

## Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Chapter XIII Ritualism



Roman Catholic people have to struggle with ritualism and superstition, forms and ceremonies which impress the eye but deaden the soul to spiritual truth.

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## Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Chapter XII Penance, Indulgences: Salvation by Grace or by Works?



Protestantism is primarily a reassertion of New Testament Christianity, the teaching that salvation is by faith rather than works. Romanism, on the other hand, teaches that salvation depends ultimately upon ourselves, upon what we do, that one can “earn” salvation by obedience to the laws of the church.

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## Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Section Three Chapter XI The Infallibility of the Pope



The doctrine of papal infallibility appeals to many people who are poorly informed. They know practically nothing about the Bible. Consequently, they have no sound theology on which to base their actions.

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## [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner](#) [Chapter X Purgatory](#)



You don't have to fear going to Purgatory after you die because there is no such place! Purgatory is an invention by the Church to keep you under its control.

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## [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner](#) [Chapter IX The Confessional](#)



Catholic Church says "In the confessional the minister has the power to forgive all crimes committed after baptism." The Bible says only God can forgive sins.

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## [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner](#) [Chapter VIII The Mass](#)



Christ's sacrifice on Calvary was complete in that one offering, and that it was never to be repeated. But the Catholic Church repeats in daily in the Mass.

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## [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner](#) [Chapter VII Mary Part 2](#)



As evangelical Protestants we honor Mary, the mother of our Lord, but we don't worship her or say we must come to Jesus through her.

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## [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner](#) [Chapter VII Mary Part 1](#)



This is the continuation of the previous chapter [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Section Two Chapter VI The Papacy](#). This chapter is very long which is why I am dividing it into two parts.

## **1 Mary's Place in Scripture**

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

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

The apostles never prayed to Mary, nor, so far as the record goes, did they show her any special honor. Peter, Paul, John, and James do not mention her name even once in the epistles which they wrote to the churches. John took care of her until she died, but he does not mention her in any of his three epistles or in the book of Revelation. We recall that Prime Minister Churchill used to make it a special point of honor to mention the Queen in his eloquent public addresses. Imagine the prime Minister of England never mentioning the Queen in any of his addresses to Parliament or in any of his state papers!

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

## **2 "Mother of God"**

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

As late as the fourth century there are no indications of any special veneration of Mary. Such veneration at that time could begin only if one were

recognized as a saint, and only the martyrs were counted as saints. But since there was no evidence that Mary had suffered a martyr's death, she was excluded from sainthood. Later the ascetics came to be acknowledged as among the saints. That proved to be the opening age for the sainthood of Mary, for surely she of all people, it was alleged, must have lived an ascetic life! The church acknowledged that Christ was born of the virgin Mary. Apocryphal tradition built on those possibilities, and slowly the system emerged.

The phrase "Mother of God" originated in the Council of Ephesus, in the year 431. It occurs in the Creed of Chalcedon, which was adopted by the council which met in that city in 451, and in regard to the person of Christ it declared that He was "born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God according to the manhood"—which latter term means: according to the flesh of human nature. The purpose of the expression as used by the Council of Ephesus was not to glorify Mary, but to emphasize the deity of Christ over against those who denied His equality with the Father and the Holy Spirit. A heretical sect, the Nestorians, separated the two natures in Christ to such an extent that they held Him to be two persons, or rather a dual person formed by the union between the divine Logos and the human person Jesus of Nazareth. They were accused of teaching that the Logos only inhabited the man Jesus, from which it was inferred that they held that the person born of Mary was only a man. It was therefore only to emphasize the fact that the "person" born to Mary was truly divine that she was called "the Mother of God."

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

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

The Bible calls Mary the "Mother of Jesus," but gives her no other title. All that the Roman Church has to substantiate her worship of Mary is a sheaf of traditions entirely outside the Bible telling of her appearances to certain monks, nuns, and others venerated as saints. At first glance the term "Mother of God" may seem comparatively harmless. But the actual consequence is that through its use Roman Catholics come to look upon Mary as stronger, more mature, and more powerful than Christ. To them she becomes the source of His

being and overshadows Him. So they go to her, not to Him. "He came to us through Mary," says Rome, "and we must go to Him through her." Who would go to "the Child," even to "the holy Child," for salvation when His mother seems easier of access and more responsive? Romanism magnifies the person that the Holy Spirit wants minimized, and minimizes the person that the Holy Spirit wants magnified.

Says S. E. Anderson:

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

And Marcus Meyer says:"

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

Furthermore, if the Roman terminology is correct and Mary is to be Called God's mother, then Joseph was God's stepfather; James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas were God's brothers; Elizabeth was God's aunt; John the Baptist was God's cousin; Heli was God's grandfather, and Adam was God's 59th great grandfather. Such references to God's relatives sound more like a page out of Mormonism than Christianity.

The correct statement of the person of Christ in this regard is: As His human nature had no father, so His divine nature had no mother.

### **3 Historical Development**

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

The first mention of the legend about Mary is found in the so-called Proto-Evangelism of James, near the end of the second century, and presents a fantastic story about her birth. It also states that she remained a virgin throughout her entire life. Justin Martyr, who died in 165 compares Mary and

Eve, the two prominent women in the Bible. Irenaeus, who died in 202, says that the disobedience of the "virgin Eve" was atoned for by the obedience of the "virgin Mary." Tertullian, who was one of the greatest authorities in the ancient church, and who died in 222, raised his voice against the legend concerning Mary's birth. He also held that after the birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph lived in a normal marriage relationship. The first known picture of Mary is found in the Priscilla catacomb in Rome and dates from the second century.

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

Many of the people who came into the church had no clear distinction in their minds between the Christian practices and those that had been practiced in their heathen religions. Statues of pagan gods and heroes found a place in the church, and were gradually replaced by statues of saints. The people were allowed to bring into the church those things from their old religions that could be reconciled with the type of Christianity then developing, hence many who bowed down before the images of Mary were in reality worshipping their old gods under a new name. History shows that in several countries Roman Catholicism has absorbed local deities as saints, and has absorbed local goddesses into the image of the Madonna. One of the more recent examples is that of the Virgin of Guadalupe, a goddess worshipped by the Indians in Mexico, which resulted in a curious mixture of Romanism and paganism, with sometimes one, sometimes the other predominating—some pictures of the Virgin Mary now appearing show her without the Child in her arms.

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

practice of worshipping her.

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

The spiritual climate of the Middle Ages was favorable to the development of Mary worship. Numerous superstitions crept into the church and centered themselves in the worship of the Virgin and the saints. The purely pagan character of these practices, with dates and manner of observance, can be traced by any competent historian.

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

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

#### **4 Contrast Between Roman and Protestant Teaching**

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

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

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

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



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

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

### **Mary Is Given the Place Belonging to Christ**

*Roman Catholic Church:*

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

*The Word of God:*

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

### **Mary Is Glorified More than Christ**

*Roman Catholic Church:*

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

*The Word of God:*

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

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

*Roman Catholic Church:*

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

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

*The Word of God:*

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

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

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

*Roman Catholic Church:*

"All power is given to thee in Heaven and on earth," so that "at the command of MARY all obey—even God... and thus... God has placed the whole Church... under the domination of MARY" (pp. 180-181). Mary "is also the Advocate of the whole human race... for she can do what she wills with God" (p. 193).

*The Word of God:*

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

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

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

*Roman Catholic Church:*

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

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

*The Word of God:*

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

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

## Mary Is Given the Glory that Belongs to Christ Alone

*Roman Catholic Church:*

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

*The Word of God:*

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Sweet heart of Mary, be my salvation."

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

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

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

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

The rosary, which is by far the most popular Roman Catholic ritual prayer, contains fifty "Hail Mary's." The *Hail Mary* (or *Ave Maria*) is follows:

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

## **5 Mary as an Object of Worship**

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

It is difficult for Protestants to realize the deep love and reverence that devout Roman Catholics have for the Virgin Mary. One must be immersed in and saturated with the Roman Catholic mind in order to feel its heartbeat. Says Margaret Shepherd, an ex nun:

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

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

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

How can anyone of the perhaps one hundred million practicing Roman Catholics throughout the world who desire Mary's attention imagine that she can give him that attention during his prayers to her, his wearing her scapulars for special protection, his marching in parades in her honor, etc., while at the same time she is giving attention to all others who are praying to her, attending to her duties in heaven, conducting souls to heaven, rescuing souls from purgatory, etc.? The average Roman Catholic acts on the assumption that Mary has the powers of deity. There is nothing in the Bible to indicate that any departed human being, however good, has any further contact with affairs on this earth, or that he can hear so much as one prayer from earth. How, then, can a human being such as Mary hear the prayers of millions of Roman Catholics, in many different countries, praying in many different languages, all at the same time? Let any priest or layman try to converse with only three people at the same time and see how impossible that is for a human being. They impose on Mary works which no human being can do. How impossible, how absurd, to impose on her the works which only God can do! Since Mary is not omnipresent nor omniscient, such prayers and worship are nothing less than idolatry—that is, the giving of divine honors to a creature. Nowhere in the Bible is there the slightest suggestion that prayer should be offered to Mary. If God had intended that we should pray to her, surely He would have said so. Worship is accorded to the infant Jesus, but never to His mother. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, wise men came from the East, and when they came into the house, they saw the young child with Mary His mother. What did they do? Did they fall down and worship Mary? Or Joseph? No! We read: "They fell down and worshipped him" (Matthew 2:11). And to whom did they give their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh? To Mary? Or to Joseph? No! They presented their gifts to Jesus. They recognized Him, not Mary or Joseph, as worthy of adoration.

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

The objections against prayers to Mary apply equally against prayers to the saints. For they too are only creatures, infinitely less than God, able to be at only one place at a time and to do only one thing at a time. How, then, can they listen to and answer the thousands upon thousands of petitions made simultaneously in many different lands and in many different languages? Many such petitions are expressed, not orally, but only mentally, silently. How can Mary and the saints, without being like God, be present everywhere and know the secrets of all hearts?

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

becomes, to Protestants, truly abhorrent.

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

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

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

He answered, "Jesus Christ."

"Who paid your debt and mine by shedding His blood; was it Mary or Jesus?"

He said, "Jesus Christ."

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

Again he answered that it was Jesus.

"Did any sinner come to Mary on earth to be saved?"

"No."

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

"Yes, many."

"Have they been rebuked?"

"Never."

Do you remember that Jesus ever said to sinners, "Come to Mary and she will save you?"

"No," he said.

"Do you remember that Jesus has said to poor sinners, "Come to me?"

"Yes, He has said it."

"Has He ever retracted those words?"

"No."

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

"O, it was Jesus!"

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

And the bishop answered, "No."

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

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

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

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

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

The Scriptures directly repudiate all saint worship. We have specific examples of Peter, and Paul, and even of an angel rejecting such worship.

When Peter went to the house of Cornelius in response to the vision that he had while at prayer on the housetop, we read that "Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter raised him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man" (Acts 10:25-26). Although Peter was one of the twelve, and had been personally associated with Jesus, he knew that he had no right to such worship for he was only a man. At Lystra, after Paul had healed a lame man, the multitude attempted to worship him and Barnabas. We read: "But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they rent their garments, and sprang forth among the multitude, crying out and saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you and bring you good tidings, that ye should turn from these vain things unto a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that in them is" (Acts 14:14-15). And the apostle John writes concerning his experience on the island of Patmos: "And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel that showed me these things. And he saith unto me, See thou do it not: I am a fellow-servant with thee and with thy brethren the prophets, and with them that keep the words of this book: worship God" (Revelation 22:8-9). But how different is the attitude of popes, bishops, and priests who expect people to kneel before them and to kiss their hands or rings! The pope allows or expects that under some conditions they shall even kiss his feet! But what nonsense that is, both on the part of the pope and on the part of those who submit themselves to such a servile practice!

## **6 In Romanism Mary Usurps the Place of Christ**

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

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



effective.

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

## **7 Mary Represented as More Sympathetic than Jesus**

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

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

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

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

But what a travesty it is on Scripture truth to teach that Christ demands

justice, but that Mary will extend mercy! How dishonoring it is to Christ to teach that He is lacking in pity and compassion for His people, that He must be persuaded to that end by His mother! When He was on earth it was never necessary for anyone to persuade Him to be compassionate. Rather, when He saw the blind and the lame, the afflicted and hungry, He was "moved with compassion" for them and lifted them out of their distress. He had immediate mercy on the wicked but penitent thief on the cross, and there was no need for intercession by Mary although she was there present. His love for us is as great as when He was on earth; His heart is as tender; and we need no other intermediary, neither His mother after the flesh, nor any saint or angel, to entreat Him on our behalf.

## **8 One Mediator**

The Bible teaches that there is but one mediator between God and men. It says: "For there is one God, one mediator also between God and men himself man, Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). When this verse is understood the whole system of the Roman Church falls to the ground, for it invalidates the papacy, the priesthood, and all Mary worship. Other verses which teach the same truth are:

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

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

"He is the mediator of a new covenant" (Hebrews 9:15).

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

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

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

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

The priests detract from the glory of Christ when they teach that Mary is a mediator. Humanly speaking, that must grieve her who would want all honor to go to Christ. The priests have no right to place her in such an unscriptural position. Mary is presented in Scripture as a handmaiden of the Lord who fulfilled her office in the church according to promise, just as did John the

Baptist and others, but whose work has long since ceased. The great antithesis is not between Eve and Mary, as Rome sets it forth, but between Adam and Christ (Romans 5:12-21; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22,45,47). Roman tradition has so altered the picture of Mary that the Mary found in the New Testament and the Mary found in the Roman Catholic Church are two different and conflicting persons. Any fair-minded Roman Catholic knows that his church gives first place to Mary and that Christ is kept in the background.

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

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

(Continued in [Chapter VII Mary Part 2.](#))

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# Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner

## Section Two Chapter VI The Papacy



The word “pope,” and the word “papacy,” the system of ecclesiastical government in which the pope is recognized as the supreme head, are not found in the Bible.

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# Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner

## Chapter V Peter



This is the continuation of the [previous chapter of Roman Catholicism](#) by Lorraine Boettner.

### **1 The Roman Catholic Position**

The controversial passage in regard to Peter’s place in the Church is Matthew 16:13-19, which reads as follows: “Now Jesus, having come into the district of Caesarea Philippi, began to ask his disciples, saying, ‘Who do men say the Son of Man is?’ But they said, ‘Some say, John the Baptist; and others, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered and said, ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Then Jesus answered and said, ‘Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed this to thee, but my Father in heaven. And I say to thee, thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Confraternity Version).

To this passage the Confraternity Version adds the following interpretation:

"The rock was Peter. ... *The gates of hell*: hostile, evil powers. Their aggressive force will struggle in vain against the Church. She shall never be overcome; she is indefectible. And since she has the office of teacher (cf. 28, 16-20), and since she would be overcome if error prevailed, she is infallible.

"Keys: a symbol of authority. Peter has the power to admit into the Church and to exclude therefrom. Nor is he merely the porter; he has complete power within the Church. 'To bind and to loose' seems to have been used by the Jews in the sense of to forbid or to permit; but the present context requires a more comprehensive meaning. In heaven God ratifies the decisions which Peter makes on earth in the name of Christ" (pp. 36-37).

And the late Cardinal Gibbons, a former archbishop of Baltimore and one of the most representative American Roman Catholics, in his widely read book, *Faith of our Fathers*, set forth the position of his church in these words:

"The Catholic Church teaches that our Lord conferred on St. Peter the first place of honor and jurisdiction in the government of His whole church, and that the same spiritual supremacy has always resided in the popes, or bishops of Rome, as being the successors of St. Peter. Consequently, to be true followers of Christ all Christians, both among the clergy and laity, must be in communion with the See of Rome, where Peter rules in the person of his successor" (p. 95).

The whole structure of the Roman Church is built on the assumption that in Matthew 16:13-19 Christ appointed Peter the first pope and so established the papacy. Disprove the primacy of Peter, and the foundation of the papacy is destroyed. Destroy the papacy, and the whole Roman hierarchy topples with it. Their system of priesthood depends absolutely upon their claim that Peter was the first pope at Rome, and that they are his successors. We propose to show that (1) Matthew 16:13-19 does not teach that Christ appointed Peter a pope; (2) that there is no proof that Peter ever was in Rome; and (3) that the New Testament records, particularly Peter's own writings, show that he never claimed authority over the other apostles or over the church, and that that authority was never accorded to him.

## **2 The "Rock"**

"And I say to thee, thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18, Confraternity Version).

Romanists quote this verse with relish, and add their own interpretation to establish their claim for papal authority. But in the Greek the word Peter is Petros, a person, masculine, while the word "rock," petra, is feminine and refers not to a person but to the declaration of Christ's deity that Peter had just uttered—"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Using Peter's name and making, as it were, a play upon words, Jesus said to Peter, "You are Petros, and upon this petra I will build my church." The truth that Peter had just confessed was the foundation upon which Christ

would build His church. He meant that Peter had seen the basic, essential truth concerning His person, the essential truth upon which the church would be founded, and that nothing would be able to overthrow that truth, not even all the forces of evil that might be arrayed against it. Peter was the first among the disciples to see our Lord as the Christ of God. Christ commended him for that spiritual insight, and said that His church would be founded upon that fact. And that, of course, was a far different thing from founding the church on Peter.

Had Christ intended to say that the Church would be founded on Peter, it would have been ridiculous for Him to have shifted to the feminine form of the word in the middle of the statement, saying, if we may translate literally and somewhat whimsically, "And I say unto thee, that thou art Mr. Rock, and upon this, the Miss Rock, I will build my church." Clearly it was upon the truth that Peter had expressed, the deity of Christ, and not upon weak, vacillating Peter, that the church would be founded. The Greek "petros" is commonly used of a small, movable stone, a mere pebble, as it were. But "petra" means an immovable foundation, in this instance, the basic truth that Peter had just confessed, the deity of Christ. And in fact, that is the point of conflict in the churches today between evangelicals on the one hand, and modernists or liberals on the other—whether the church is founded on a truly divine Christ as revealed in a fully trustworthy Bible, or whether it is essentially a social service and moral welfare organization which recognizes Christ as an example, an outstandingly great and good man, but denies or ignores His deity.

The Bible tells us plainly, not that the church is built upon Peter, but that it is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20). And again, "For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11). Without that foundation the true Christian church could not exist.

If Matthew 16:18 had been intended to teach that the church is founded on Peter, it would have read something like this: "Thou art Peter, and upon you I will build my church"; or, "Thou art Peter, and upon you the rock I will build my church." But that is not what Christ said. He made two complete, distinct statements. He said, "Thou art Peter," and, "Upon this rock (change of gender, indicating change of subject) I will build my church."

The gates of hell were not to prevail against the church. But the gates of hell did prevail against Peter shortly afterward, as recorded in this same chapter, when he attempted to deny that Christ would be crucified, and almost immediately afterward, in the presence of the other disciples, received the stinging rebuke, "Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art a stumbling block unto me, for thou mindest not the things of God but the things of men" (v. 23)—surely strong words to use against one who had just been appointed pope!

Later we read that Peter slept in Gethsemane, during Christ's agony. His rash act in cutting off the servant's ear drew Christ's rebuke. He boasted that he was ready to die for his Master, but shortly afterward shamefully denied with oaths and curses that he even knew Him. And even after Pentecost Peter still

was subject to such serious error that his hypocrisy had to be rebuked by Paul, who says: "But when Cephas came to Antioch [at which time he was in full possession of his papal powers, according to Romanist doctrine], I resisted him to the face, because he stood condemned" (Galatians 2:11). And yet Romanists allege that their pope, as Peter's successor, is infallible in matters of faith and morals!

The Gospel written by Mark, who is described in early Christian literature as Peter's close companion and understudy, does not even record the remark about the "rock" in reporting Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi (Mark 8:27-30). No, Christ did not build His church upon a weak, sinful man. Rather the essential deity of Christ, which was so forcefully set forth in Peter's confession, was the foundation stone, the starting point, on which the church would be built.

That no superior standing was conferred upon Peter is clear from the later disputes among the disciples concerning who should be greatest among them. Had such rank already been given, Christ would simply have referred to His grant of power to Peter. Instead we read:

"And they came to Capernaum: and when he was in the house he asked them, What were ye reasoning on the way? But they held their Peace: for they had disputed one with another on the way, who was the greatest. And he sat down, and called the twelve; and he saith unto them, If any man would be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all" (Mark 9:33-35).

And again:

"And there came near unto him James and John, the sons of Zebedee, saying unto him, Teacher, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall ask of thee. And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? And they said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and one on thy left hand, in thy glory. And when the ten heard it, they began to be moved with indignation concerning James and John. And Jesus called them unto him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they who are accounted to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you: but whosoever would become great among you shall be your minister; and whosoever would be first among you, shall be servant of all" (Mark 10:34-44).

It is interesting to notice that some of the church fathers, Augustine and Jerome among them, gave the Protestant explanation of this verse, understanding the "rock" to mean not Peter but Christ. Others, of course, gave the papal interpretation. But this shows that there was no "unanimous consent of the fathers," as the Roman Church claims, on this subject.

Dr. Harris says concerning the reference to the "rock":

"Mark's Gospel is connected with Peter by all early Christian tradition and it does not even include this word of Jesus to Peter. Likewise in the Epistles of Peter there is no such claim. In 1 Peter 2:6-8 Christ is called a rock and a chief cornerstone. But Peter here claims nothing for himself.

Indeed he is explicit in calling all believers living stones built up a spiritual house with Christ as the head of the corner.

“Christ is repeatedly called a Rock. The background for this is that around thirty-four times in the Old Testament God is called a Rock or the Rock of Israel. It was a designation of God. In the Messianic passages, Isaiah 8:14; 28:16; and Psalm 118:22, Christ is called a Rock or Stone upon which we should believe. These passages are quoted in the New Testament and for that reason Christ is called a Rock several times. It designates Him as divine. For that reason, every Jew, knowing the Old Testament, would refuse the designation to Peter or to anyone except insofar as we are children of Christ. He is the Rock. We are living stones built upon Him. Ephesians 2:20 says this plainly. We are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone. Paul says of the Rock from which the Israelites drank that it typified Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4). In the New Testament there are twelve foundations and on them are the names of the twelve apostles—none of them are made pre-eminent” (The Bible Presbyterian Reporter, January, 1959.)

And Dr. Henry M. Woods says:

“If Christ had meant that Peter was to be the foundation, the natural form of statement would have been, ‘Thou art Peter, and on thee I will build my church’; but He does not say this, because Peter was not to be the rock on which the church was built. Note also that in the expression ‘on this rock,’ our Lord purposely uses a different Greek word, Petra, from that used for Peter, Petros. He did this to show that, not Peter, but the great truth which had just been revealed to him, viz., that our Lord was ‘the Christ, the Son of the living God,’ was to be the church’s foundation. Built on the Christ, the everlasting Saviour, the gates of hell would never prevail against the Church. But built on the well-meaning but sinful Peter, the gates of hell would surely prevail; for a little later our Lord had to severely rebuke Peter, calling him ‘Satan’” (*Our Priceless Heritage*, p. 40).

### 3 The “Keys”

“And I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19, Confraternity Version).

Admittedly this is a difficult verse to interpret, and numerous explanations have been given. It is important to notice, however, that the authority to bind and to loose was not given exclusively to Peter. In the eighteenth chapter of Matthew the same power *is given to all of the disciples*. There we read:

“At that hour the disciples came to Jesus. ... Amen. I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed also in heaven” (vv. 1,18, Confraternity Version).

Consequently Matthew 16:19 does not prove any superiority on Peter’s part. Even the scribes and Pharisees had this same power, for Jesus said to them:



“But woe upon you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye shut the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye enter not in yourselves, neither suffer them that are entering in to enter” (Matthew 23:13). And on another occasion He said: “The scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat: all things therefore whatsoever they bid you, these do and observe: but do not ye after their works; for they say, and do not. Yea, they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be born, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger” (Matthew 23:2-4).

Here the expression clearly means that the scribes and Pharisees, in that the Word of God was in their hands, thereby had the power, in declaring that Word to the people, to open the kingdom of heaven to them, and in withholding that Word they shut the kingdom of heaven against people. That was Moses’ function in giving the law. It was, therefore, a declaratory power, the authority to announce the terms on which God would grant salvation, not an absolute power to admit or to exclude from the kingdom of heaven. Only God can do that, and He never delegates that authority to men.

And in Luke 11:52 Jesus says: “Woe unto you lawyers! for ye took away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered.” Here, the key of the knowledge of the way of salvation, by which entrance into the kingdom of heaven is obtained, was in the hands of the Pharisees in that they had the law of Moses in their possession, and were therefore the custodians of the Word of God. In that sense they possessed the key to the kingdom. They took away that key in that they failed to proclaim the Word of God to the people. They were not entering into the kingdom of heaven themselves, and they were hindering those who wanted to enter.

Furthermore, we notice that in the words spoken to Peter, it was “things,” not “persons,” that were to be bound or loosed—“whatsoever,” not “whomsoever”—things such as the ceremonial laws and customs of the Old Testament dispensation were to be done away with, and new rituals and practices of the Gospel age were to be established.

Thus the “keys” symbolize the authority to open, in this instance, to open the kingdom of heaven to men through the proclamation of the Gospel. What the disciples were commissioned to do, given the privilege of doing, was the opposite of that which the scribes and Pharisees were doing; that is, they were to facilitate the entrance of the people into the kingdom of heaven.

There was, of course, no physical seat which had been used by Moses and which now was being used by the scribes and Pharisees. But the scribes and Pharisees, who were in possession of the law of Moses, were giving precepts which in themselves were authoritative and good and which therefore were to be obeyed; but since they did not live up to those precepts the people were not to follow their example.

It is clear that the keys were symbolical of authority, which here is specified as the power of binding and loosing; and it is also clear that the consequences of what the disciples did in this regard would go far beyond earth and would have their permanent results in heaven. They were in a real sense building for eternity. In referring to the keys of the kingdom Jesus

was continuing the figure in which He had been comparing the kingdom of heaven to a house which He was about to build. It would be built upon a solid rock (Matthew 7:24). Entrance into that house was through the door of faith. This door was to be opened, first to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles. And Peter, who had been the first of the disciples to comprehend the person of Christ in His true deity and to confess that deity before the other disciples, was commissioned to be the first to open that door. In this sense the keys were first given to him. To him was given the distinction and high honor among the apostles of being the first to open the door of faith to the Jewish world, which he did on the day of Pentecost when through his sermon some three thousand Jews were converted (Acts 2:14-42), and a short time later the distinction and high honor of opening the door of faith to the Gentile world, which he did in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:1-48). And while the keys were in this respect first given to Peter, they were soon afterward also given to the other disciples as they too proclaimed the Gospel both to Jews and Gentiles. But while Peter was given the distinction and honor of being the first to open the kingdom to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles, he did not claim nor assume any other authority, and was in all other respects on precisely the same footing as were the other apostles.

Possession of the keys, therefore, did not mean that Peter had sovereignly within his own person the authority to determine who should be admitted to heaven and who should be excluded, as the Roman Church now attempts to confer that authority on the pope and priests. Ultimate authority is in the hands of Christ alone—it is He “that openeth and none shall shut, and that shutteth and none openeth” (Revelation 3:7). But it did mean that Peter, and later the other apostles, being in possession of the Gospel message, truly did open the door and present the opportunity to enter in as they proclaimed the message before the people. This same privilege of opening the door or of closing the door of salvation to others is given to every Christian, for the command that Christ gave His church was to go and make disciples of all the nations. Thus “the power of the keys” is a *declarative* power only.

It can almost be said that the Roman Catholics build their church upon these two verses which speak of the “rock” and the “keys.” They say that the power given to Peter was absolute and that it was transferred by him to his successors, although they have to admit that there is not one verse in Scripture which teaches such a transfer. Under this “power of the keys” the Roman Church claims that “In heaven God ratifies the decisions which Peter makes on earth” (footnote, Confraternity Version, p. 37).

But it is interesting to see how Peter himself understood this grant of power. In his exercise of the power of the keys he says: “And it shall be, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21). And at the house of the Roman centurion Cornelius he again gave a universal Gospel invitation: “To him [Christ] bear all the prophets witness, that through his name every one that believeth on him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43). So, in the preaching of Peter, as elsewhere in the New Testament, salvation is set forth as based on faith in Christ, and nowhere is obedience to Peter, or to the pope, or to any other man even hinted at.

Rome terribly abuses this “power of the keys” to insure obedience to her

commands on the part of her church members and to instill in them a sense of fear and of constant dependence on the church for their salvation. This sense of fear and dependence, with constant references to "Mother Church," goes far to explain the power that the Roman Church has over her members, even cowering them to the extent that they are afraid to read or to listen to anything contrary to what their church teaches. And since that teaching is drilled into them from childhood, the truly formidable power that the Roman Church exercises over the laity can be easily understood.

#### **4 Papal Authority Not Claimed by Peter**

The Roman Church claims that Peter was the first bishop or pope in Rome and that the later popes are his successors. But the best proof of a man's position and authority is his own testimony. Does Peter claim to be a pope, or to have primacy over the other apostles? Fortunately, he wrote two epistles or letters which are found in the New Testament. There he gives his position and certain instructions as to how others in the same position are to perform their duties. We read:

"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. ... The elders therefore among you I exhort, who am a fellow-elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, who am also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Tend the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight, not of constraint, but willingly, according to the will of God; nor yet for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you, but making yourselves ensamples to the flock" (1 Peter 1:1, 5:1-3).

Here Peter refers to himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ, an elder (the word in the Greek is presbuteros), which of course has nothing to do with a sacrificing priesthood. He does not claim the highest place in the church as some would expect him to do or as some would claim for him. He assumes no ecclesiastical superiority, but with profound humility puts himself on a level with those whom he exhorts. He makes it clear that the church must be democratic, not authoritarian. He forbids the leaders to lord it over the people, to work for money or to take money unjustly. He says that they are to serve the people willingly, even eagerly, and that by their general lives they are to make themselves examples for the people.

But the fact is that the Church of Rome acts directly contrary to these instructions. Can anyone imagine the proud popes of later times adopting such a role of humility? It was several centuries later, when the church had lost much of its original simplicity and spiritual power, and had been submerged in a flood of worldliness, that the autocratic authority of the popes began to appear. After the fourth century, when the Roman empire had fallen, the bishops of Rome stepped into Caesar's shoes, took his pagan title of Pontifex Maximus, the supreme high priest of the pagan Roman religion, sat down on Caesar's throne, and wrapped themselves in Caesar's gaudy trappings. And that role they have continued ever since.

In regard to the title Pontifex, the *Standard International Encyclopedia* says this was "the title given by the ancient Romans to members of one of the two celebrated religious colleges. The chief of the order was called Pontifex

Maximus. The pontiffs had general control of the official religion, and their head was the highest religious authority in the state. ... Following Julius Caesar the emperor was the Pontifex Maximus. In the time of Theodosius [emperor, died A.D. 395] the title became equivalent to Pope, now one of the titles of the head of the Roman Catholic Church."

Peter refused to accept homage from men—as when Cornelius the Roman centurion fell down at his feet and would have worshipped him, Peter protested quickly and said, "Stand up; I myself also am a man" (Acts 10:25-26). Yet the popes accept the blasphemous title of "Holy Father" as theirs as a matter of right. And how the cardinals, bishops, and priests do like to set themselves apart from the congregations and to lord it over the people!

Surely if Peter had been a pope, "the supreme head of the church," he would have declared that fact in his general epistles, for that was the place of all others to have asserted his authority. The popes have never been slow to make such claims for themselves, or to extend their authority as far as possible. But instead Peter refers to himself only as an apostle (of which there were eleven others), and as an elder or presbyter, that is, simply as a minister of Christ.

## **5 Paul's Attitude toward Peter**

It is very interesting to notice Paul's attitude toward Peter. Paul was called to be an apostle at a later time, after church had been launched. Yet Peter had nothing to do with that choice, as he surely would have had, if he had been pope. Instead God called and ordained Paul without consulting Peter, as He has called and ordained many thousands of ministers and evangelists since then without reference to the popes of Rome. Paul was easily the greatest of the apostles, with a deeper insight into the way of salvation and a larger revealed knowledge concerning the mysteries of life and death. He wrote much more of the New Testament than did Peter. His thirteen epistles contain 2,023 verses, while Peter's two epistles contain only 166 verses. And if we ascribe the Epistle to the Hebrews to Paul, as does the Roman Catholic Church (Confraternity Version, p. 397), he wrote an even larger proportion. Peter's epistles do not stand first among the epistles, but after those of Paul; and in fact his second epistle was one of the last to be accepted by the church. Paul worked more recorded miracles than did Peter, and he seems to have established more churches than did Peter. Apart from the church at Rome, which we believe was established by laymen, Paul established more prominent and more permanent churches than did Peter. And, so far as the New Testament record goes, Paul's influence in the church at Rome was much greater than was that of Peter. Paul mentions Peter more than once, but nowhere does he defer to Peter's authority, or acknowledge him as pope.

Indeed, quite the contrary is the case. Paul had founded the church at Corinth, but when some there rebelled against his authority, even to the extent of favoring Peter, he does not give even an inch on his own authority. Instead he vigorously defends his authority, declaring, "Am I not an apostle? have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (1 Corinthians 9:1), and again, "For in nothing was I behind the very chiefest apostles" (2 Corinthians 12:11), or, as translated in the Confraternity Version, "In no way have I fallen short of

the most eminent apostles." He declares that he has been "intrusted with the gospel of the uncircumcision, even as Peter with the gospel of the circumcision" (Galatians 2:7). He therefore put himself on a level with all the other apostles. Certainly those ideas were incompatible with any idea of a pope in Paul's day.

But beyond all that, on one occasion Paul publicly rebuked Peter. When Peter at Antioch sided with the "false brethren" (v. 4) in their Jewish legalism and "drew back and separated himself" from the Gentiles and was even the cause of Barnabas being misled, Paul administered a severe rebuke. We read:

"But when Cephas came to Antioch, I resisted him to the face, because he stood condemned. For before that certain came from James, he ate with the Gentiles; but when they came, he drew back and separated himself, fearing them that were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that even Barnabas was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Cephas before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest as do the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, how compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?" (Galatians 2:11-14).

He then impressed upon Peter some good, sound, evangelical theology, declaring that:

"...a man is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ... because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (v. 16).

In other words, Paul gave the "Holy Father" a "dressing down" before them all, accusing him of not walking uprightly in the truth of the Gospel. Surely that was no way to talk to a pope! Imagine anyone today, even a cardinal, taking it upon himself to rebuke and instruct a real pope with such language! Just who was Paul that he should rebuke the Vicar of Christ for unchristian conduct? If Peter was the chief it was Paul's duty and the duty of the other apostles to recognize him as such and to teach only what he approved. Obviously Paul did not regard Peter as infallible in faith and morals, or recognize any supremacy on his part.

## **6 Attitude of the Other Apostles toward Peter**

The other apostles as well as Paul seem totally unaware of any appointment that made Peter the head of the church. Nowhere do they acknowledge his authority. And nowhere does he attempt to exercise authority over them. The only instance in which another man was chosen to succeed an apostle is recorded in Acts 1:15-26, and there the choice was made not by Peter but by popular choice on the part the brethren who numbered about one hundred and twenty, and by the casting of lots.

On another occasion Peter, together with John, was sent by the apostles to preach the Gospel in Samaria (Acts 8:14). Imagine the pope today being sent by the cardinals or bishops on any such mission. It is well known that today the popes seldom if ever preach. They do issue statements, and they address select audiences which come to them. But they do not go out and preach the

Gospel as did Peter and the other apostles.

The important church council in Jerusalem (Acts 15) reveals quite clearly how the unity of the church was expressed in apostolic days. Differences had arisen when certain men from Judaea came down to Antioch, in Syria, where Paul and Barnabas were working and insisted that certain parts of the Jewish ritual must be observed. Had the present Roman Catholic theory of the papacy been followed, there would have been no need at all for a council. The church in Antioch would have written a letter to Peter, the bishop of Rome, and he would have sent them an encyclical or bull settling the matter. And of all the churches the one at Antioch was the last that should have appealed to Jerusalem. For according to Roman Catholic legend Peter was bishop in Antioch for seven years before transferring his see to Rome! But the appeal was made, not to Peter, but to a church council in Jerusalem. At that council not Peter but James presided and announced the decision with the words, "Wherefore my judgment is..." (v. 19). And his judgment was accepted by the apostles and presbyters. Peter was present, but only after there had been "much questioning" (v. 7) did he even so much as express an opinion. He did not attempt to make any infallible pronouncements although the subject under discussion was a vital matter of faith. In any event it is clear that the unity of the early church was maintained not by the voice of Peter but by the decision of the ecumenical council which was presided over by James, the leader of the Jerusalem church. Furthermore, after that council *Peter is never again mentioned in the book of Acts.*

It is an old human failing for people to want to exercise authority over their fellow men. We are told that the disciples disputed among themselves which was to be accounted the greatest. Jesus rebuked them with the words: "If any man would be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all" (Mark 9:35). On another occasion the mother of James and John came to Jesus with the request that her two sons should have the chief places in the kingdom. But He called the disciples to Him and said, "Ye know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Not so shall it be among you: but whosoever would become great among you shall be your minister; and whosoever would be first among you shall be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:25-28). And even on the night in which Christ was delivered up to die they contended among themselves "which of them was accounted to be greatest" (Luke 22:24). In each instance Jesus taught them that they were not to seek to exercise lordship, but rather to excel in service. But in no instance did He settle the dispute by reminding them that Peter was the Prince of the Apostles. In fact they could not have argued that question at all if Peter had already been given the place of preeminence, as the Roman Church holds.

Christ alone is the Head of the church. "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11). The church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20). Paul says that God "gave him [Christ] to be head over all things to the church, which is his body" (Ephesians 1:22-23). Besides Him there can be no earthly foundation or

head of the church. Only a monstrosity can have two heads for one body.

## 7 Was Peter Ever in Rome?

According to Roman Catholic tradition Peter was the first bishop of Rome, his pontificate lasted twenty-five years, from A.D. 42 to 67, and he was martyred in Rome in A.D. 67. The Douay and Confraternity versions say that he was in Rome before the Jerusalem council of Acts 15, and that he returned to Jerusalem for that council, after which he went to Antioch, and then returned to Rome. In the Confraternity Version we read:

“After the resurrection the primacy was conferred upon him and immediately after the ascension he began to exercise it. After preaching in Jerusalem and Palestine he went to Rome, probably after his liberation from prison. Some years later he was in Jerusalem for the first church council, and shortly afterward at Antioch. In the year 67 he was martyred in Rome” (Introduction to the First Epistle of St. Peter).

The remarkable thing, however, about Peter’s alleged bishopric in Rome, is that the New Testament has not one word to say about it. The word Rome occurs only nine times in the Bible, and never is Peter mentioned in connection with it. There is no allusion to Rome in either of his epistles. Paul’s journey to that city is recorded in great detail (Acts 27 and 28). There is in fact no New Testament evidence, nor any historical proof of any kind, that Peter ever was in Rome. All rests on legend. The first twelve chapters of the book of Acts tell of Peter’s ministry and travels in Palestine and Syria. Surely if he had gone to the capital of the empire, that would have been mentioned. We may well ask, if Peter was superior to Paul, why does he receive so little attention after Paul comes on the scene? Not much is known about his later life, except that he traveled extensively, and that on at least some of his missionary journeys he was accompanied by his wife—for Paul says, “Have we no right to lead about a wife that is a believer, even as the rest of the apostles, and the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas” (1 Corinthians 9:5). (The Confraternity Version here reads “sister” instead of “wife”; but the Greek word is *gune*, wife, not *adelphē*, sister.)

We know nothing at all about the origins of Christianity in Rome. This is acknowledged even by some Roman Catholic historians. It was already a flourishing church when Paul wrote his letter to the Romans in A.D. 58. Quite possibly it had been founded by some of those who were present in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost and heard Peter’s great sermon when some 3,000 were converted, for Luke says that in that audience were “sojourners from Rome, both Jews and proselytes” (Acts 2:10). In any event there is nothing but unfounded tradition to support the claim that Peter founded the church in Rome and that he was its bishop for 25 years. The fact is that the apostles did not settle in one place as did the diocesan bishops of much later date, so that it is quite incorrect to speak of Rome as the “See of Peter,” or to speak of the popes occupying “the chair” of St. Peter.

Legend was early busy with the life of Peter. The one which tells of his twenty-five years’ episcopate in Rome has its roots in the apocryphal stories originating with a heretical group, the Ebionites, who rejected much of the

supernatural content of the New Testament, and the account is discredited both by its origin and by its internal inconsistencies. The first reference that might be given any credence at all is found in the writings of Eusebius, and that reference is doubted even by some Roman Catholic writers. Eusebius wrote in Greek about the year 310, and his work was translated by Jerome. A 17th century historian, William Cave (1637-1713), chaplain to King Charles II of England, in his most important work, *The Lives of the Apostles*, says:

“It cannot be denied that in St. Jerome’s translation it is expressly said that he (Peter) continued twenty-five years as bishop in that city: but then it is as evident that this was his own addition, who probably set things down as the report went in his time, *no such thing being found in the Greek copy of Eusebius.*”

Exhaustive research by archaeologists has been made down through the centuries to find some inscription in the Catacombs and other ruins of ancient places in Rome that would indicate that Peter at least visited Rome. But the only things found which gave any promise at all were some bones of uncertain origin. L. H. Lehmann, who was educated for the priesthood at the University for the Propagation of the Faith, Rome, tells us of a lecture by a noted Roman archaeologist, Professor Marucchi, given before his class, in which he said that no shred of evidence of Peter’s having been in the Eternal City had ever been unearthed, and of another archaeologist, Di Rossi, who declared that for forty years his greatest ambition had been to unearth in Rome some inscription which would verify the papal claim that the Apostle Peter was actually in Rome, but that he was forced to admit that he had given up hope of success in his search. He had the promise of handsome rewards by the church if he succeeded. What he had dug up verified what the New Testament says about the formation of the Christian church in Rome, but remained absolutely silent regarding the claims of the bishops of Rome to be the successors of the apostle Peter (cf., *The Soul of a Priest*, p. 10).

And, after all, suppose Peter’s bones should be found and identified beyond question, what would that prove? The important thing is, does the Church of Rome teach the same Gospel that Peter taught? Succession to Peter should be claimed, not by those who say they have discovered his bones, but by those who teach the Gospel that he taught—the evangelical message of salvation by grace through faith.

Furthermore, if mere residence conferred superiority, then Antioch would outrank Rome; for the same tradition which asserts that Peter resided in Rome asserts that he first resided in Antioch, a small city in Syria. It is well known that during the time of the apostles and for generations later the Eastern cities and the Eastern church had the greatest influence, and that the Roman church was comparatively insignificant. The first councils were held in Eastern cities and were composed almost altogether of Eastern bishops. Four of the patriarchates were Eastern—Jerusalem, Antioch, Constantinople, and Alexandria. Rome did not gain the ascendancy until centuries later, after the breakup of the Roman empire. If any church had a special right to be called the Mistress of all the churches, it surely was the church in Jerusalem, where our Lord lived and taught, where He was crucified, where Christianity was first preached by Peter and the other



apostles, where Peter's great Pentecostal sermon was delivered, and from which went forth to Antioch and Rome and to all the world the glad tidings of salvation. Long before the Reformation Rome's claim to be the only true church was rejected by the eastern churches, which were the most ancient and in the early days much the most influential churches in the world.

Another interesting and very important if not decisive line of evidence in this regard is the fact that Paul was preeminently the apostle to the Gentiles while Peter was preeminently the apostle to the Jews, this division of labor having been by divine appointment. In Galatians 2:7-8 Paul says that he "had been intrusted with the gospel of the uncircumcision, even as Peter with the gospel of the circumcision (for he that wrought for Peter unto the apostleship of the circumcision wrought for me also unto the Gentiles)." Thus Paul's work was primarily among the Gentiles, while Peter's was primarily among the Jews. Peter ministered to the Jews who were in exile in Asia Minor, "to the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Peter 1:1), and in his journeys he went as far east as Babylon, from which city his first epistle (and probably his second) was addressed to the Jewish Christians in Asia Minor: "She that is in Babylon, elect together with you, saluteth you" (1 Peter 5:13). As most of Paul's letters were addressed to churches he had evangelized, so Peter wrote to the Jewish brethren that he had evangelized, who were scattered through those provinces. While there is no Scriptural evidence at all that Peter went west to Rome, here is a plain statement of Scripture that he did go east to Babylon. Why cannot the Roman Church take Peter's word to that effect?

But his testimony, of course, must be circumvented by those who are so anxious to place him in Rome, and they take a curious way to do it. The Confraternity edition has an introductory note to 1 Peter which reads: "The place of composition is given as 'Babylon'... a cryptic designation of the city of Rome."

But there is no good reason for saying that "Babylon" means "Rome." The reason alleged by the Church of Rome for understanding Babylon to mean Rome is that in the book of Revelation Rome is called by that name (Revelation 17:5, 18:2). But there is a great difference between an apocalyptic book such as the book of Revelation, which for the most part is written in figurative and symbolic language, and an epistle such as this which is written in a straightforward, matter-of-fact style.

In regard to Peter's assignment to work among the Jews, it is known that there were many Jews in Babylon in New Testament times. Many had not returned to Palestine after the Exile. Many others, such as those in Asia Minor and Egypt, had been driven out or had left Palestine for various reasons. Josephus says that some "gave Hyrcanus, the high priest, a habitation at Babylon, where there were Jews in great numbers" (Antiquities, Book XV, Ch. II, 2). Peter's assigned ministry to the Jews took him to those places where the Jews were in the greatest numbers, even to Babylon.

## **8 Paul's Epistle to the Romans**

The strongest reason of all for believing that Peter never was in Rome is

found in Paul's epistle to the Romans. According to Roman Church tradition, Peter reigned as pope in Rome for 25 years, from A.D. 42 to 67. It is generally agreed that Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome was written in the year A.D. 58, at the very height of Peter's alleged episcopacy there. He did not address his letter to Peter, as he should have done if Peter was in Rome and the head of all the churches, but to the saints in the church in Rome. How strange for a missionary to write to a church and not mention the pastor! That would be an inexcusable affront. What would we think of a minister today who would dare to write to a congregation in a distant city and without mentioning their pastor tell them that he was anxious to go there that he might have some fruit among them even as he has had in his own community (1:13), that he was anxious to instruct and strengthen them, and that he was anxious to preach the Gospel there where it had not been preached before? How would their pastor feel if he knew that such greetings had been sent to 27 of his most prominent members who were mentioned by name in the epistle (Ch. 16)? Would he stand for such ministerial ethics? And if he were the most prominent minister in the land, as allegedly was the bishop of Rome, such an affront would be all the more inexcusable. This point alone ought to open the eyes of the most obdurate person blinded by the traditions of the Roman Church.

If Peter had been working in the church in Rome for some 16 years, why did Paul write to the people of the church in these words: "For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the and ye may be established" (1:11)? Was not that a gratuitous insult to Peter? Was it not a most presumptuous thing for Paul to go over the head of the pope? And if Peter was there and had been there for 16 years, why was it necessary for Paul to go at all, especially since in his letter he says that he does not build on another's foundation: "making it my aim so to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, that I might not build upon another man's foundation" (15:20)? This indicates clearly that Peter was not then in Rome, and that he had not been there, that in fact Paul was writing this letter because no apostle had yet been in Rome to clarify the Gospel to them and to establish them in the faith. At the conclusion of this letter Paul sends greetings to the 27 people mentioned above, including some women, also to several groups. But he does not mention Peter in any capacity.

And again, had Peter been in Rome prior to or at the time when Paul arrived there as a prisoner in A.D. 61, Paul could not have failed to have mentioned him, for in the epistles written from there during his imprisonment—Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon—he gives a complete list of his fellow workers in Rome, and Peter's name is not among them. He spent two whole years there as a prisoner, and received all who came to visit him (Acts 28:30). Nor does he mention Peter in his second epistle to Timothy, which was written from Rome during his second imprisonment, in A.D. 67, the year that Peter is alleged to have suffered martyrdom in Rome, and shortly before his own death (2 Timothy 4:6-8). He says that all his friends have forsaken him, and that only Luke is with him (4:10-11). Where was Peter? If Peter was in Rome when Paul was there as a prisoner, he surely lacked Christian courtesy since he never called to offer aid. Surely he must have been the first absentee bishop on a big scale!

All of this makes it quite certain that Peter never was in Rome at all. Not one of the early church fathers gives any support to the belief that Peter was a bishop in Rome until Jerome in the fifth century. Du Pin, a Roman Catholic historian, acknowledges that "the primacy of Peter is not recorded by the early Christian writers, Justin Martyr (139), Irenaeus (178), Clement of Alexandria (190), or others of the most ancient fathers." The Roman Church thus builds her papal system, not on New Testament teaching, nor upon the facts of history, but only on unfounded traditions.

The chronological table for Peter's work, so far as we can work it out, seems to be roughly as follows:

Most Bible students agree that Paul's conversion occurred in the year A.D. 37. After that he went to Arabia (Galatians 1:17), and after three years went up to Jerusalem where he remained with Peter for 15 days (Galatians 1:18). That brings us to the year A.D. 40. Fourteen years later he again went to Jerusalem (Galatians 2:1), where he attended the Jerusalem council described in Acts 15, in which Peter also participated (v. 6). This conference dealt primarily with the problems which arose in connection with the presentation of the Gospel in Jewish and Gentile communities. Paul and Barnabas presented their case, and were authorized by the council to continue their ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 15:22-29); and this quite clearly was the occasion on which Paul was assigned to work primarily among the Gentiles while Peter was assigned to work primarily among the Jews (Galatians 2:7-8), since this same Jerusalem council is spoken of in the immediate context (Galatians 2:1-10). So this brings us to the year A.D. 54, and Peter still is in Syria, 12 years after the time that the Roman tradition says that he began his reign in Rome.

Sometime after the Jerusalem council Peter also came to Antioch, on which occasion it was necessary for Paul to reprimand him because of his conformity to Judaistic rituals (Galatians 2:11-21). And the same Roman tradition which says that Peter reigned in Rome also says that he governed the church in Antioch for seven years before going to Rome. Hence we reach the year A.D. 61, with Peter still in Syria! Indeed, how could Peter have gone to Rome, which was the very center of the Gentile world? Would he defy the decision reached by all the apostles and brethren from the various churches who met in the famous first Christian council in Jerusalem? Clearly the Scriptural evidence is that Peter accepted that decision, and that his work was primarily among the Jews of the dispersion, first in Asia Minor, and later as far east as Babylon—that in fact his work took him in the opposite direction from that which Roman tradition assigns to him! And even if Peter had been the first bishop of Rome, that would not mean that the bishops who followed him would have had any of the special powers that he had. The apostles had the power to work miracles and to write inspired Scripture. Even if Peter had been granted special powers above those of the other apostles, there is nothing in Scripture to indicate that those powers could have been transmitted to his successors. In his second epistle he makes a reference to his approaching death (1:14), and surely that would have been the appropriate place to have said who his successor should be and what the method of choosing future bishops should be. But he gives no indication that he even

thought of such things. Peter as an apostle had qualifications and gifts which the popes do not have and dare not claim. The fact of the matter is that with the passing of the apostles their place as guides to the church was taken not by an infallible pope but by an inspired and infallible Scripture which had been developed by that time, which we call the New Testament, through which God would speak to the church from that time until the end of the age.

We may be certain that if the humble, spiritually-minded Peter were to come back to earth he would not acknowledge as his successor the proud pontiff who wears the elaborate, triple-decked, gold bejeweled crown, who wears such fabulously expensive clothing, who is carried on the shoulders of the people who stands before the high altar of worship, who is surrounded by a Swiss military guard, and who receives such servile obedience from the people that he is in effect, if not in reality, worshipped by them. The dedicated Christian minister who serves his people faithfully and humbly, and not the pope, is the true successor of Peter.

## **9 Conclusion**

Let it be understood that we do not seek to minimize or downgrade but only to expose the preposterous claims that the Roman Church makes for its popes and hierarchy. Peter was a prince of God, but he was not the Prince of the Apostles. He, together with the other apostles, Mary, and the early Christians, turned from the religion in which they were born, Judaism, and became simply Christians, followers of Christ. Not one of them was a Roman Catholic. Roman Catholicism did not develop until centuries later.

The doctrine of the primacy of Peter is just one more of the many errors that the Church of Rome has added to the Christian religion. With the exposure of that fallacy the foundation of the Roman Church is swept away. The whole papal system stands or falls depending on whether or not Peter was a pope in Rome, and neither the New Testament nor reliable historical records give any reason to believe that he ever held that position or that he ever was in Rome.

(Continued in [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Section Two Chapter VI The Papacy.](#))

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## [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Chapter IV Tradition](#)



This is the continuation of the [previous chapter of Roman Catholicism](#) by Lorraine Boettner.

### **1 What Tradition Is**

Protestantism and Roman Catholicism agree that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. But they differ widely in regard to the place that it is to have in the life of the church. Protestantism holds that the Bible alone is the authoritative and sufficient rule of faith and practice. But Romanism holds that the Bible must be supplemented by a great body of tradition consisting of 14 or 15 apocryphal books or portions of books equivalent to about two thirds the volume of the New Testament, the voluminous writings of the Greek and Latin church fathers, and a huge collection of church council pronouncements and papal decrees as of equal value and authority—a veritable library in itself.

It is very evident that this difference of opinion concerning the authoritative basis of the church is bound to have radical and far-reaching effects. The age-long controversy between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism comes to a head regarding the question of authority. Right here, we believe, *is the basic difference between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism*. And, we may add, we believe that in its use of tradition is to be found the Achilles' heel of Roman Catholicism. For it is in this that Romanism finds the authority for its distinctive doctrines.

Every religious movement that develops some unity, and continues to live, has its traditions. These traditions gather up the beliefs, thinking, practices,

and rules of the group, particularly as these are expressed in its doctrinal standards and forms of government. In this manner the movement gives stability to and regulates its own manner of life, and hands that stability and manner of life on to the next generation.

We do not reject all tradition, but rather make judicious use of it insofar as it accords with Scripture and is founded on truth. We should, for instance, treat with respect and study with care the confessions and council pronouncements of the various churches, particularly those of the ancient church and of Reformation days. We should also give careful attention to the confessions and council decisions of the present day churches, scrutinizing most carefully of course those of the denomination to which we belong. But we do not give any church the right to formulate new doctrine or to make decisions contrary to the teaching of Scripture. The history of the church at large shows all too clearly that church leaders and church councils can and do make mistakes, some of them serious. Consequently their decisions should have no authority except as they are based on Scripture.

Protestants differ from Roman Catholics in that they keep these standards strictly subordinate to Scripture, and in that they are ever ready to re-examine them for that purpose. In other words they insist that, in the life of the church, Scripture is primary, and the denominational standards are subordinate or secondary. They thus use their traditions with one controlling caution—they continually ask if this or that aspect of their belief and practice is true to the Bible. They subject every statement of tradition to that test, and they are willing to change any element that fails to meet that test.

In contrast with this, Roman Catholics hold that there are two sources of authority—Scripture, and developing tradition, with the church being the judge of Scripture and therefore able to say authoritatively what the right interpretation of Scripture is. This, in effect, gives three authorities—the Bible, tradition, and the church. The primacy is in the hands of the church since it controls both tradition and the interpretation of Scripture. This, therefore, is the basis on which the Roman system rests. If this can be shown to be erroneous, it will be seen that the whole system rests on a false basis.

As Roman Catholicism works out in actual practice, the traditions of the church at any time are what the church says they are, Scripture means what the church says it means, and the people are permitted to read the Bible only in an approved version and within the limits of a predetermined interpretation. But when the Christian message is thus shackled by tradition and ecclesiastically dictated interpretation, it ceases to be the free grace of God offered to repentant sinners, and becomes an instrument in the hands of the clergy for the control of the people. In professing to interpret the Bible in the light of tradition, the Roman Church in reality places tradition above the Bible, so that the Roman Catholic is governed, not by the Bible, nor by the Bible and tradition, but by the church itself, which sets up the tradition and says what it means. Theoretically, the Roman Church accepts the Bible, but in practice she does not leave her members free to follow it. The errors that are found in her traditions obscure and nullify much of the truth

that she professes to hold. To cite but one example of what this means in actual practice, while the Roman Catholic Church, in professing allegiance to the Bible, must agree with the Protestant churches that there is "one mediator also between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2.5), she introduces a host of other mediators—the Virgin Mary, the priests, and hundreds of saints and angels—which effectively sets aside the truth contained in the Scripture statement.

## **2 How Tradition Nullifies the Word of God**

We give credit to Rome for this: she professes to hold that the Bible is the Word of God. She repudiates and denounces modernism, which in reality is a more or less consistent denial of the supernatural throughout the Christian system and which unfortunately has come to have a strong influence in some Protestant churches. Modernists seek to reduce some of the historical accounts of the Bible, as for example those of the creation of man and of the fall, to mere myths or legends. Also, modernists usually say that the Bible contains the Word of God, but deny that it is in all its parts actually the Word of God.

But having said that, we must point out how Rome also nullifies or destroys the Word. She maintains that alongside of the written Word there is also an unwritten Word, an oral tradition, which was taught by Christ and the apostles but which is not in the Bible, which rather was handed down generation after generation by word of mouth. This unwritten Word of God, it is said, comes to expression in the pronouncements of the church councils and in papal decrees. It takes precedence over the written Word and interprets it. The pope, as God's personal representative on the earth, can legislate for things additional to the Bible as new situations arise.

The Council of Trent, the most authoritative of all Roman councils and the one of greatest historical importance, in the year 1546, declared that the Word of God is contained both in the Bible and in tradition, that the two are of equal authority, and that it is the duty of every Christian to accord them equal veneration and respect. Thus, while modernism takes away from the Word of God, Romanism adds to it. Both are in error, and each would seem to be about equally bad. It would be hard to say which has done more to undermine true religion.

The untrustworthiness of oral tradition, however, is apparent for several reasons. In the first place, the early Christians, who were closest to Christ and the apostles, and whose testimony therefore would have been most valuable, wrote but very little because of the persecutions to which they were exposed. And what is found in the writings of the second and third centuries has but little reference to the doctrines which at present are in dispute between Protestants and Roman Catholics. Tradition, therefore, for hundreds of years allegedly was transmitted by mere report. And it is this which Rome receives as of equal authority with the written Word. But so unreliable is report that it has become a proverb that "a story never loses in its carriage." In other words, a story seldom retains its original character without addition and exaggeration. Fortunately, we have a remarkable instance in the New Testament itself in which report or tradition

circulated a falsehood, showing how easily oral tradition can become corrupted, how in a particular instance it did become corrupted even in the apostolic age. In John 21:21-23 we read: "Peter therefore seeing him (John) saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me. This saying therefore went forth among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, that he should not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" Surely we cannot build a church on such an insecure foundation as oral tradition!

Furthermore, that the body of tradition is not of divine origin nor apostolic is proved by the fact that some traditions contradict others. The church fathers repeatedly contradict one another. When a Roman Catholic priest is ordained, he solemnly vows to interpret the Scriptures only according to "the unanimous consent of the fathers." But such "unanimous consent" is purely a myth. The fact is they scarcely agree on any doctrine. They contradict each other, and even contradict themselves as they change their minds and affirm what they previously had denied. Augustine, the greatest of the fathers, in his later life wrote a special book in which he set forth his Retractions. Some of the fathers of the second century held that Christ would return shortly and that He would reign personally in Jerusalem for a thousand years. But two of the best known scholars of the early church, Origen (185-254), and Augustine (354-430), wrote against that view. The early fathers condemned the use of images in worship, while later ones approved such use. The early fathers almost unanimously advocated the reading and free use of the Scriptures, while the later ones restricted such reading and use. Gregory the Great, bishop of Rome and the greatest of the early bishops, denounced the assumption of the title of Universal Bishop as anti-Christian. But later popes even to the present day have been very insistent on using that and similar titles which assert universal authority. Where, then, is the universal tradition and unanimous consent of the fathers to papal doctrine?

The men who wrote the books of the Bible were inspired by the Holy Spirit and so were preserved from error. But the traditions of the church fathers, the church councils, and the popes are of a lower order and contain many errors and contradictions.

Bellarmino (1542-1621), a Jesuit and a noted Roman Catholic writer, divides tradition into three classes—divine, apostolic, and ecclesiastical. Divine traditions are those which it is alleged Christ Himself taught or ordained, which were not written but were handed down generation after generation by word of mouth. Apostolic traditions are those which were taught by the apostles but not written. And ecclesiastical traditions are those council pronouncements and papal decrees which have accumulated through the centuries. We insist, however, that it would have been utterly impossible for those traditions to have been handed down with accuracy generation after generation by word of mouth and in an atmosphere dark with superstition and immorality such as characterized the entire church, laity and priesthood alike, through long periods of its history. And we assert that there is no proof whatever that they were so transmitted. Clearly the bulk of those traditions originated with the monks during the Middle Ages.



When the leaders of the Reformation appealed to Scripture and thundered against the errors of the Roman Church, that church had to defend herself. And since she could not do so from the Bible alone, she resorted to these other writings. The result is that the most prominent doctrines and practices of the Roman Church, such as purgatory, the priesthood, the mass, transubstantiation, prayers for the dead, indulgences, penance, worship of the Virgin Mary, the use of images in worship, holy water, rosary beads, celibacy of priests and nuns, the papacy itself, and numerous others, are founded solely on tradition.

It is on such a basis as this that the Roman Church seeks to establish herself as "the only true church." But when the Roman Catholic layman searches his Bible for confirmation of the distinctive doctrines of his church, he finds either absolute silence or a distinct negative. The Bible, for instance, has nothing to say about the pope or the papacy as an institution, and it is emphatic and uncompromising in its commands against the use of images or idols in worship. It is natural that the Roman Church does not want to give up tradition. It cannot. If it were to give up tradition the whole system would fall to the ground, so much of its doctrine and practice has no other foundation.

Technically, the Roman Church does not claim that the pope receives new revelations or that he is inspired by the Holy Spirit as were the prophets and apostles when they wrote Scripture. In fact it denies that it formulates any new doctrines at all. Rather it insists that in *ex cathedra* pronouncements the Holy Spirit enables the pope to draw out and proclaim what belonged to the original revelation. But it does claim a divine presence of the Holy Spirit in the giving of *ex cathedra* pronouncements and in the formulation of traditions— which we would say is precisely the same in principle as claiming inspiration. At any rate, by this device it professes to maintain the unchangeability of the church while in reality it adds new doctrines.

It is obvious how inaccessible the Roman rule of faith is. No priest has the rule of his faith, which he vows to accept at ordination, unless he has all these numerous and ponderous volumes. No one could possibly master such a mass of materials, even if they contained no contradictions. And such a rule of faith is utterly beyond the reach of the laity.

### **3 The Apocrypha**

The 14 or 15 books that the Roman Catholic Church adds to the Bible and pronounces equally inspired and authoritative are known as the Apocrypha. These are printed as a part of the Bible and must be accepted by all Roman Catholics as genuine under penalty of mortal sin.

The word Apocrypha is from the Greek *apokrupha*, meaning hidden things, and is used by ecclesiastical writers for matters which are (1) secret or mysterious; or (2) unknown in origin, forged, or spurious; or (3) unrecognized or uncanonical. It is primarily in the sense of spurious or uncanonical that we use the term. The books had this name before they were officially approved by the Council of Trent, and so it is not a name given

them by Protestants. They are listed as follows:

1. The First Book of Esdras
2. The Second Book of Esdras
3. Tobit
4. Judith
5. The additions to the book of Esther
6. The Wisdom of Solomon
7. Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach
8. Baruch
9. The Letter of Jeremiah
10. The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men
11. Susanna
12. Bell and the Dragon
13. The Prayer of Manasseh
14. The First Book of Maccabees
15. The Second Book of Maccabees

Of these only the First and Second Books of Esdras (the latter of which contains an emphatic denial of the value of prayers for the dead, 7:105), and The Prayer of Azariah, were not officially accepted at the Council of Trent. The books accepted add a volume of literature about two thirds the size of the New Testament, or if the entire 15 be included, about 84 percent of the size of the New Testament. By way of comparison, a word count of the Old Testament in the King James Version shows a total of 592,439 words, the New Testament 181,253 words, and the Apocrypha 152,185 words. And since the Apocryphal books are pre-Christian, having been written between the close of the Old Testament and the coming of Christ, the effect of such an addition is to give greater prominence to the Old Testament and therefore to Jewish life and thought, and to decrease relatively the importance of the New Testament.

The Hebrew Old Testament was completed some four hundred years before the time of Christ. In the second century B.C., a Greek translation by Hebrew scholars was made in Alexandria, Egypt, and was called the Septuagint because the translators numbered 70. There developed an important difference, however, between the Greek translation and the Hebrew canon since the Septuagint contained a dozen or more Apocryphal books interspersed among the books of the Hebrew Bible. But not all copies contained the same books—suggesting that there was no general agreement among the translators as to which of these additional books were authoritative.

The Septuagint translation came into general use in Palestine, and that was the popular version at the time of Christ. But the Palestinian Jews never accepted the Apocryphal additions. And Protestants accept only the 39 books of the Old Testament that were in the Hebrew Bible at the time of Christ.

There is no record that Christ or any of the apostles ever quoted from the Apocryphal books or that they made any reference to them, although they undoubtedly knew of them. There are in the New Testament about 290 direct quotations from and about 370 allusions to passages in the Old Testament; yet among all of those there is not a single reference either by Christ or any of the apostles to the Apocryphal writings. They quote from every major book of

the Old Testament and from all but four of the smaller ones. They thus set their stamp of approval upon the Jewish Old Testament. Christ quoted it as authoritative, and said, "The Scriptures cannot be broken" (John 10:35). But the reason that neither He nor the apostles ever once referred to the Apocryphal books is obvious. They did not regard those books as Scripture, and they did not intend that legendary books should become a part of the Bible. Romanists sometimes charge Protestants with having "cut those books out of the Bible." But the record makes it clear that if anyone cut them out, it was Christ Himself.

This is all the more significant when we remember that the language commonly spoken in Palestine in the days of Christ was not Hebrew, but Aramaic, that Greek was one of the spoken languages of Palestine at that time, that bilingual Christians who spoke both Aramaic and Greek probably were in the church from the first, and that Christ Himself probably could speak Greek as well as Aramaic. Furthermore, the New Testament books were written in Greek, and in those books we find that while some of the quotations were from the Old Testament reflecting the direct use of the Hebrew, the prevailing practice was to quote from the Greek of the Septuagint. Hence the writers undoubtedly were familiar with the Apocryphal books and undoubtedly would have made some quotations from them if they had been regarded as Scripture.

So, we find that at the time of Christ there were two versions of the Old Testament current in Palestine, the more liberal Alexandrian Septuagint, including the Apocryphal books, in Greek, and the more conservative Hebrew version which included only the canonical books of the Jews, and that the Roman Catholic Bible follows the Alexandrian while the Protestant Bible follows the Hebrew version.

The loose talk of some Roman Catholic writers about the "Greek Bible," the form of the Septuagint that originated in Alexandria, Egypt, being the Bible of the early church, is no credit to scholarship for it ignores the most important point of all, namely, that so far as the evidence goes, Jesus and the New Testament writers did not consider the Apocryphal books canonical but instead accepted the Palestinian version of the Old Testament.

Furthermore, Josephus, the noted Jewish historian, about A.D. 90, gave a list of the books of the Jewish law and prophets, but he did not include the Apocryphal books. Other Jewish sources support Josephus. The Apocrypha was rejected by Origen, who is generally acknowledged to have been the most learned man in the church before Augustine, by Tertullian, an outstanding scholar in the early third century, by Athanasius, the champion of orthodoxy at the Council of Nicaea and by Jerome, the translator of the Latin Vulgate which became the authorized Roman Catholic Bible.

Jerome declared emphatically that the Apocrypha was no part of the Old Testament Scriptures. However, against his wishes and his better judgment, he allowed himself to be persuaded by two of his bishop friends who admired the books of Tobit and Judith to make a hurried translation of those. He is said to have translated the former at one sitting, and neither of them received the careful attention that had been given to the books which he considered canonical. But it is unfortunate that he did make the translations, for they

were later bound up with his Vulgate, and served to encourage the addition of other Apocryphal books. Augustine alone of the prominent scholars in the early church was willing to give the Apocrypha a place in the Bible, but it is not certain that he considered it authoritative in all cases. Yet in spite of all of these things, the 53 bishops of the Council of Trent, in the year 1546, pronounced the Apocryphal books canonical and deserving "equal veneration" with the books of the Bible.

Even within the Roman Church, opinion regarding the canonicity of the Apocrypha has been divided. We have pointed out that Jerome categorically denied that it formed any part of the inspired Scriptures. Cardinal Cajetan, Luther's opponent at Augsburg in 1518, in his Commentary on all the Authentic Historical Books of the Old Testament, which he dedicated in 1532 to pope Clement VII, approved the Hebrew canon as over against the Alexandrian. And within the Council of Trent itself several of its members were opposed to the inclusion of these books in the Bible. Thus, even within the papacy, the Apocrypha was not considered canonical until the Council of Trent added it to the Old Testament and pronounced it so—nearly 2,000 years after the Old Testament was completed and closed.

Dr. Harris writing on this subject says:

"Pope Gregory the Great declared that First Maccabees, an Apocryphal book, is not canonical. Cardinal Zomenes, in his Polyglot Bible just before the Council of Trent, excluded the Apocrypha and his work was approved by pope Leo X. Could these popes have been mistaken or not? If they were correct, the decision of the Council of Trent was wrong. If they were wrong where is a pope's infallibility as a teacher of doctrine?" (*Fundamental Protestant Doctrines*, I, p. 4).

The real reason for the addition of the Apocryphal books to the Bible by the Roman Church, as we have said, is to be found in connection with events at the time of the Reformation. The Reformers vigorously attacked doctrines which they regarded as unscriptural. The doctrine of purgatory in particular was in need of defense, and the Roman scholars thought they found support in 2 Maccabees 12:40-45, which tells of the work of Judas Maccabeus, who after a battle sent money to Jerusalem to offer a sacrifice for soldiers who had died while guilty of the sin of idolatry. But, as we shall show when we discuss the doctrine of purgatory, this passage really does not support the Roman Catholic position at all. For idolatry is a mortal sin, and according to Roman Catholic doctrine, those dying in mortal sin go directly to hell. Only those who are guilty of venial sin go to purgatory and so only they can be helped by masses and prayers. This again illustrates the desperate nature of the search for support of the distinctive Roman Catholic doctrines.

#### **4 The Nature of the Apocryphal Books**

What, then, is the nature of these books that have caused so much dispute? In the first place they are useful in giving a history of Judaism as it existed between the close of the Old Testament and the opening of the New Testament, and in that regard they are on a par with the writings of Josephus and Philo and other authors of the time. They do not give a continuous history, but

particularly in 1 and 2 Maccabees they narrate important phases of Jewish history. Most of the books, however, must be classed as religious novels, pious fiction, abounding in repetitions and trivial details which are of little interest to the average reader. They contain doctrines that are unscriptural, and stories that are fantastic and incredible. The colorful tale of Tobit, for instance, is clearly fictitious, written by a pious Jew about 190-170 B.C., and intended to provide religious and moral instruction in the form of an adventure story. Judith, another popular story, is also clearly fictitious. Ecclesiasticus has historical value in that it pictures many aspects of the Judaism of Palestine during the second century B.C.

But none of the writers claim inspiration for their works, and some explicitly disclaim it (Prologue to Ecclesiasticus; 1 Maccabees 4:46, 9:27; 2 Maccabees 2:23, 15:38). They add nothing essential either to the record of God's dealings with His people Israel as recorded in the Old Testament, or to the Christian Gospel as recorded in the New Testament.

Some examples of the numerous errors in these books are: Judith, chapter 1, vv. 1-7, calls Nebuchadnezzar king of the Assyrians and declares that he reigned in Nineveh. But we know that he was king of Babylon (Daniel 4:4-6,30). In Tobit an angel is represented as telling a lie, claiming that he is Azarius, the son of Ananias. But an angel is a created spirit and cannot be the son of any human being. The book of Baruch purports to have been written by a man of that name who was secretary to Jeremiah (1:1). But he quotes from Daniel, and the book of Daniel was not written until long after the time of Jeremiah, for Jeremiah wrote at the beginning of the 70-year captivity and Daniel at its close.

In answer to the question as to why these books were never accepted by the Jews as canonical, Dr. Edward J. Young, Professor of Old Testament in Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, says:

"The answer must be that these books were never regarded as divinely inspired. ... Both Judith and Tobit contain historical, chronological and geographical errors. The books justify falsehood and deception and make salvation to depend upon works of merit. Almsgiving, for example, is said to deliver from death (Tobit 12:9, 4:10, 14:10-11).

"Judith lives a life of falsehood and deception in which she is represented as assisted by God (9:10,13). Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon inculcate a morality based on expediency. Wisdom teaches the creation of the world out of pre-existent matter (7:17). Ecclesiasticus teaches that giving of alms makes atonement for sin (3:3), and in 1 Maccabees there are historical and geographical errors. This is not to deny many fine and commendable things in the Apocrypha, but the books nevertheless show themselves at points to be at variance with divinely revealed truth. They were consequently never adopted by the Jews as canonical" (*Revelation and the Bible*, p. 167).

Dr. Allan MacRae, Professor of Old Testament in Faith Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, says:

"The so-called Apocryphal books of the Old Testament are books written by godly Jews and containing only their fallible human ideas. They are in no sense the Word of God, nor can they ever become the Word of God. The Jews did

not consider these books as part of the Word of God. Jesus Christ did not set His seal upon them as He did upon the actual books of the Old Testament. They are never quoted in the New Testament. There is no evidence that any of the apostles ever considered any of the books as, in any sense, a part of the Word of God.

"It is true that many people in the Middle Ages became confused and thought that some of these books were part of the Word of God. This is because they were included in copies of the Vulgate. However, the man who translated the Vulgate into Latin from the original Hebrew never intended that they should be so included. St. Jerome, the learned translator of the Vulgate, wrote an introduction in which he strongly and clearly expressed his belief that only the books that are today included in our Old Testament belonged in the Bible, and that the so-called Apocrypha are in no sense a portion of God's Word."

The Westminster Confession of Faith, which presents the views of the Presbyterian and Reformed churches, in a statement not designed to forbid reading of the books of the Apocrypha, but to differentiate between their proper and improper use, says:

"The books commonly called Apocryphal, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the Canon of Scripture; and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings" (Ch. 1, sec. 3).

The Lutheran Church in Germany made no official pronouncement regarding the Apocrypha, but in the Bible prepared by Martin Luther, which for centuries remained the standard Bible of the Lutheran churches at home and abroad, it was included but was printed at the end of the Old Testament and in smaller print, which was generally understood to mean that it was considered as of secondary importance as compared with the Old and New Testament.

The Church of England and the Episcopal Church in the United States do not accept the Apocrypha as fully canonical, but they do include some readings from those books in their church manual—which indicates that they assign those readings a position higher than they give to the good writings of outstanding church leaders and near equal authority with the Old and New Testament. The sixth of the Thirty-nine Articles calls the Apocryphal treatises books which "the Church doth read for example of life and instruction of manners; but yet doth it not apply them to establish any doctrine."

The position of the Eastern Orthodox Church is not clear. It has debated the issue through its long history, but has made no final decision. In practice it has tended to accept the Apocrypha as authoritative, but it has not subjected itself to the rigid ecclesiastical control of doctrine as has the Roman Church, and the result is that some church fathers and theologians quote it authoritatively while others reject it. The Septuagint version of the Old Testament is still in use in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

The British and Foreign Bible Society, in 1827, ruled against including the Apocrypha in its Bibles, and the American Bible Society has followed that example. Nearly all Protestant churches today oppose the use of the

Apocrypha.

There were also a considerable number of New Testament Apocryphal books which at times circulated among the Jews or the Christians or both. These were written during the period from the second to the eighth century, and were designed primarily to supplement, or in some instances to correct, the canonical books. Dr. Bruce M. Metzger, Professor of New Testament in Princeton Theological Seminary, says concerning these books:

“Because the four Gospels say little of Jesus’ infancy, childhood, and early manhood, and are silent altogether regarding His experiences during the three days in the tomb, several Apocryphal gospels were produced to satisfy the pious curiosity of Christians regarding these two periods of Jesus’ life. ... Still other gospels were written to support heretical doctrines, such as Docetism (the view that Jesus only seemed to be human) in the Gospel of the Egyptians, or to minimize the guilt of Pilate, such as the Gospel according to Peter and the Gospel of Nicodemus. ...

“The most cogent proof that these books are intrinsically on a different plane from the books of the New Testament is afforded by reading them side by side with the books of the New Testament and allowing each to make its own impression. Then, in the words of M. R. James, ‘it will very quickly be seen that there is no question of anyone’s having excluded them from the New Testament: they have done that for themselves.’ ... The authors did not hesitate to elaborate marvelous tales, and, in the credulous temper of that age, almost anything was believed” (Introduction to the Apocrypha, pp. 249-250, 262- 263).

Some of the New Testament Apocryphal or pseudonymous books were: The General Epistle of Barnabas, First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, Second Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, Apostolic Constitutions, First Book of Hermas, Second Book of Hermas, Third Book of Hermas, various epistles of Ignatius, the Gospel of the Infancy of the Savior, a mutilated and altered Gospel of John, and the Gospel of the Nativity of Mary.

These spurious writings, however, were never included in the Roman Catholic Bible. The Council of Trent evidently selected only books that would help them in their controversy with the Reformers, and none of these gave promise of doing that. Furthermore, these books are important, not as a reliable source of historical information about the age with which they purport to deal (that is, the first centuries of the Christian era), but because of what they reveal about the age in which they were produced, showing something of the legend, folklore, ignorance, and superstition so prevalent in that age in which many of the distinctive doctrines of the Roman Church have their roots. That such tales could have been believed shows the depth of the ignorance and superstition to which the people were accustomed.

## **5 The Vulgate and Modern Translations**

The official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church is the Latin translation of Jerome, called the *Vulgate* (meaning “common”). Jerome was commissioned by Bishop Damasus near the close of the fourth century to prepare a standard

Latin version of the Bible, and his purpose was to put the Bible into the common language of the people in accurate, readable form. Had the Roman Catholic Church continued to promote the study of the Bible by the common people how different might have the course of church and world history! But unfortunately that course was reversed by later popes, the Bible was withheld from the people, and to a large extent even from the priests. Only in recent years has Rome given the Bible to the people in some countries, and then mostly because of Protestant pressure.

The church historian, A. M. Renwick, of Edinburgh, Scotland, in his book, *The Story of the Church*, says: "Jerome (340-420), one of the most interesting and picturesque figures in church history, was born in northern Dalmatia (now Yugoslavia). He produced the Latin Vulgate Version of the Bible, which, even today, is the only version recognized as authentic by the Roman Church. ... He spent thirty-four years at Bethlehem, where he lived mostly in a cave as a hermit and carried out his immense literary and scholarly labors" (p. 5).

The Roman Church seems to hold the Latin Vulgate translation of about A.D. 400, to be infallible. The Council of Trent decreed: "If any one receive not, as sacred and canonical, the said books entire with all their parts... as they are contained in the Old Latin Vulgate edition... let him be anathema!" The Vatican Council of 1870 (the council that set forth the doctrine of the infallibility of the pope) reaffirmed the declaration of the Council of Trent that "these books of the Old Testament and New Testament are to be received as sacred and canonical, in their integrity, with all their parts, as they are enumerated in the decree of the said council, and are contained in the ancient Latin edition of the Vulgate," adding that "they contain revelation, with no admixture of error" (Chapter II).

In the year 1590 Sixtus V issued an edition of the Vulgate which he declared to be final, and prohibited under an anathema the publication of any new editions thereafter unless they should be exactly like that one. However, he died soon after, and scholars found numerous errors in his edition. Two years later a new edition was published under Pope Clement VIII, and that is the one in general use today. Clearly Sixtus V was in error—another example of the absurdity of that doctrine which holds that the pope is infallible in matters of faith and morals. This doctrine of the authority or infallibility of the Vulgate has caused Roman scholars much difficulty in recent years, because many errors have been pointed out and are now acknowledged by all scholars.

The Roman Catholic Douay version of the Bible (New Testament, 1582, and Old Testament, 1609) was made from the Latin Vulgate, as are the Roman Catholic translations into modern languages. The recent Confraternity version of the New Testament (1941) carries the notation "Translated from the Latin Vulgate." The inaccuracies of Jerome's Vulgate are legion, as measured by present day scholarship, and the text has not been revised for centuries. So even the best of present day Roman Catholic versions, according to the notation on its own flyleaf, is a translation of a translation—an English translation of a Latin translation of the original Greek.

Roman Catholics pride themselves on a long history. Yet how much more



accurate are the Protestant translations of the Bible! Protestant scholars go back to the original Greek and Hebrew Scriptures, which are much older than the Vulgate to which Roman Catholics are bound, and they use all the aids that modern scholarship and research can provide. Yet the priests tell their people that it is a mortal sin to read a Protestant Bible, and they destroy Protestant Bibles wherever possible, allegedly on the grounds that they contain error! In 1957 a large stock of Bibles in Madrid, Spain, belonging to the British and Foreign Bible Society was seized and burned. Yet as Protestants we would not dream of destroying Roman Catholic Bibles. Rather we acknowledge that despite their limitations they are quite good translations, and that they contain God's truth in clear enough revelation to enlighten any who will read them in a sincere search for truth, that apart from their interpretative notes they are surprisingly like our King James and American Standard versions. After all, the most distinctive features of the Roman Catholic religion come not from their Bibles but from their traditions.

## **6 The Question of Authority**

We have said that the most controversial issue between Protestants and Roman Catholics is the question of authority—*What is the final seat of authority in religion?*—and that Protestants hold that the Bible alone is the final rule of faith and practice, while Roman Catholics hold that it is the Bible and tradition as interpreted by the church. In actual practice the Roman Church, since the infallibility decree of 1870, holds that the final seat of authority is the pope speaking for the church.

But we need only read church history to discover that when another source of authority is placed alongside Scripture as of equal importance, Scripture eventually becomes relegated to the background. Whether that other source be reason, emotion, or tradition, the inevitable result is that it supplants Scripture and causes it gradually to fade away. If that other source be reason, we get rationalism. If it be emotion, we get mysticism. And if it be tradition, we get ecclesiastical dictation or clericalism. In each case the Bible, while still given lip service, is effectually superseded.

At the time of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther took his stand solidly on the Bible and refused to be moved unless it could be shown that his teaching was contrary to the Bible. Summoned to appear before the Diet of Worms to give an account of his beliefs, the closing words of his masterful address were: "Here I take my stand; I can do no other; so help me, God." It could not be shown that his teaching was contrary to the Bible, and his position was unassailable.

The primary and almost immediate result of the Reformation was to bring the doctrines of Scripture clearly before men's minds as the Reformers based their teaching squarely on the Scriptures to the exclusion of all accumulated tradition. While the Church of Rome declared that "it belongs to the church to judge of the true sense of Scripture," the Reformers, both on the Continent and in England, declared that even lay people, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, can interpret Scripture by diligent and prayerful searching and reading.

It is true, of course, that the person who has not been born again, that is, the one who has not been the object of the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit and who therefore is not a Christian, is not able to understand spiritual truth. This too is clearly taught in Scripture: "Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged" (1 Corinthians 2:14). But every born again Christian has the gift of the Holy Spirit, and is therefore able to understand the basic essentials of what God has written. It is also true that many people, even among born again believers, differ on minor points. But that is because they have not read the Scriptures carefully enough and compared the various parts. The remedy for that is more devoted, patient, diligent Bible study. In any event there is no reference whatever in the Bible that even hints that God has delegated the interpretation of Scripture to any one individual or group of individuals.

If it be asked how the Church of Rome, which contains important elements of truth, has become honeycombed with paganism, how even a professedly Christian church has managed to build up a semi-pagan organization, the answer is that the illegitimate authority that Rome has given to uninspired tradition has produced the effect. That development had an almost exact parallel in the nation of Israel. Israel had the inspired prophets, but she preferred the pleasing and flattering teachings of the false prophets, and so developed a set of traditions which in time came to supplant the true teachings of the prophets. In the teachings and writings of the false prophets the rulers of the Jews found the things they wanted, just as the popes and bishops have found in the man-made traditions of their church things which appeal to their selfish and prideful natures and which gave them what they wanted under the cover of religion. A study of religious errors will show that they have this common characteristic—they consist either of additions to Scripture, or of subtractions from Scripture, or perhaps a mixture of the two.

We do not deny, of course, the statement of the Romanists that much of what Jesus said and did is not recorded in the Gospels. John says plainly: "Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these things are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name" (20:30-31). But we do maintain that that which is written is sufficient. It is Protestant doctrine that the Bible contains all that is necessary to salvation, and no other writings or church pronouncements are to be regarded as having divine authority.

Numerous references set forth the sufficiency of Scripture. Nowhere do we find even a hint that these need to be supplemented by church councils or papal decrees of any kind. Some of these are as follows:

"To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no morning for them" (or as the King James Version says, "it is because there is no light in them") (Isaiah 8:20).

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:18).

“Ye search the scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of me” (John 5:39).

Our Lord proclaimed the infallibility of Scripture, for He said: “The scriptures cannot be broken” (John 10:35).

The brothers of the rich man had sufficient evidence because, said Jesus, “They have Moses and the prophets” (Luke 16:29).

Jesus’ rebuke to the Sadducees was, “Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures” (Matthew 22:29).

When Jesus reasoned with His disciples after His resurrection in regard to the purpose and necessity of His death, we are told: “And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27).

Peter wrote: “And we have the word of prophecy made more sure; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a dark place. ... For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:19,21).

James quoted Scripture in the Council of Jerusalem to settle the question that was at issue (Acts 15:16-18).

Paul repeatedly appealed to Scripture, as when he asks: “For what saith the scripture?” (Romans 4:3). And to Timothy he wrote: “From a babe thou hast known the sacred writings which are able to make thee whole unto salvation” (2 Timothy 3:15).

The diligence of the Bereans in testing all things by Scripture is commended: “Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, examining the scriptures daily, whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). The Scriptures which the Bereans had were the Old Testament. They compared Paul’s teachings about Jesus with what the Old Testament had predicted. They were not theologians or scholars, but ordinary religious people, and yet the writer of the book of Acts (Luke) implies that by comparing the teachings of the great Apostle Paul with Scripture they were able to determine whether he was right or wrong.

And the book of Revelation pronounces a blessing on both the reader and those who hear: “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things that are written therein: for the time is at hand” (1:3).

Thus the sufficiency of Scripture is everywhere assumed. In all these cases our Lord and the New Testament writers referred to Scripture as clear, authoritative, and final. Never once did they say or imply that extra-Scriptural tradition was needed to supplement Scripture, or that any man or group of men was authorized to give authoritative interpretations of Scripture.

## 7 Tradition Condemned by the Scriptures

In New Testament times the Jews had a great body of tradition, the accumulation of centuries, which they gave precedence over Scripture. But Jesus never mentioned tradition except to condemn it and to warn against it. He rebuked the Pharisees with these words: "Ye leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men. ... Ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your tradition... making void the word of God by your tradition" (Mark 7:8,9,13). "And he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition. ... Ye have made void the word of God because of your tradition. ... But in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men" (Matthew 15:3,6,9).

Thus our Lord rebuked the Pharisees for doing precisely what the Church of Rome does today, for substituting a body of human teachings and making it equal to or even superior to the Word of God.

Early in the Old Testament Moses warned against this same danger: "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish from it, that ye may keep the commandments of Jehovah your God which I command you" (Deuteronomy 4:2). Paul gave a clear warning against the use of tradition: "Take heed lest there shall be any one that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy and with deceit, after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Colossians 2:8). And John, in the final book of the New Testament set forth the severe penalty for adding to or taking away from the Word of God: "I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto them, God shall add unto him the plagues which are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, out of the holy city, which are written in this book" (Revelation 22:18-19).

In the Roman Church of today we have a perfect illustration of the attitude which characterized the Pharisees and scribes, who substituted a body of human teachings and made them equal to or even superior to the Word of God. In Jesus' day traditionalism had become so perverse and powerful that it finally crucified Him. Religion was so blinded by its own distortions of the Word of God that it took the cross to expose it and upset it and to reveal the truth once more. In a similar way the Church of Rome is following a set of traditions that she has accumulated through the centuries, which by her own pronouncements she has elevated to equal authority with, or even to superiority over the Word of God. Her purpose, of course, is to justify doctrines and practices which have no basis in Scripture, or which are in violation of Scripture commands.

In order for Rome to defend her use of tradition, which admittedly came into use long after the New Testament was completed, it was necessary for her to assert that the authority of the church is superior to that of the Scriptures. Protestantism holds that the Scriptures are the infallible rule of faith and practice, and that the church as an institution and all believers must be governed by that authority. The Church of Rome, on the other hand, holds that she is the supreme authority in matters of faith and

practice. She even attempts to say that the Roman Catholic Church produced the Bible, and that the pope as the vicar of Christ on earth has the right to legislate for the church. But such claims are absurd, because the New Testament was completed in the first century of the Christian era while the Roman Catholic Church with its distinctive features and its separate existence did not come into being until about four centuries later. Furthermore, the sin and corruption that have characterized the Roman Church, particularly during the Middle Ages when so many of her doctrines and practices originated, is proof that she is in no sense superior to the Bible but quite the contrary. But because of that teaching, the average Roman Catholic may not be particularly impressed when it is pointed out to him that the doctrines of purgatory, the mass, indulgences, penance, the use of images, etc., are not in Bible or even that they are contrary to the Bible. He believes these things, not because he has Scriptural authority for them, but because the church teaches them. This again shows how pernicious can be the use of tradition.

The reason that the Jews had departed from their Scriptures was that they accepted tradition and the decisions of their councils as their guide of faith. The Roman Church has made the same mistake. She, too, has compromised the truth of the Bible in order to follow tradition. When she began putting herself on a par with Scripture she found it impossible to stop there. The next step was to place herself above Scripture, and she has assumed that position ever since.

## **8 The Protestant Attitude toward the Bible**

The first complete English Bible was translated by John Wycliffe, "the morning star of the Reformation," about 1382. Before his time there was no Bible in English, although a few fragmentary portions had been translated. Wycliffe knew only the Latin Bible, so his version, like the Roman Catholic versions even to the present day, was a translation of a translation. The first English New Testament translated from the original Greek was that of William Tyndale, in 1525-26. That work was made possible through the publication of the Greek New Testament by Erasmus a few years earlier. But since the church authorities in England (Henry VIII was king and also the head of the church) did not want the people to have the Bible in their own language, Tyndale was forbidden to carry on his work in England. He went instead to Germany, where the work of Luther had provided a hospitable environment for such a venture. His work was completed and published in the city of Worms, in 1526. However, it was condemned by the English government, and in order to gain entrance into England had to be smuggled in a few copies at a time.

But Tyndale eventually paid with his life for his devotion to the Bible. Having taken up residence in Antwerp, Belgium, opposition to his work began and continued until he was arrested and condemned. In 1536 he was put to death by strangling and his body was burned. His dying words were, "O God, open the king of England's eyes." That prayer was answered, and God opened the eyes of Henry VIII. In 1536 there appeared the Miles Coverdale version of the Bible, which also was published outside England, but which circulated

with considerable freedom in England. And in 1539 the second edition was published in England and circulated freely. Coverdale was the friend and colleague of Tyndale, and the translation was largely Tyndale's.

The next important translation was the Geneva Bible, translated during the reign of Roman Catholic Queen Mary Tudor by a group of English scholars, exiles in Geneva, Switzerland, hence its name. This became the Bible of the intrepid John Knox and of the early Puritans. It seems to have been the Bible used by Shakespeare. The next important translation was the King James version, published in 1611. This was the Bible usually used by Cromwell's army and the Scottish Covenanters, also used by John Bunyan. It was brought to this country by the Pilgrims and Puritans. To this day it continues to be the most popular of all English versions.

Up until the time of the Reformation the Bible had been a book for priests only. It was written in Latin, and the Roman Church refused to allow it to be translated into the languages of the common people. But when the Reformers came on the scene all of that was changed. Luther translated the entire Bible into German for the people of his native land, and within 25 years of its appearance one hundred editions of the German Bible came off the press. It was also soon translated into most of the vernacular tongues of Europe, and wherever the light of the Reformation went it became the book of the common people. Decrees of popes and church councils gave way to the Word of Life. The Protestant churches of Europe and America have labored earnestly to put the Bible into the hands of the people in their own languages and have urged the people everywhere to read it for themselves. Protestant Bible societies now circulate more copies of the Bible each year than were circulated in the fifteen centuries that preceded the Reformation.

According to the 1983 report of the American Bible Society, about 2,000,000 copies of the complete Bible, Old and New Testaments, are printed in the United States each year, and more than 3,000,000 copies of the New Testament, and many millions of portions of the Bible (at least one book, usually one of the Gospels) are printed each year. And the 1984 report says that the complete Bible is now available in 286 languages and dialects, the New Testament in 594 more, and some portion of the Bible in 928 more, making a total of 1,808 languages and dialects into which the Bible or some part of it has been translated. Today the Bible is available in whole or in part in the native tongues of probably 96 percent of the people of the world.

Dr. Hugh Thompson Kerr, late Presbyterian minister in Pittsburgh, has well said:

"Protestants have been the pioneers in Bible translation and have organized and supported the great world-encircling Bible societies. They believe that the Bible needs no other interpreter than the Holy Spirit. The Bible read under the guidance of the Holy Spirit is the Christian's authoritative guide. Protestants therefore claim that they truly represent and interpret Christianity as it is set forth in the Bible. They hold that anyone who will read the Bible prayerfully, with the aid of the best scholarship, will reach the conclusion that Protestantism honestly interprets the teachings and confirms the practice of early Christianity" (booklet, *What Protestants*

*Believe*, p. 8).

And another says:

“The fact is, the Bible was written for the common people. The language of the Old Testament was the language spoken in the homes and market places of the Hebrews. The New Testament Greek was not the classical Greek of an earlier period but the Greek spoken by the common people. It was called the *koine*, which means the common language, what we would call today ‘newspaper language.’ This shows that God intended the common people to understand the Bible. Any man with ordinary intelligence and able to read English can read and learn that Jesus is the Saviour of sinners” (Edward J. Tunis, booklet, *What Rome Teaches*, p. 9).

The Protestant ideal is that everyone should read the Bible. Right here, we believe, is the reason that the Protestant nations—the United States, England, Scotland, Holland, and the Scandinavian nations—have followed one line of development, while the Roman Catholic nations—Italy, Spain, France, and the Latin American nations—have followed a distinctly different pattern. Protestants believe that those who study the Bible in sincerity and with prayer will have no difficulty in understanding its basic truths. The words of Jesus, previously quoted, imply that the common people should know the Bible and that they are able to understand it.

It is virtually axiomatic that where there is an open Bible, men will not long remain in bondage. But by the same token where the Bible is a closed book, men soon find themselves in darkness and servitude. Everywhere it has been the precursor of civilization and liberty, driving out barbarity and despotism as bats and vermin flee from the sunshine. In every land where its free and unrestrained reading has been encouraged, it has dispelled ignorance and superstition.

## **9 The Roman Catholic Attitude toward the Bible**

In contrast with the Protestant attitude toward the Bible, the Roman Church has traditionally opposed its free use by the people. Even today in the predominantly Roman Catholic countries, it keeps the Bible from the people, or at least makes no effort to provide it for them. The result is that the people in those countries know practically nothing about the Bible except as some Protestant organizations have gone in and distributed copies. In countries where the Roman Church is in keen competition with Protestantism it has allowed the people to have the Bible if there is a demand for it, but it has always insisted strenuously that the version must be the Douay, or more recently the Confraternity, each of which contains a set of notes printed on the same page with the text and giving the Roman Catholic interpretation of disputed passages. Even to this day any other version, even the Bible as such without note or comment, is suspect. The alleged reason is that these versions contain “errors.” But the real reason is that the Church of Rome does not want the Bible read apart from her interpretative notes.

The Bible was first officially forbidden to the people by the Church of Rome and placed on the *Index of Forbidden Books* by the Council of Valencia (a

cathedral city in southeastern Spain) in the year 1229, with the following decree:

"We prohibit also the permitting of the laity to have the books of the Old and New Testament, unless any one should wish, from a feeling of devotion, to have a psalter or breviary for divine service, or the hours of the blessed Mary. But we strictly forbid them to have the above mentioned books in the vulgar tongue."

Here we see that the Bible was forbidden to the laity, except for the Psalms or breviary (book of devotions), and even then it could be only in Latin—which of course placed it beyond the reach of the common people. That decree was passed at the time the Waldensians were gaining strength, and it was enforced with bitter persecution.

The Council of Trent reaffirmed that decree and prohibited the use of the Scriptures by any member of the church unless he obtained permission from his superior. The decree read as follows:

"In as much as it is manifest, from experience, that if the Holy Bible, translated into the vulgar tongue, be indiscriminately allowed to everyone, the temerity of men will cause more evil than good to arise from it; it is, on this point, referred to the judgment of the bishops, or inquisitors, who may, by the advice of the priest or confessor, permit the reading of the Bible translated into the vulgar tongue by Catholic authors, to those persons whose faith and piety, they apprehend, will be augmented, and not injured by it; and this permission they must have in writing."

To this decree, as to more than a hundred others passed by this council, was attached an anathema against anyone who should dare to violate it, and also penalties were fixed against the illegal possessor or seller of books. Here we observe particularly the statement that the reading of the Bible in the native tongue will do "more evil than good"! Imagine that, as the deliberate teaching of a church professing to be Christian! How insulting to God is such teaching, that His Word as read by the people will do more evil than good! That attitude toward the Word of God is the mark, not of a true church, but of a false church.

While it has been the policy of the Roman Church to withhold the Bible from the people, Peter, the alleged founder of that church, refers to Scripture as "the word of prophecy made more sure," and likens it to "a lamp shining in a dark place" (2 Peter 1:19). What a blessing it would be to the world if the Roman Church would really follow the teaching of Peter!

Early in the history of Israel God instructed Moses to make the words of the law known and easily accessible to all the people: "And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and thou shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest in the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. ... And thou shalt write them upon the door-posts of thy house, and upon thy gates" (Deuteronomy 6:7-9). Another verse which expresses the preciousness of Scripture and its importance to the individual is Psalm 119:11: "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee."



Even where permission to read the Bible is granted by the Council of Trent, to those who presumably are so thoroughly indoctrinated with Roman Catholicism that nothing will shake their faith, that permission must be in writing!

Liguori, one of the highest authorities on Canon Law, whose books probably are considered more authoritative and probably are quoted more often than those of any other writer, says: "The Scriptures and books of Controversy may not be permitted in the vulgar tongue, as also they cannot be read without permission."

Four different popes during the eighteenth century made pronouncements against giving the Bible to the people in their own language, typical of which was that of Clement XI (1713) in the Bull Unigenitus: "We strictly forbid them (the laity) to have the books of the Old and New Testament in the vulgar tongue." As for the Encyclical of Leo XIII (1893) on "The Study of the Bible," sometimes quoted by Roman Catholics as a statement urging the laity to study the Bible, it should be observed that (1) the Bible which was cited for study was the Latin Vulgate, which of course was not available to the common people nor understood by them; (2) the statement forbade them to interpret it otherwise than as the church interpreted it; and (3) it did not rescind or modify the prior law of the church which refused the free use of the Scriptures to the laity.

Such was the teaching and practice of the Roman Church for centuries. For one to possess or read the Bible in his native tongue without permission in writing from his superior and under the watchful eye of the bishop was a mortal sin, for which absolution could not be granted until the book was delivered to the priest. As the top-heavy structure of law and ritual developed, the Bible had to be denied to the people. Otherwise they would have seen that it was merely a man-made structure. On the other hand, the Bible had to be preserved as a reference book for the theologians and priests in order to sustain the power of the priesthood by plausible and elastic interpretations of certain texts. But so far as the people were concerned it might as well have been forgotten. Small wonder it is that ignorance, superstition, poverty, and low moral conditions have been so characteristic of Roman Catholic countries.

In Protestant countries, however, in recent years a considerable change has taken place in Roman Catholic practice, and, shamed into a different attitude because of Protestant criticism, the Roman Church now grants her people the privilege of reading the Bible, and even stocks it in the book stores—using, of course, only the approved versions. The Roman Church does not wish to appear to be the foe of the Bible, so indefensible is that position. An annual "Catholic Bible Week" has been instituted, and indulgences granted for reading the Bible at least fifteen minutes each day. But this appears to be an unnatural emphasis, by no means given with a clear conscience permitted but not looked upon favorably by the authorities in Rome. Significantly, no similar program of Bible reading has been instituted in the predominantly Roman Catholic countries. Only in Protestant countries, and primarily in the United States, is this policy followed. And it certainly comes very late in the long, long history of the Roman Church. One can easily guess what the

result would be if for some reason the Protestant influence were removed.

Unfortunately, it still is a mortal sin for a Roman Catholic anywhere to read the King James, American Standard, Revised Standard, or any other Protestant version. So, even the Bible as such remains on the Index of Forbidden Books!<sup>1</sup> It is made fit for a Roman Catholic to read only when it is annotated by an authorized theologian! What St. Paul wrote, if it stands by itself, is on the Index. What was written by St. Peter himself, who according to Roman Catholic tradition was the first pope, is on the Index unless some Roman Catholic annotates his writing. Yet the Roman Church does not claim infallibility for the theologian who annotates it! So here we have the very height of absurdity—it takes the work of a theologian who is not infallible to correct and edit and make lawful and orthodox the text of those who wrote by divine inspiration! The attitude of the Roman Church toward the Bible societies has been one of sustained opposition. Several acts of the popes have been directed exclusively against them. In 1824 Pope Leo XII, in an encyclical letter said: “You are aware, venerable brethren, that a certain society called the Bible society strolls with effrontery throughout the world, which society, contrary to the well-known decree of the Council of Trent, labors with all its might and by every means to translate—or rather to pervert—the Scriptures into the vulgar tongue of every nation. ... We, in conformity with our apostolic duty, exhort you to turn away your flock by all means from these poisonous pastures.” In 1844 Pope Gregory XVI again condemned these societies, and Pope Pius IX, author of the decree of papal infallibility, who died in 1878, denounced “these cunning and infamous societies, which call themselves Bible societies, and give the Scriptures to inexperienced youth.”

<sup>1</sup> Technically the Index was dropped in 1965, but general supervision over books allowed continues through the newly established magazine supervision Nuntius (Herald). The imprimatur remains in force, and gives another effective means of control. Since the Second Vatican Council, restrictions against other versions have been relaxed to some extent.

But in reality who can estimate the vast good that these noble organizations and their faithful colporteurs have brought to the nations of the world? Most prominent among these have been the British and Foreign Bible Society, the American Bible Society, the Bible Society of Scotland, and that of the Netherlands, which have translated the Scriptures into hundreds of languages and dialects, and which now circulate millions of copies of the Bible every year. Many times Bibles have been publicly burned by the priests. That the real attitude of the Vatican toward the Bible has not changed is shown by the fact that in 1957 the depot of the British and Foreign Bible Society in Madrid, Spain, was closed and its stock of Bibles confiscated and burned. After the Spanish civil war, which brought Franco and the Roman Catholic Church to power, Spanish children returning from hospitable Swiss families with Bibles in their pockets were forced at the Spanish frontier to hand those precious books over to the local priest. Time and again in Colombia during the past ten years Bibles have been taken from Protestants by fanatical Romanist groups and burned, almost always at the instigation of the local priests, usually in communities where new Protestant churches were being formed. The fact remains that only in those countries where

Protestantism is dominant does the Bible circulate freely. Think of the popes, who profess to be God's representatives on earth, forbidding their people and all others to read God's own Book of Life! Surely the Church of Rome by such action proves itself apostate and false.

So, for a thousand years, from the early sixth century to the sixteenth century, while the Roman Church held sway, the Bible remained a closed book. The Roman Church, instead of being a kingdom of light, became a kingdom of darkness, promoting ignorance and superstition and holding the people in bondage. In most Roman Catholic countries today the Bible remains a closed book. Only since the time of the Protestant Reformation has it circulated freely in any country.

Among evangelical Christians in the United States there are thousands of classes studying the Bible. But among Roman Catholics such groups are very rare. Even a brief discussion with Roman Catholics will reveal that they know very little about the doctrines or the history of their church, and that they know almost nothing at all about the Bible.

Rome's traditional policy of seeking to limit the circulation of the Bible and of anathematizing or destroying all copies that are not annotated with her distinctive doctrines shows that she is really afraid of it. She is opposed to it because it is opposed to her. The plain fact is that she cannot hold her people when they become spiritually enlightened and discover that her distinctive doctrines are merely man-made inventions.

A curious fact in regard to the Index of Forbidden Books is that the Roman Church permits the reading of some books by ecclesiastical writers outside her fold when those books contain nothing contrary to her doctrines. Even some heathen books are allowed to adults, because of their "elegance and propriety." But not the Bible—unless it carries her interpretation! The traditional attitude of the Roman Catholic Church toward the promotion and study of the Bible has been, we believe, the greatest spiritual and cultural tragedy since the influx of the pagans into the church in the fourth century.

## **10 Interpreting the Bible**

While the Roman Catholic people in the United States have access to the Bible, they are told that they cannot understand it and that it must be interpreted for them by the church speaking through the priest. People ordinarily do not waste their time reading a book that they are persuaded they cannot understand.

The priests in turn are pledged not to interpret the Bible for themselves, but only as the church interprets it, and according to "the unanimous consent of the fathers." But the church has never issued an official commentary giving that interpretation. And as we have pointed out earlier, the unanimous consent of the fathers is purely a myth, for there is scarcely a point of doctrine on which they do not differ. The doctrine of the immaculate conception, for instance, was denied by Anselm, Bonaventura, and Thomas Aquinas, three of the greatest Roman theologians. Yet Rome presumes to teach that Mary was born without sin, and that that is the unanimous teaching of

the fathers.

In their insistence on following an official interpretation, the Roman Catholics are pursuing a course similar to that of the Christian Scientists, who also have the Bible but insist that it must be interpreted by Mary Baker Eddy's book, *Science and Health, with Key to the Scriptures*, and that of the Mormons, who likewise have the Bible but interpret it by the *Book of Mormon*.

The practical result of the priests and people being told that they cannot interpret the Bible for themselves is that they read it but very little. Why should they? They cannot understand it. They may read a few pages here and there, but even among the priests there is scarcely one in twenty who reads it from beginning to end and really studies it. Instead the priests spend hours reading their breviaries, books of daily devotions and prayers, as required by their church, but which are of human origin. This practice of representing the Bible as a mysterious book is a part of Rome's over-all program of presenting Christianity as a mystery religion, in which the mass in particular as well as various other practices are set forth as mysteries which are not to be understood but which are to be accepted with implicit faith.

The priests and the people alike look upon the Bible as a mysterious book, and anyway the interpretation is given to them in pope's decrees and church council pronouncements, which are declared to be clearer and more easily understood. Furthermore, these latter supersede Scripture. Experience proves that whenever an interpretation becomes more important than a document, the document becomes buried and the interpretation alone survives. For this reason the average Roman Catholic is faithful to his church but neglects his Bible. Instead of following the teachings of God the priests and people follow the traditions of men.

A fraudulent claim recently put forth by the Knights of Columbus in a series of newspaper and magazine ads designed to appeal to Protestants and others is that the Roman Catholic Church produced the Bible and that we received it from her. Some of her spokesmen attempt to say that the canon of the Bible was established in the fourth century, by the pope and council of Carthage, in A.D. 397. But that statement is erroneous on two counts. In the first place, there was no pope as such in A.D. 397. It was not until the Council of Chalcedon, in 451, that the bishop of Rome was designated pope, and the authority of the bishop of Rome never has been acknowledged by the Eastern churches. Previous to that time all priests and bishops were called popes (Latin, papa), and in the Eastern churches that title is applied to ordinary priests even to the present day. The Council of Chalcedon attempted to restrict the title exclusively to the bishop of Rome, who at that time was Leo I, and conferred it posthumously on all previous bishops of Rome in order to make it appear that an unbroken succession of popes had proceeded from Peter.

And in the second place, the New Testament was produced during the first century of the Christian era and had assumed its present form centuries before the Roman Catholic Church developed its distinctive characteristics. At that time the Eastern churches were dominant in Christian affairs, and the

Church in Rome was relatively insignificant. Gregory I, called Gregory the Great, who was consecrated pope in 590 and died in 604, was in effect the founder of the papal system. He reorganized the church, revised the ritual, restored monastic discipline, attempted to enforce celibacy among the clergy, and extended the authority of the Roman Church into many countries adjacent to Italy. He more than anyone else gave the Roman Church its distinctive form and set the course that it was to follow in its later history.

Furthermore, long before the Council of Carthage, the particular books now found in the New Testament, and only those, had come to be looked upon by the church at large as the inspired and infallible Word of God on the basis of their genuineness and authority. These particular writings, in distinction from all other books of that age, manifest within themselves this genuineness and authority as we read them; and the Council of Carthage did not so much choose the books that were to be accepted in the New Testament, but rather placed its stamp of approval on the selection that by that time, under the providential control of the Holy Spirit, had come to be looked upon by the church as the New Testament canon. The Old Testament canon was completed and had assumed its present form long before the coming of Christ. The Roman Church, of course, had nothing whatever to do with that.

(Continued in [Chapter V Peter](#).)

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## [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner](#) [Chapter III The Priesthood](#)



There is no priesthood in the New Testament. Christ is our priest, not a man on the earth. Hebrews 3:1b “...consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus;”

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## [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner](#) [Chapter II The Church](#)



The church is composed of all who are true Christians, those who have been “born again,” or “born anew” (John 3:3), from all nations and denominations.

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## [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner](#) [Chapter I Introduction](#)



The best book to share with your Catholic relatives and friends to witness to them as to the unbiblical, unscriptural doctrines and practices in their

church.

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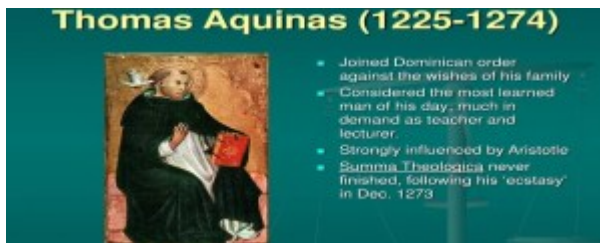
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