What reason could they have had? What led them to what seems to be outright rebellion against God? I needed to find out.

I presumed that if indeed the Church had taken a course so divergent from that taught by our Lord, the highest-ranking officials of the Church, the Popes, must have initiated and authorized such divergence. And so I embarked on a project I had never before undertaken: searching for more information about the Popes. It proved to be an astonishing and disturbing experience, a foray into unbelievable historical records.

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Chapter 11

The Holiness of Popes

*MAT 20:25-26 But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the **rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them**, and their great men exercise authority over them. **It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant...***

From my youth, I had always been taught that the Pope was God's Vicar on earth, His earthly representative, and as such, he was just about as holy, and deserved just about the same reverence, as God Himself. He was a man above any other ordinary mortal, and who preached with the authority of God. Here was a man whom I was to believe in whatever he taught, and to whom I was to submit in unquestioning obedience. His holiness was a given, accepted by all, and was unassailable.

As I grew older, I began to ask questions, on simple yet obvious matters such as their uncanny similarities to the Pharisees of old. Why did they seem to me to so love honor and wealth?

And inevitably, as answers offered me proved increasingly unsatisfactory, and given my own personal trait of curiosity, I was led to do my own research.

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With the advent of the internet and the resulting ease of research, I found it relatively easy to make inquiries about Popes. And because during the first 25 years of my life the only Pope I knew was Pope Pius XII, I thought he might be a good starting point for my inquiries.

But in searching for information about him, I was unexpectedly led to surprising areas of information, to a webpage that offered the entire Chapter 6 of a book entitled, “A Woman Rides A Beast” by Dave Hunt³⁸.

He spoke, not of Pius XII, but of Popes in general. In particular, he talked of the surprisingly evil lives they led, of papal sexual excesses, love of money, cold and unfeeling cruelty, and so on.

I was perplexed! Evil lives of holy Popes? What was this I had stumbled upon? Popes are exemplary men; everyone knows that. What was this about wicked Popes? The chapter appeared downright blasphemous!

But what I was reading offered very compelling material.

Here were specifics about Pope Gregory XI’s papal bull of 1372, *In Coena Domini*, that claimed papal dominion over the entire Christian world, secular as well as religious, that also threatened excommunication to all who failed to obey the Popes or to pay them taxes. Was this a vagary of one misguided Pope? Apparently not, as about 200 years later, a different Pope, Pope Pius V, swore in 1568 that *In Coena* was to remain an eternal law.

³⁸<http://www.chick.com/information/religions/catholicism/sevenhills.asp>

Here was a paragraph about Pope Stephen III, claiming vast tracts of land by virtue of the “Donation of Constantine” of March 30, 315 AD, which purportedly declared that Emperor Constantine had given these lands to the Popes forever. However, and incredibly, in 1440, or over a thousand years after its “discovery”, the Donation was proved by a papal aide, Lorenzo Valla, to be a fraudulent forgery! A forgery! Then, even more astonishingly, for centuries thereafter, Popes continued to amass lands, still claiming the authority of the Donation already proven to have been forged!

Here was another paragraph speaking of the sexual energies of the Popes, how many of them, despite their insistence on celibacy for all clergy, openly violated such vows with impunity, with their own celebrated marriages. Among these Popes were Sergius III (904-11), John X (914-28), John XII (955-63), Benedict V (964), Innocent VIII (1484-92), Urban VIII (1623-44), and Innocent X (1644-55).

Then there was Pope Clement IV who, in 1265, declared that Charles of Anjou, if his payments for a certain transaction were late, would be excommunicated, and for a second late payment, his whole nation would come under anathema, or curses.

There was also Gregory IX (1227-41), who thundered that the Pope was lord and master of everyone and everything!

In the final paragraph of this chapter of this remarkable book, I read of Pope Nicholas I (858-867) declaring that Popes alone have the power to bind or to loose, to absolve or to condemn, and that Christians cannot, under pain of excommunication, execute judgments other than theirs, which alone is infallible. He also commanded a king to destroy another, saying that he is ordered, in the name of religion, to invade his enemy, burn his cities, and to massacre his people!

Were these the same Vicars of Christ I had for decades been taught to revere? The revelations were mind-boggling. Was there truth to these reports? I wanted to find out more, and I decided to buy the book itself.

I was to regret that somewhat, as it quickly led me to further bewilderment.

I read about how the supposedly “unbroken line of Popes from Peter on down”, contrary to the implied assumption that there were always peaceful, orderly transfers of power, was often interrupted by warlike Popes fighting savage and bloody battles to gain the papal throne, how 2 Popes, Popes Ursinus and Damasus reigned simultaneously,³⁹ how 3 Popes did the same when Benedict IX, after selling the papacy for 1500 pounds of gold, and Pope Gregory VI (1045-1046), together with Sylvester III sat on three papal thrones all at the same time!⁴⁰

³⁹ A Woman Rides The Beast, Dave Hunt, Harvest House Publishers, p. 101

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 106

There were yet other instances of double Popes, during the time of Pope Urban VI and Clement VII in the late 1300s, and triple Popes in the early 1400s, with Gregory XII, Benedict XIII, and Alexander V.⁴¹

I read on of extremely young Popes,⁴² John XII who was crowned at the unbelievable age of 16, and Benedict IX, who beat John's record and ascended the papal throne at the astonishing age of 11! Is it at all imaginable that Jesus would have approved of them?

I learned that the Popes, since centuries ago, fostered the idea of doing the thinking for the faithful, and that consequently, they were against the idea of people studying the Bible by themselves. Apparently Popes preferred to dictate people's beliefs. Thus Pope Gregory XVI wrote in 1832 an encyclical, *Mirari vos*, which denounced freedom of conscience as "an insane folly" and freedom of the press, then under debate, as "a pertiferous error which cannot be sufficiently detested." Even the great Magna Carta of England, issued in 1215, was denounced by Pope Innocent III,⁴³ who also excommunicated the barons who obtained it. In similar vein, Pope Gregory XVI denounced the Belgian Constitution of 1832!

The Popes' demand for unquestioning obedience would seem to exceed that of God Himself. *Pope*

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 181

⁴² Ibid, p. 106

⁴³ Ibid, p. 54-55

Innocent III (1198-1216) stated⁴⁴ that all clerics must obey the Pope even if he commands something actually evil! Incredible!

Their love for money was unbelievable, and they devised insidious ways to acquire it. They issued impossible rules on say, fasting or marriage, then turned around and offered dispensations for violations, for a price!⁴⁵ John XII (1316-1334) set a price for absolution for everything from murder to incest to sodomy! Later, Pope Leo X (1513-1521), issued a publication formally setting the price for absolution for similar crimes.⁴⁶

Their sexual appetites were formidable. Some had mistresses of 15 years of age.⁴⁷ Some were helped onto their thrones by their powerful mistresses.⁴⁸ Pope John XII was killed by a jealous husband who found the pontiff bedded with his wife!⁴⁹ Some Popes were fathered by other Popes, as were Pope Sylverius (536-537) by Pope Hormisdas (514-523), and Pope John XI (931-935) by Servius III (905-911).⁵⁰

Their readiness to use torture was, to me, thoroughly unbelievable, notwithstanding the gentleness of their Lord and Master, the Prince of Peace. Clement V rebuked King Edward II by

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 86

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 238

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 185

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 78

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.103

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 105

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 164

saying “I command you at once to submit those men to torture!”⁵¹

Their claim to infallibility sometimes bordered on the comical. Infallible Boniface II (530-532) issued anathemas, i.e., curses, against infallible Diocorus (530), and infallible Agapetus (535-536) subsequently reversed and burned the anathemas.⁵² Pope Paul IV acknowledged the existence of heretical, but still infallible Popes, and invalidated their acts.⁵³ Joan of Arc was initially condemned to be burned as a witch and heretic by infallible Eugenius IV, but later beatified by infallible Pius X, and ultimately canonized by equally infallible Benedict XI. Then there was the unbelievable story of Pope Formosus,⁵⁴ who, 8 months after his death, was exhumed by his successor Stephan VII, put under trial for a disputed act - his skeleton propped up on a throne, fully clothed in papal garments - and was found guilty, with all his previous infallible papal acts nullified.

My mind swam with the foregoing revelations from the book. I was incredulous.

You probably are too. But you can try reading a few additional chapters of that book, Chapters 1, 7, 9, and 12 which are fortunately available in another website⁵⁵ for

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 246

⁵² Ibid, p. 117

⁵³ Ibid, p. 116

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 115; see also the Catholic Encyclopedia article on

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06139b.htm>

⁵⁵ <http://philologos.org/guide/books/hunt.dave.2.htm>

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anyone to examine and read. Better yet, get the book of Dave Hunt. It should be required reading for all Catholics.

The matter of **infallibility** is of particular interest to me, in the light of what I had come to know about God's infinite wisdom and man's finiteness.

By the plenitude of their declared powers, and not by divine decree, the highest Church Authorities have pronounced themselves infallible. But Paul declared that God alone is wise, and therefore infallible!

ROM 16:27 ...to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen. [NIV]

His wisdom is of such depth that Paul was led to rapturous praise of it.

ROM 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! [NIV]

The Psalms also tell us that His understanding is limitless!

PSA 147:5 Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit. [NIV]

Paul also tells us that *all* the treasures of wisdom are hidden in God.

COL 2:3 God... in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. [NIV]

In the glaring light of God's own declarations of the inapproachability of His wisdom, how then can mere mortal man declare himself infallible, and in effect, the equivalent of God in His wisdom and knowledge?

The claim, in the light of the majestic omnipotence and omniscience of almighty God, and the pitiful finiteness and nothingness of His creatures, I found preposterous!

Just how does God view such pitiful human claims to divine attributes? He declared,

1CO 3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God. As it says in the book of Job, God uses man's own brilliance to trap him; he stumbles over his own "wisdom" and falls. [TLB]

Still the allegations of Dave Hunt's book about the ungodliness of Popes were rejected by my mind. Did these fantastic stories present fairly the truth about the Popes?

Were these reports possibly the rantings of an irresponsible author? Was it not conceivable that he had an axe to grind, stemming perhaps from a perceived wrong of long ago inflicted by a clergyman? Was the author perhaps merely indulging in his perverse joy of Pope-bashing?

Possibly valid questions. But then again, I must consider that Dave Hunt is an established author. His books, numbering in excess of 20, have sold over 3,000,000 copies. No man who relies on writing for his living would likely indulge in maligning a class of people solely for the

fun of it, endangering his good name and his very livelihood.

And why would similar authors, writing books on similar subjects, arrive at similar conclusions about the wickedness of the Popes?

Why would an established author like Peter de Rosa, a former Jesuit, I ask myself, write a book like “Vicars of Christ---The Dark Side of the Papacy” and reveal incredible and devastating facts about the papacy through over 400 pages of his book? I noted with incredulity just a few pages of that book.

In the year 964, Benedict V dishonored a young girl, and then fled to Constantinople with the entire treasury of St. Peter’s.⁵⁶

John XII slept with his mother, offered a toast to the devil, and plundered St. Peter’s, then fled to Tivoli.⁵⁷

During the time of Gregory VII, he maintained a whole school of forgers, generating historical document after historical document, complete with papal seal, to suit the every need of the pope. These documents were even inserted into Canon Law, and included the infamous False Decretals.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Vicars of Christ, Peter de Rosa, Poolbeg Press Ltd. P 47-48

⁵⁷ Ibid, p 51

⁵⁸ Ibid, p 59

Earlier popes had been content to be called Vicars of St. Peter, but Innocent III originated the popes' title of Vicar of Christ.⁵⁹

Innocent III placed all of England under an interdict, by which he shut down 8000 cathedrals and churches in the country. No services were held on Sundays, not even on Christmas or Easter. No marriages were celebrated, and the dead were buried without ceremony.⁶⁰

Innocent III made the astonishing papal statement that every cleric must obey the pope, even if he commanded what is evil, for no one could judge the pope.⁶¹

Gregory IX declared that the pope is lord and master of the universe!⁶²

When, in 1958, John XXIII was elected pope, helpful cardinals quickly erased the name of an earlier dubious John XXIII who claimed, simultaneously with two others, the throne of the papacy.⁶³

Martin V, two days *after* his election, was ordained a priest, and the following day, was consecrated a bishop.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Ibid, p 68

⁶⁰ Ibid, p 70

⁶¹ Ibid, p 73

⁶² Ibid, p 73

⁶³ Ibid, p 93-94

⁶⁴ Ibid, p 97

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Author T.A. Trollope, in his book *The Papal Conclaves* (1876), stated that few papal elections have been other than simoniacal (i.e., were bought), and that the invention of the Sacred College of Cardinals was the most fertile source of corruption in the Church. Peter de Rosa adds that many cardinals went to Rome for the conclaves with their bankers.⁶⁵

Sixtus IV licensed brothels in Rome for 30,000 ducats per year (roughly \$60,000). He also originated the idea of indulgences for the dead, which proved to be extremely profitable for the pope.⁶⁶

Alexander VI, after murderers were caught, freed them for a fee. Similarly, he appointed Cardinals for a fat fee, and then arranged for them to be poisoned, to increase the turnover.⁶⁷

But de Rosa's book apparently is to be believed, for why would the Catholic Free Press, USA, itself say,

Vicars of Christ is a book written by a loyal Catholic with impeccable academic credentials, who has done the monumental research in gathering information from many sources, including that buried in the Vatican archives.⁶⁸

Why would yet another reputable author, Pulitzer Prize winner Gary Wills, write a book like "Papal Sin---

⁶⁵ Ibid, p 98

⁶⁶ Ibid, p 101

⁶⁷ Ibid, p 106

⁶⁸ A review reprinted in Peter de Rosa's book

Structures of Deceit” and establish that modern Popes exacerbate the sins and errors of past Popes with their modern intellectual dishonesty?

Why would a man like Dr. Anthony Pezzotta, an Italian priest who holds a master’s degree in Theology, after studying and searching Scripture, come to the heart-wrenching conclusion that what he was taught in Seminary school was all wrong? Why would he leave the priesthood, become a Christian honoring Jesus alone as Lord, and write a book like *Truth Encounter*, in which he exposes the popes in much the same way that Hunt and de Rosa do?

The idea, still preposterous to many, that the Popes were less than holy, is shared by a surprising number of Christians of various organizations. Examine websites like the one of Way of Life Literature⁶⁹ and read how they identify the harlot of Revelation 17 as the Roman Church, in much the same way that Dave Hunt does.

But of course, there is always the possibility that seemingly responsible men like Messrs. Hunt, de Rosa, Wills, or Pezzotta may after all, be nursing unfair biases against the Popes, and these are the reasons for their consistently negative views of the papacy. They are, after all, human too, burdened with inevitably human weaknesses and a certain degree of untrustworthiness.

Who then can be trusted? Other, better qualified men? But given any man’s inherent weaknesses, I would not be able to place my trust in them either. Whom then shall I trust?

⁶⁹ <http://www.wayoflife.org/fbns/harlot.htm>

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Only God can be trusted! But does God have anything to say about the papacy?

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Chapter 12

What Does God Say?

*REV 17:3-4 Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw **a woman sitting on a scarlet beast** that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries.*

To me, one of the most amazing chapters in the whole Bible is Revelation 17. At first glance, one may think it is one of those mysterious, inscrutable and incomprehensible passages which we sometimes feel occurs too frequently in the Bible, especially for those who are not too familiar with it.

But it turns out, as I found out, that this is one of the most informative and astonishing as well, as it tells of thoroughly unexpected future events, not too far off in the future. Let me lead the reader into a quick look into a part of it.

*REV 17:1 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you **the punishment of the great prostitute**, who sits on many waters.*

REV 17:2 *With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries."*

REV 17:3 *Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns.*

REV 17:4 *The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries.*

REV 17:5 *This title was written on her forehead: MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.*

REV 17:6 *I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished. [NIV]*

What is this about a great prostitute, I asked? Who is she? How did she commit adultery with the leaders of the earth? Why will she be punished?

I knew that in the Bible, prostitution and unfaithfulness are often used symbolically to portray infidelity to God, particularly by Israel.

JER 3:8 *I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries. Yet I saw that her unfaithful sister Judah had no fear; she also went out and committed adultery. [NIV]*

JER 3:20 But like a woman unfaithful to her husband, so you have been unfaithful to me, O house of Israel," declares the LORD. [NIV]

HOS 9:1 Do not rejoice, O Israel; do not be jubilant like the other nations. For you have been unfaithful to your God; you love the wages of a prostitute ... [NIV]

So John, to me, was speaking of someone, or something, that was so unfaithful to God that He considered him, or her, or it, such a great prostitute that her punishment by God was a certainty. Who or what was this prostitute? To answer this, we must turn our attention to verse 3, in which John said,

REV 17:3 "There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast."

Who was this woman? Verse 18 farther down the chapter gives us the answer.

REV 17:18 The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth." [NIV]

The woman represents a city! So, to paraphrase, we can now read:

REV 17:3 "There I saw a city sitting on a scarlet beast."

But this now begs the question: What city? The answer to this comes in turn from verse 7, which initially talks of a beast with seven heads.

*REV 17:7 Then the angel said to me: "Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the **beast** she rides, **which has the seven heads and ten horns.** [NIV]*

And in Verse 9 we are told that the seven heads represent seven hills on which the woman sits.

*REV 17:9 "This calls for a mind with wisdom. **The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits.** [NIV]*

What is this about a city on seven hills?

I knew that for centuries now, there has been one city that has been famously known as the City of Seven Hills, and *that is Rome*. To be sure, there are others such as Rio de Janeiro. But these quickly become irrelevant to our analysis as I note that they are not prominent enough to "rule over the kings of the earth" as verse 18 states.

*REV 17:18 The woman you saw is **the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.**" [NIV]*

It is only Rome, which the Catholic Encyclopedia itself identifies as "the city of seven hills", that qualifies.

So the city of Verse 3 is Rome, and that verse now effectively says,

Rev 17:3 There I saw Rome sitting on a scarlet beast.

Let us leave Verse 3 momentarily as we turn our attention to Revelation 17:5. Here we face a puzzle, as now the city of Babylon intrudes into the picture. What has Babylon have to do with Rome?

*REV 17:5 This title was written on her forehead:
MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT THE
MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE
ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.*

But a little research shows that historically, Rome has long been referred to as Babylon. William Barclay, the great Scottish author of the 18-volume series, *The Daily Study Bible*, tells us on page 144 of Revelation Vol. 2, that as far as Revelation Chapter 17 is concerned,

“... Babylon means Rome; the thing which the stranger does not know, but which the Christian reader does know, is that while the story is told under the name of Babylon, everything relates to Rome.”

So there it is. “Babylon” in verse 5 actually means “Rome”!

In this regard, it is also interesting to note that when Peter wrote the epistle we know as First Peter, he sent greetings from Rome, where he was writing from, and which we read, as freely rendered by The Living Bible, as:

IPE 5:13 The church here in Rome - she is your sister in the Lord - sends you her greetings; so does my son Mark. [TLB]

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However, most conservative Bibles render it in the original words, which are:

1PE 5:13 She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark. [NIV]

Obviously, Peter was using the language popularly known in his day; Rome was often referred to as Babylon.

But what was the significance of Rome?

We must understand that Rome stood for an institution, in the same way that we, even in our present age, often use city names to refer to institutions. For instance, when we speak of Washington, we often mean the U.S., and when we talk of London, we often mean the U.K. In similar vein, in this passage, *Rome stands for what the whole world has for centuries known it to represent, the Vatican, the seat of the power of the Roman Catholic Church.* It is for this reason that Roman Catholics know themselves as such, precisely because they acknowledge the authority of Rome, the Vatican.

So now we need to face this revelation: God's Word is actually talking about the Vatican! What a revelation this was to me!

We take a moment to allow us to catch our breath in the rapid development of our understanding of Revelation 17! Still somewhat incredulous, I turned my attention back to Verse 3, which reads in part:

*REV 17:3 There I saw **a woman sitting on a scarlet beast...***

We now know that this verse could be paraphrased as,

REV 17:3 There I saw the Vatican sitting on a scarlet beast.

But who is the beast? We get a clue from Rev 12:3, which tells of a dragon with the familiar seven heads:

*REV 12:3 Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red **dragon with seven heads** and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. [NIV]*

In a subsequent verse, war in heaven is described, with the defeat of the dragon, and with the person of the dragon then identified.

*REV 12:9 **The great dragon** was hurled down - **that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan**, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. [NIV]*

So now the pieces of the puzzle fall into place.

When John said he saw a woman riding a beast, he was seeing nothing less than the city of Rome, or the Vatican, astride, or working with, Satan!

The final paraphrase of Revelation 17:3 would therefore read:

REV 17:3 There I saw the Vatican sitting on Satan!

A truly mind-boggling revelation! It took some time for my mind to accept and digest that idea!

But I knew that I must, as I studied this Scriptural text, be humbly and reverently ready to receive revelations that God might have been bringing to my mind.

As I continued my analysis of Revelation 17, I found out that the additional details of John's amazing vision only served to strengthen my initial findings.

REV 17:4 The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries.

Is it not amazing how the description of the woman, the city, which I now understood to represent the Vatican, fits into our knowledge of present day events?

Is it not surprising that any color TV report of the Pope with his Cardinals will quickly reveal the very colors described by Revelation 17:4, purple and scarlet? Who has not witnessed scenes of an ocean of purple and scarlet at Vatican ceremonies?

Paraphrasing Revelation 17:4, it is now possible for us to read,

Rev 17:4 The Vatican was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones, and pearls...

Does not the Vatican indeed glitter with gold and precious stones? Anyone who has visited that city will find John's description remarkably accurate. Within the walls of the Vatican, hundreds of thousands of tourists have gawked, as I have, at the uncounted exhibits of golden chalices and crosses, all encrusted with precious stones.

The "golden cup filled with the filth of her adulteries" quickly brings to mind the adulteries, or idolatries, of the Church to the teachings of its Lord and Master. One only needs to think of such obvious departures from Christ's teachings such as simplicity and humility, and contrast these with present-day papal attachment to palaces and wealth and gold and vast land properties fraudulently acquired with the use of the forged Donation of Constantine, and financial scandals, etc. But we saw all that earlier, in Chapter 7, *Lifestyles Of The Rich And Powerful*.

And we must consider the sexual immoralities of Church leaders over the centuries and down to the present time, in disobedience to its own rules on celibacy, as we saw in Chapter 3, *The Rape of Celibacy*.

Don't all the foregoing indeed qualify as "abominable things", detested by the Lord?

And what about the Church's erroneous teaching to 1 billion Catholics all over the world that salvation can be earned only within the Church, and that, contrary to

Scripture, it is not a free gift of God, but must be earned by countless sacrifices, indulgences, etc.?

This despite the fact that after 500 years of controversy over this matter, dating back to Martin Luther's Reformation, the highest-ranking officials of Catholicism and Lutheranism, with the full knowledge and approval of the Pope, finally signed in October of 1999 a formal *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, declaring that indeed, Scripture is right, and salvation is a free gift of God, and need not be earned.

Isn't the patently erroneous teaching about earned salvation, to date still publicly uncorrected, an "abomination of the earth"?

But this too we saw earlier in Chapter 5, *Augsburg - An Old Treasure Unearthed, Reburied*.

In his vision, John further reported,

REV 17:6 I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished. [NIV]

This passage will quickly bring to mind the bloody Inquisitions beginning with the Medieval Inquisition of 1184 and ending with the Spanish Inquisition of 1884. But faithful Catholics through the ages have always been taught that these were necessary for the preservation of the purity of the faith, and that those who dared to introduce heretical, unchristian ideas deserved to be put to death.

Because the vast majority of Catholic faithful take the Church's teaching unquestioningly, very, very few bother to search any further, and thus remain uninformed. This is such a pitiful situation, considering the ease with which one can now do research using today's powerful internet search capabilities.

For it now takes but the minimum of research effort to uncover how wrong the assumptions of old have been. One only has to enter into a search engine the words Inquisition, or Crusades, or Waldensians or Albigences - some of the most massacred of "heretics" - to learn that a vast majority of the victims of the Papal inquisitions were those whose sin was, not so much the belief in and practice of that which was against Scripture, but *that which was scrupulously Scriptural!* The "heretics" were mostly those who passionately believed in the Word of God alone, and thus refused to bow to the Roman Church which taught that Scripture *and Tradition* as interpreted by Church Authorities were to be men's guide, notwithstanding God's Word which teaches:

DEU 4:2 Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you. [NIV]

Before the Inquisition ran its course, historians estimate that 5 to 15 million people lost their lives through torture and execution.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ *A History of Christianity in the World* by Clyde L. Manschreck

So thorough was the work of the Inquisition, and so many millions tortured and burned, that the renowned historian Will Durant was moved to write⁷¹

Compared with the persecution of heresy in Europe from 1227 to 1492, the persecution of Christians by Romans in the first three centuries after Christ was a mild and humane procedure ... **we must rank the Inquisition as among the darkest blots on the record of mankind, revealing a ferocity unknown in any beast.**

No wonder John saw the woman – Vatican City – “drunk with the blood of the saints”.

But was John, or author Dave Hunt, the only ones to associate Rome with the harlot of Revelation 17?

It is incredible to realize that many people, dating back to a thousand years ago, saw the Popes as Antichrist, and associated them with the harlot of Revelation 17!⁷²

Back in the 14th and 15th centuries the Lollards maintained that

“the Church of Rome was not the Church of Christ, but of infidel heathens; and they despised all ecclesiastical laws, together with all the Bishops and Ministers of the Church.”⁷³

⁷¹ The Story of Civilization, Simon and Schuster 1950, vol. IV, p. 784

⁷² For more informative detail, examine this webpage of Way of Life: <http://www.wayoflife.org/fbns/harlot.htm>

⁷³ Allix, *Ancient Churches of the Albigenses*, p. 230

Earlier, in 1206, at the conference of Montreal, the Albigenses made the following statement:

*“The Church of Rome was not the spouse of Christ, but the Church of confusion, drunk with the blood of the martyrs. That the polity of the Church of Rome was neither good nor holy, nor established by Jesus Christ”*⁷⁴

Farther back, in 1000, the Waldensians identified the Pope as the Antichrist. A Waldensian treatise titled the *Noble Lesson*, stated:

“Antichrist, the predicted murderer of the Saints, hath already appeared in his true character, seated monarchally in the seven-hilled city.”

Earlier still, in the 11th century, Berenger of Tours denounced Rome’s dogmas and maintained that the Roman Church was the See of Satan!⁷⁵

In the 10th century, Arnulphus, Bishop of Orleans, called the Pope antichrist, in a full council at Rheims.⁷⁶

As early as at the end of the 9th century, Tergandus, Bishop of Treves, called the Pope “antichrist, yea, a wolf, and Rome, Babylon.”⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Peter Allix, *The Ecclesiastical History of the Ancient Churches of the Albigenses*, 1821 edition, p. 178

⁷⁵ George Faber, *The History of the Ancient Vallenses and Albigenses*, 1838, p. 159

⁷⁶ Peter Allix, *The Ecclesiastical History of the Ancient Churches of Piedmont*, 1821, p. 229

⁷⁷ *Martyrs Mirror*, 5th English edition, p. 240

John the author of Revelation, and Dave Hunt the author of *A Woman Rides The Beast*, were not the only ones to associate the great harlot of Revelation 17 with Rome and the Vatican!

But, we may continue to argue, haven't the Popes of the present day repented of the sins of the past, and have they not changed? Didn't Vatican II, for instance, undo the practices and beliefs of the past, and are we not now enjoying a fresh, new start on the life of the Church?

Dr. Loraine Boettner, noted Evangelical authority on Roman Catholic doctrine, disputes that, and remarks regarding Vatican II:⁷⁸

"But Pope John XXIII, who called the first session, and Pope Paul VI, who presided over the later sessions (as well as several prominent cardinal and theologians), took care to emphasize that no changes would be made in the doctrinal structure of the Church.

An official document, "The Constitution on the Church" prepared by the Council and approved by the Pope, reaffirms basic Catholic doctrine precisely as it stood before the Council met.

Indeed, a Church that claims infallibility cannot, by definition, change, else she condemn her past publishers of doctrine as fatally capable of error, an intolerable admission.

⁷⁸ <http://www.spiritwatch.org/catchron4.htm>

How then is this saga of the Roman Holy Catholic Church to play out? Will God simply stand by and allow the prostitute to continue its deception?

I wanted to know: Does God have a plan?

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Chapter 13

Come Out Of Her, My People!

*REV 18:7 Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. **In her heart she boasts, 'I sit as queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn.'** [NIV]*

Indeed, God has a plan! And what an incredible plan, I discovered! We already saw a hint of it when we reviewed Revelation 17:1.

*REV 17:1 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "**Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters.**" [NIV]*

The great prostitute *will* be punished, it seems! God's majesty will not allow any other final ending. He will brook no mockery to His sense of justice.

*GAL 6:7 Do not be deceived: **God cannot be mocked...**[NIV]*

But before He executes judgment, He gives a chance to His people, the faithful who may have been innocently drawn into the harlotry of the prostitute, to escape unharmed!

So God calls out to His people,

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REV 18:4 ... "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; [NIV]

Come out of her!

Incredible! Is God truly asking His people, including me, to do the unthinkable? Are the faithful who have for centuries been loyally following the leadership of their Catholic Church being commanded by God to abandon what now appears to be the target of His intended wrath?

I felt that this thought was so unprecedented that it called for very serious pause and review. Was this possibly a mistaken interpretation? Was the admonition to "Come out" perhaps an isolated incident in the Bible that had no precedents, and therefore did not need to be taken too literally?

But in fact there are precedents, I found out!

I saw that in the biblical account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, God sent His angels to warn Lot, and urged him to abandon the wicked city.

*GEN 19:12-13 The two men said to Lot, "Do you have anyone else here - sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? **Get them out of here, because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the LORD against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it.**" [NIV]*

In another incident, after God had exiled His rebellious people to Babylon (the real Babylon this time; not Rome!),

and He was ready to finally rescue them, He urged them to similarly leave the evil city.

ISA 52:11 Go now, leave your bonds and slavery. Put Babylon and all it represents far behind you - it is unclean to you. You are the holy people of the Lord... [TLB]

I came to realize that God always wants His faithful people to be holy, and to separate themselves from those who are profane. The faithful are not to have anything to do with the wicked. In the New Testament, He said.

2CO 6:17 "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing..." [NIV]

So, in the same vein, God now calls His faithful, those who may have been innocently following the prostitute, to abandon the whore of Revelation 17, the City of Seven Hills, with His command to "Come out of her!"

God states He has terrible punishment in store for her, and does not want the innocent to suffer her retribution.

REV 18:5 for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes. [NIV]

God then reveals the unrelenting fury He has planned against her.

REV 18:6 Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. [NIV]

REV 18:7 Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, 'I sit as queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn.' [NIV]

REV 18:8 Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her. [NIV]

The whole world will be astonished at the sight! She will be consumed by fire! Her end will be swift.

REV 18:17 In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!' ... [NIV]

The end of the seat of Catholicism? Is it possible? If yes, without the Vatican, where would one billion Catholics turn to for leadership? A billion sheep without a shepherd? Astounding! Would they then turn to the True Shepherd?

To continue, Babylon's end will also be for all time, we are told.

REV 18:22 The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No workman of any trade will ever be found in you again. The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again. [NIV]

Heaven will recognize how she led astray all the nations of the world.

*REV 18:23 The light of a lamp will **never shine in you again**. The voice of bridegroom and bride will **never be heard in you again**. Your merchants were the world's great men. **By your magic spell all the nations were led astray**. [NIV]*

The blood of the martyrs is unmistakably ascribed to her cruelty.

*REV 18:24 **In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth.**" [NIV]*

Then, incredibly, Revelation 18 and 19 shift the scene from the destruction upon the city on earth, to a great celebration in Heaven!

*REV 18:20 **Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you.** [NIV]*

*REV 19:1 After this I heard what sounded like **the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,** [NIV]*

*REV 19:2 **for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants.** [NIV]*

What an astounding scenario this was to me! Chaos and punishment on earth upon the great prostitute for her

harlotry, and wild celebration and praise for God in Heaven for His judgment!

What sincere, searching Catholic can escape feeling stunned and very deeply disturbed at this point? Who can avoid feeling that the dam of his traditional faith has undergone an upheaval and has developed deep, potentially catastrophic cracks, and threatens to burst open? I found myself groping in bewilderment .

What has started out as an innocent quest for some small answers to questions which were, yes, perplexing and bothersome, has inexorably led to unexpectedly earthshaking realizations.

Faced with such unanswerable questions, any sincere and thinking Catholic would begin to feel like ... a child awakening to the false identity of his trusted parents.

Or like a sheep beginning to realize the unnerving relationship of his shepherd to the forest wolves.

Lord God, what are You leading me to?

But even as the foundations of my faith began to crumble, the enormous weight of the training of my teachers over seven long decades of my life held me firmly in place, and it was not easy to contemplate embracing even a few of the new ideas revealed by Scripture. A war began to rage within me, between the strict discipline of my extensive Catholic training on one hand, and the mighty Word of God on the other hand.

The outcome of the epic struggle would have remained in doubt, had the Lord not led me into that most disturbing and authoritative command,

REV 18:4 ... "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; [NIV]

Was God Himself telling me, nay, *commanding* me, to abandon my lifelong church, and actually *come out of her*?

And I could not avoid noting with fear the threat to possible disobedience, that if I don't come out of her, I would share in her sins, and receive her plagues!

But for so long had I been trained to be unquestioningly loyal to the unassailable authority of the Popes that I could not readily contemplate letting go of those traditional anchors of my spiritual life.

What if the interpretation of Revelation 17, 18 and 19 were all wrong? What if my interpretation of the identity of the Great Prostitute of Revelation 17:1 were in error? What if this were other than the Catholic Church? What if the city of seven hills of Revelation 17:18 were not Rome? What if the purple and gold of Revelation 17:4 did not refer to the Vatican's official colors? What if the blood of the saints of Revelation 17:6 did not refer to the blood shed in the Inquisitions and Crusades?

Indeed, can anyone interpret prophecy accurately? Isn't the interpretation of any prophecy by its very nature essentially and necessarily speculative, until subsequent actual events prove or disprove its validity?

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There remained many arguments for doubt.

And so for a year I wrestled with myself, and, I now suppose, with God Himself. In countless discussions deep into innumerable nights, my wife and I debated all possible aspects of our faith's dilemma. In the final months of our struggle, we were feeling absolutely lost in the seeming enormity of the choice God seemed to be asking us to make.

But even assuming that indeed, I was wrong to make the conclusions I had taken in the interpretation of those prophecies, the questions I earlier raised would continue to cry out for satisfactory answers.

Where did shepherds go when they were needed?

Why was the Church embroiled in the disruptive question of celibacy?

Why, if the Lord commanded the Catholic Church 2000 years ago to disciple all nations, to date only a third of the world has heard of Christ?

Why was the central and fundamental teaching of the Lord on the free gift of salvation erroneously taught, and when finally acknowledged, reburied and hidden from the faithful?

Why were God's 10 Commandments reduced to 9, and why was this done surreptitiously?

Why was the simple and humble Christ succeeded by those who were obsessed with wealth and power?

Why did His messengers dare assume more authorities than they were given, and deliver their own messages?

Why did Popes lead such unholy lives for centuries, and continue to insist on displaying and enjoying their wealthy lifestyles and preserving unscriptural doctrines?

In sum, why did our spiritual leaders seem to have learned more from the Pharisees than from the Lord?

These remained valid, searching questions. What were the satisfactory answers?

And the Lord was unrelenting in His own questions to me and my wife.

Who is really your Lord?

Am I? Or some others?

Which teaching are you going to believe?

Mine? Or men's teachings?

Whom will you follow and obey?

Will you obey Me even if I lead you to a place I will show you, as Abraham obeyed Me when I asked him to go to a place I would show him?

Will you obey Me even if the cost to you of your obedience is high, such as persecution, loss of love of friends, and even that of family members?

Do you love Me more than these?

Is your love for Me truly absolute?

*Do you love Me enough to obey Me
unquestioningly?*

We struggled with the Lord's persistent questions. We agonized over our doubts, and fears. We suffered through countless sleepless nights. We prayed, and we prayed. We consulted with God-fearing friends. We worshipped, and adored, and praised our God.

In the end, we could see no avenue to take save that which was the narrow path of obedience. God's majestic sovereignty prevailed, and we succumbed and surrendered to His power and authority.

We agreed to answer His call.

Humbly we declared our obedience to God almighty.

And so we became Born-Again Christians, followers of Christ, Who alone is now our Lord!

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Chapter 14

Epilogue

ISA 46:4 Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you. [NIV]

Now that we can more peacefully look back on that momentous event, we marvel at, and are profoundly humbled by, the realization that it is a most awesome grace that in our advanced years, God had seen fit not to give up on us, but to call us out of darkness, and into His marvelous light.

And what amazing grace He has since allowed us to experience, as we enjoy the absolute exhilaration of uninhibited praise in the company of fellow Christians, all unashamedly in love with the Lord, obsessed with glorifying Him, all truly loving Him, in total obedience to His command to:

MAR 12:30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. [NIV]

God has brought us to a church which acknowledges His name, and fears Him as Lord, and trembles at His Word, a

church which acknowledges only Him as Lord and Saviour.

What a glorious marvel is the place that God in His sovereignty has led us to. How infinitely loving is He to allow us to experience being members of the family of God, and bring us to a church which truly nourishes our hungry spirits, which fearfully observes all that Scripture teaches, scrupulously obeying God's word in all church activities, its ministries, its organization, its relationships, its teachings, indeed in *everything that it does*, to ensure that God's name in all things is glorified.

How totally refreshing to hear a sermon include the speaker's firmly-worded invitation to disagree with him, and call his attention, should any part of his sermon be contrary to Scripture! For us who had been brought up to unquestioningly believe *everything* that was told us, this was absolutely unheard of and unbelievably refreshing!

What lessons we learn! Where we earlier thought we knew our God and what Christ taught, we now realize we had grasped only the very tip of a vast iceberg of Truth. Indeed, in listening to new revelation about Scripture, we have often felt as if we, in the sunset of our years, are back in Grade One.

In at least weekly teachings, often more frequently, we feast on God's Word, and are given intense teaching regarding such primary and basic lessons as the authority and sufficiency of Scripture, the sovereignty of God that takes pleasure in freely electing from eternity those whom He chose to, the equality of the godhead of the Trinity, and the different roles that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit took in the salvation of mankind, the frequently under-

estimated power of the Holy Spirit, the superiority of Christianity over all other “religions” that offer man the hopeless option of reaching up to powerless gods, the eye-opening and sobering doctrine of the total depravity of man, the incomparable grace of the free gift of salvation and its security, the biblical and true meaning of church, etc.

What awesome truths!

How liberating to know for certain that our moral moorings are now anchored on the unchanging and sovereign Word of God! How secure we feel in the knowledge that our church will always abide by God’s Word, and passionately insist on obeying Scripture, thereby protecting us from the ongoing attacks on morality that the world will increasingly see as Christ’s Second Coming rapidly approaches.

We are overcome with joy! The long night of our struggle to obey has ended in a dawn of incredible exhilaration and freedom! And so, as we step into His kingdom, we raise our voices high as we join the psalmist in praising our holy and awesome God,

***PSA 98:4 Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth,
burst into jubilant song with music... [NIV]***

***Oh would that all would come to experience the joy of
our salvation!***

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Note To The Reader

The author and his wife have joyfully become members of Baguio's Guiding Light Christian Ministries. As a Christian church, Guiding Light is evangelical, acknowledging the Bible as the sole and final authority in all spiritual practices and beliefs. It believes in the gospel message as set forth in Scripture, emphasizing salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. The author and his wife serve in a ministry as members of the Young Once, dedicated to the edification of the older members of the church.

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Appendix

A Biblical Basis for Salvation by Grace

In the beginning, God, in His great love for us, planned for us a wonderful life in Eden, a life of daily fellowship with God.

But man sinned, and we lost our fellowship with God. Sinful man became separated from God.

JER 2:22 Although you wash yourself with soda and use an abundance of soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me," declares the Sovereign LORD. [NIV]

ROM 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [NIV]

ROM 5:12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned - [NIV]

ROM 6:23 For the wages of sin is death [NIV]

Sinful man became the object of God's wrath.

1CO 6:9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? ... [NIV]

EPH 2:3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. [NIV]

Man in his sinfulness was incapable of restoring his fellowship with God. God in His mercy had to take the initiative to restore that fellowship.

JOH 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. [NIV]

Jesus was God's only provision for man's sin.

JOH 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. [NIV]

JOH 1:12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God - [NIV]

ROM 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. [NIV]

2CO 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. [NIV]

REV 3:20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. [NIV]

But the sinful mind is hostile to God, and to depraved mankind, the Gospel is foolishness!

JER 13:23 Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil. [NIV]

ROM 8:7 the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. [NIV]

1CO 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to

*us who are being saved it is the power of God.
[NIV]*

God in His graciousness wills that all who believe in His Son will be saved. Salvation is God's free gift!

JOH 6:40 For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." [NIV]

JOH 6:44 "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. [NIV]

EPH 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast. [NIV]

But man must respond to God's invitation. Man must repent!

JOE 2:13 Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. [NIV]

ACT 2:38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins ... [NIV]

2CO 7:10 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. [NIV]

We must understand God's gift of Salvation. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone!

By grace alone.

ROM 11:6 And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. [NIV]

*EPH 2:4-5 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - **it is by grace you have been saved.** [NIV]*

Through faith alone.

*EPH 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, **through faith** - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. [NIV]*

*1PE 1:9 ... you are receiving **the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.** [NIV]*

In Christ alone.

*JOH 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. **No one comes to the Father except through me.** [NIV]*

*ACT 4:12 **Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.**" [NIV]*

*1TH 5:9 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive **salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.** [NIV]*

*HEB 5:9 ... once made perfect, **He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him** [NIV]*

Know this too, that man, once saved, is assured of the security of his salvation!

*JOH 5:24 "I tell you the truth, **whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.** [NIV]*

*JOH 6:39 **And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.** [NIV]*

*JOH 10:28 **I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.** [NIV]*

*JOH 11:25-26 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. **He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.** Do you believe this?" [NIV]*

*HEB 7:25 Therefore **he is able to save completely** those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. [NIV]*

*IPE 1:3-4 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy **he has given us new birth** into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into **an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade** - kept in heaven for you, [NIV]*

*ROM 8:38-39 For I am convinced that **neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.** [NIV]*

Do we now realize how much we have offended God by our sinfulness, and how we in our wickedness

are hopelessly unable to redeem ourselves, and how desperately therefore we need God's grace to bestow on us His gift of salvation, of which we are thoroughly undeserving? If so, are we ready to ask God for His gracious gift? If yes, then humbly come to God and ask for His forgiveness:

Lord Jesus, I admit that I am a terrible sinner. I admit that I sinned against You, and I turn away from those sins and seek forgiveness from You. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sins. I believe that what You did was sufficient to save me. I commit myself to you now as my only hope for salvation, and I surrender to You as the Lord of my life. Be my Savior, Lord Jesus, and live Your life in me from here on. Amen.

Tests for Salvation

Let us assume we have taken all the steps enumerated above, and we have been doing our best to walk with the Lord. Are we now saved?

For many of us, the answer may be an emphatic "Yes!" But should we take steps to make sure of the authenticity of our salvation? Peter urged us to do so.

*2PE 1:10 Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to **make your calling and election sure...**
[NIV]*

For the very purpose of helping us know the certainty of our salvation, John wrote the book of First John.

1JO 5:13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. [NIV]

There are many tests available. Some of them are:

The Faith Test.

Do we believe that Jesus is the Messiah, that He died and paid for our sins, and forever lives?

1JO 5:1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. [NIV]

JOH 1:12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God - [NIV]

1JO 5:12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. [NIV]

The Sin Test.

Do we continue in our habitual sins? Over and over, John says that he who has been saved will not sin continuously. *If we continue in some habitual sin, our salvation may not have been authentic!*

1JO 3:6 No one who lives in Him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him. [NIV]

1JO 3:9 No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. [NIV]

1JO 5:18 We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him. [NIV]

The Life Test.

Are we living a new life in Christ, rooted in His Word, bearing fruit?

2CO 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! [NIV]

PSA 1:2 ... his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. [NIV]

MAT 7:16 By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? [NIV]

GAL 5:22-23 But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control; and here there is no conflict with Jewish laws. [TLB]

The Love Test.

Do we exhibit a new capacity to love others whom we did not earlier love, and whom we now want saved, growing in the knowledge of Christ?

1JO 4:7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. [NIV]

1JO 4:20 If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. [NIV]

ROM 9:3 For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers... [NIV]

PHI 1:9-10 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ... [NIV]

As in any test, if we fail, there are consequences. What is the significance of a failure to pass these tests?

We must take serious note.

Failure to pass these tests seriously puts into question the salvation we may be claiming!

If we are not saved and not headed toward Heaven, where are we actually headed?

There can be only one answer: toward Hell.

For we will go to either of only two places in eternity, Heaven or Hell.

*MAR 16:16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but **whoever does not believe will be condemned.** [NIV]*

If we fail the tests, we must review the biblical basis for salvation, and ensure we have started with a humble and contrite heart, that we acknowledge our need for the Savior, and that we desire to be forgiven, all to ensure our rebirth! Our future in eternity depends on it!

This then is a Biblical basis for God's free gift of Salvation. Know the truth!

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