

# Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner

## Chapter XIII Ritualism



This is the continuation of Dr. Boetter's book, the next chapter following [Chapter XII Penance, Indulgences: Salvation by Grace or by Works?](#).

### **1 Ritualism**

If we search for the factors that account for the power and influence of the Roman Catholic Church, not only over its own members but over many others who have no personal connection with that church, we find that one of the most important is its ritualistic worship. The gorgeous vestments, colorful processions, pageantry and mystifying symbolism, the stately music, the solemn intonations of the priests in a singsong voice, the flickering candles, the tinkling bells, the sweet-smelling incense, the dim light of the cathedral where Mary holds sway—all are designed to impress the senses and the emotions. Witnessed in a great cathedral, Roman Catholic worship appeals to the senses as much as any spectacular on the stage of the Roxy Theatre in New York. Hollywood could never outdo, nor even equal, the colorful coronation of Pope John XXIII, in November, 1958, as that ritual was presented directly to some fifty thousand persons in Rome and to millions more by television and movie film. One news source described the coronation spectacle in part as follows:

“...Swiss guards in polished breastplates and scarlet and gold uniforms, and a scarlet-robed ecclesiastic carrying the pontifical tiara. Chaplains in violet soutanes, bishops in white mitres and robes decorated with silver; ecclesiastics in scarlet capes, and the College of Cardinals in cream colored vestments heavy with gold embroidery, followed each other in measured procession. Finally, amid renewed shouts of enthusiasm, the pope was carried in by 12 bearers, seated in the gestatorial chair beneath a richly embroidered canopy. The pontiff wore a gem-studded mitre and the ritual falda. To right and left were members of the noble guard and Palatine Guard in gala uniforms.”

All of that in a purely manmade religious display, a ritualistic ceremony that is not even hinted at anywhere in the Bible! Representative Roman Catholic writers acknowledge that the entire series of rites in connection with the coronation is unessential since a man becomes pope at the moment he accepts the office after his election. There were no papal coronation ceremonies before the 10th century, and the form has varied considerably since that time.

An American observer describes a public appearance of the pope in St. Peter's basilica in Rome in these words:

"First, soldier guards with rifles enter—perhaps 50 of them, then the papal officials. Then borne by 12 men on their shoulders, a huge chair on which the pope sits. He has a white skull cap and is dressed in white robes. We see the light flash on the diamond of his crucifix. Twenty thousand people shout, 'Viva il Papal' 'Long live the Pope!' He begins to salute the people genially on all sides, scattering his blessings with great liberality. He is carried through the full length of the great church to the great altar and steps from his chair to a red throne on a platform raised above the heads of the people.

"The people are wild with enthusiasm. They cheer and raise their children to see his face. As one looks about at the beaming faces, one wonders if the participants understand the difference between *latria* and *dulia*—one permits devotion to a holy thing, and the other, devotion due only to God. We fear the devotion given him is the type one would give only to his God! ...

"As he mounts his chair to be borne out again on the shoulders of 12 men dressed in red, the children cry and women plead not to be crushed. The pope is carried out, scattering his greetings all about him. As he is about to pass the curtain, he rises and again gives the apostolic blessing. The vast crowd pours out into the Piazza San Pietro, having seen a man who, to most of them, stands in the place of God. It has been the highest point in their experience the most exquisite emotion of their lives.

"One wonders what passed through the mind of the old man as the delirious crowds did him such great honor. Once before crowds exclaimed, 'It is the voice of a god and not of a man' (Acts 12:22), but God strikingly demonstrated His displeasure.

"How striking was the dissimilarity between the Lord of heaven and His pretended vice-regent in Rome! Jesus was a humble itinerant preacher, but this gentleman rides into the church on the shoulders of 12 men. All the pomp, the ostentation, the lights, the ceremony, all the wealth imaginable, are employed to enhance the grandeur of an institution which in every sense is the opposite of the simple church of the Gospels and the book of Acts" (article, Henry F. Brown).

Eucharistic and Marianistic congresses, with priests, bishops, and cardinals wearing gorgeous robes and bejeweled mitres, present similar spectacles. In February, 1946, when thirty-two new cardinals were created by Pope Pius XII, Americans were surprised to learn that the scarlet robes alone of each new American cardinal's outfit cost \$10,000. The pope's robes, of course, are much more expensive. The jewels in the pope's triple-decked crown alone are said to be worth \$1,300,000. What a contrast with the manner in which Protestant ministers dress! And what a contrast with the words of the alleged founder of the Roman Church, the Apostle Peter, who said to the lame beggar: "Silver and gold have I none" (Acts 3:6). Peter warned against the "wearing of jewels of gold, or of putting on apparel" (1 Peter 3:3). Paul, too, could say, "I coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel" (Acts 20:33).

Some people however, want to be dazzled with a theatrical display of religion, and the Roman Church readily obliges. But the total effect of such ritualistic displays, so lacking in spiritual instruction is usually repulsive to thoughtful minds, and is entirely outside the bounds of true Christianity. What spiritually sensitive souls most condemn seems often to have been the chief attraction for the great mass of people who, without interest in religion as such, are moved by the spectacular display of what seems to be a union of the human and the divine. To the ignorant and uneducated, and also to a considerable extent to the educated, the splendor of the Roman Church appears as something awesome, fascinating, and inspiring. But many a spiritually weary traveler has found after all that such ritual and ceremony is only a mirage seen from a distance, a gorgeous display promising rest for the traveler on his way through a desert land, but failing utterly to supply the water of life that could bring peace and joy to his thirsty heart. Gradually the mirage fades on the horizon, and the desert that was to have bloomed as the rose yields only briars and thorns. How different from all that is the evangelical Protestant service, where with a minimum of ritual the emphasis is on the sermon which is designed to impart Biblical knowledge and to nurture and edify the spiritual and moral nature of man!

Concerning the rituals and ceremonials of Romanism, Stephen L. Testa says:

“Pagan Rome and Jewish Jerusalem had these ceremonials. But when Christ came to save the world He did not copy or adopt any of them; rather He disdained them. He founded His church, not as a hierarchy, but as a simple brotherhood of saved souls, commissioned to preach the Gospel to all the world. The early church, the church of the catacombs, for 300 years had no such ceremonials. It was in the fourth century, after the so-called conversion of Emperor Constantine, that he made Christianity the State Church and those pagan ceremonials were introduced. It was then that the Catholic Church became the Roman Catholic Church. Italy and the other Catholic countries have derived no benefit whatever, spiritual or material, from them, as anyone can see for himself. The Reformation of course rejected them.”

We are often amazed at the magnificence of Roman Catholic churches and cathedrals, even in areas where the people are comparatively poor, or even in poverty. The following account of how the Roman Church developed in one area is given by August Vanderark, in the booklet, *Christ the Hope of Mexico*:

“The American visitor to Mexico is often amazed to discover an abundance of large beautiful churches in almost every part of the nation. Frequently the question arises, ‘How could they afford to construct such a vast number of imposing edifices?’ The answer, of course, is slave labor.

“Following the conquest by Cortez, the Indians were forced into slavery by the Roman Church and put to work building its places of worship and other religious structures. In Henry Bamford Parkes’ most excellent work, *A History of Mexico*, we read: ‘Twelve thousand churches were built in Mexico during the colonial period; and though they testify to the triumph of Christ over Huitzilopochtli (chief god of the Aztecs), they also testify to the skill of the missionaries (Jesuits) in obtaining unpaid labor from the Indians.’ Many of the Indians died as a result of being forced into the strenuous labor to

which they were not accustomed.”

Romanism is largely a religion of ceremonials and rituals, and as such it is a far departure from the purity and simplicity of the Gospel. The supposed blessing is mysterious and magical. No really intelligent participation is required on the part of the people. They are largely spectators watching the pageantry, and are supposed to be blessed simply because they are there. The mystifying mannerisms of the priests, and the mumble-jumble of the unknown tongue used at the altar, tend more toward credulity and superstition. Fifteen centuries of history make it clear that the Roman ritual is powerless to uplift the world. Indeed, is it any wonder that Roman Catholic countries are proverbially impoverished, illiterate, and degraded? We charge Rome with obscuring rather than revealing the simple truth of the way of salvation as set forth in the Bible, and with the addition of many doctrines and practices not found in the Bible. When we tear aside the gaudy trappings of Romanism we find only an ugly skeleton, which, because it cannot find support in Scripture, is not able to stand on its own feet. Applicable here are the words of Joel: “Rend your heart, and not your garments” (2:13); and especially the words of Isaiah:

“What unto me is the multitude of your sacrifices? saith Jehovah: I have had enough of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; for I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to trample my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; new moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies—I cannot away with iniquity and the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth; they are a trouble unto me; I am weary of bearing them” (1:11-14).

Elaborate ritual and ceremony, which theoretically are designed to aid the worshipper, usually have the opposite effect in that they tend to take the mind away from things which are spiritual and eternal and to center it on that which is material and temporal. Artistic ritual and exquisite music often become ends in themselves, and can easily become instruments which prevent the people from joining in the worship of God. The reason the Roman service tends to become more and more elaborate, liturgical, and ritualistic, is that the heart of the exercise, true adoration of God, is missing, and a persistent effort is made to fill up the emptiness and unsatisfactoriness of it all by piling one ceremony and ritual upon another. But ironically, the more that is done the more difficult it becomes to worship God, and so the vicious circle goes round and round.

We object to the elaborate ceremonials and gorgeous furnishings of Romanism, not because of any lack of aesthetic taste, but on theological grounds. Such things may be all right in a theater, but they are out of place in a Christian church. Within proper limits dignity and beauty are characteristics which are proper in the worship of God, as indeed is clear from the prescriptions for worship which were given to the children of Israel. But the various elements of the Old Testament ritual were types and shadows portraying God’s plan of salvation. Their purpose was to present the Gospel in picture to a primitive people. But those things were done away in Christ, and no others were put in their place (Hebrews 8:5, 9:23, 10:1). The only

references to incense, for example, in connection with the New Testament church are found in the book of Revelation where it is used figuratively, referring to the prayers of God's people (Revelation 5:8, 8:3-4). Romanism is in this respect a recrudescence of Judaism, and in its ceremonialism stands much closer to Judaism than to New Testament Christianity. It has a delight in the picture language of ceremonies that were designed for the childhood of the church, and it still is fascinated with the beauty of the temple and its gorgeous ritual.

We maintain that the New Testament assigns no liturgy at all for the church. We maintain further that there is a beauty in chaste simplicity, that this characterized the early church, that the departure from this simplicity in the fourth and later centuries was the result of spiritual deterioration, and that most of the ritualism and ceremonialism was taken over from the pagan religion of ancient Rome. But while no required form is demanded, it is necessary that some systematic form be developed, so that "all things" may be done "decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40). Most churches develop an order of service sufficient to give order and dignity to the service without going to the extreme of Romanism.

Let Protestants not be deceived by the outward splendor of Romanism. The most elaborate rituals will not save one if the heart is not right. Neither the two thousand proscriptions of the Canon Law, nor all the absolutions of the priests, can open the kingdom of heaven for one who is not first of all a true believer.

## **2 Ceremonials**

Some of the ceremonials of Romanism are of special interest. First of all and most important is the *Ave Maria*, or "Hail Mary," which was used in part as early as 1508, completed 50 years later, and finally approved for general use by Pope Sixtus V at the end of the 16th century. It reads as follows:

"Hail, Mary, full of grace; the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among 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."

The "Hail Mary" is thus a prayer. It is repeated many times in the churches, in the schools, and by individuals in private as a work of penance and as one of the most effective means of storing up merit.

Another ceremonial, always used by Roman Catholics in entering a church as well as in various personal acts, is the sign of the cross. This is considered both a prayer and a public profession of faith. In entering a church they dip the forefinger of the right hand in holy water, and touch the forehead, the breast, and the left and right shoulder, thus tracing upon their person the figure of the cross while reciting aloud or in silence the words, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

Fasting has a prominent place in Romanism. When carried out according to the rules of the church it is supposed to gain certain merits for the person

fasting. A fast day is not one on which no food at all is eaten, as the name might imply, but one on which persons over twenty-one and under sixty years of age are allowed but one full meal, and are forbidden meats, unless granted a special dispensation. A day of abstinence is one on which meat is forbidden, but the usual number of meals is allowed. Fasting is required during Lent<sup>1</sup>(the forty week-days preceding Easter), and on certain other appointed days. Fish, but not other meat, allowed on Fridays. This, like the days of fasting and the days of abstinence, is of course an empty formalism, a purely arbitrary rule, without any New Testament authority, and can be set aside at any time by a dispensation from the priest because of hard work, sickness, or for various other reasons. Yet the people are taught that under normal conditions it is a mortal sin to eat meat on Friday and on other days of abstinence. In 1958 Pope John XXIII granted Roman Catholics throughout the world a special dispensation to eat meat on Friday, December 26, the day after Christmas, because of continued Christmas festivities and celebrations.

<sup>1</sup> On February 17, 1988 Pope Paul VI relaxed the Lenten rules for fasting except for Wednesday and Good Friday. The general rule against eating meat on Friday has also been abolished. Thus what only a short time ago was a mortal sin now becomes permissible, changed by the bishops as nonchalantly as if they were merely changing for worship on Sunday morning.

The fasts commanded by the Church of Rome are wholly different from those in the Old Testament. Rome's fasts are purely arbitrary and mechanical, not spiritual, appointed by the popes. They are not necessarily connected with any religious observances. The wild revelry, drinking, and feasting which precedes Lent and other occasions in Roman communities, particularly that best known one, the Mardi Gras carnival in New Orleans and some other cities, proves this beyond dispute. True fasting is a spiritual exercise usually connected with prayer, repentance, and meditation.

Mere arbitrary fasting is denounced in Scripture as an abomination. To Jeremiah God said concerning the people of Israel, who were outwardly religious and observed forms but who in heart rejected Him and broke His commandments: "Pray not for this people for their good. When they fast, I will not hear their cry" (14:12). Christ rebuked the Pharisees because they were particular about keeping the fasts but neglected obedience to God (Matthew 6:16), and Paul warned against manmade commandments "to abstain from meats" as a mark of apostasy (1 Timothy 4:3). How completely arbitrary and unchristian are commandments which impose fasts, making certain meats edible on some days but not on others, edible at certain times of the day but not at other times, and for some people but not for others! Paul's words concerning food dedicated to an idol are equally applicable here: "But food will not commend us to God: neither if we eat not, are we the worse; nor if we eat, are we the better" (1 Corinthians 8:8). That, in fact, is the New Testament principle as regards eating or fasting.

Still another Roman ceremonial is flagellation, or self-torture. This is not to be thought of as merely a barbaric and stupid custom practiced back in the Middle Ages. In some places it still is a reality in our twentieth century. Emmett McLoughlin, in his *People's Padre* (p. 17), tells how three times a week, at a certain hour in the evening, the students in the seminary where he

obtained his training were required to go to their rooms, disrobe, and practice flagellation. And in a recent popular movie, *The Nun's Story*, produced under Roman Catholic supervision, the mother superior is pictured handing the novitiate girl a whip which she is to use on herself, with the admonition that she should use it "neither too little, nor too much"; "for," said the mother superior, "the one is as bad as the other." In the Philippine Islands the fanatical "Flagellantes," at the Lenten season each year can be seen in processions, carrying heavy crosses, chanting Latin hymns, and beating their bodies with a scourge until the flesh is raw and bleeding, in a blind hope that through that kind of suffering merit will be stored up and their souls will be released sooner from purgatory. How can an intelligent and professedly Christian priesthood allow such things to continue? Flagellation, however, has never been practiced by the rank and file of Roman Catholics.

Another important peculiarity of the Roman Church has been its use of the Latin language. It has been a long standing rule that the mass cannot be celebrated in any language other than Latin, that it is better not to celebrate mass at all than to do so in the language of the people. However, the Second Vatican Council, in 1964, gave permission for the mass to be celebrated in the common tongue, or for a translation to be provided so that the people can follow intelligently what is being said. Early in the Middle Ages, about the year 600, preaching in the Latin tongue was instituted—which surely was one of the most ridiculous things in the world. Latin had been the basis of the Italian language, but was no longer understood by the people. However, preaching never was a very important part of the Roman service, and it is no longer conducted in Latin. But the mass, which is the very heart of the service, still is in Latin,<sup>2</sup> although the great majority of present day congregations know nothing about Latin. A little reflection should convince anyone that neither the Lord's supper as instituted by Christ, nor His passion, which is reenacted in the mass, was done in Latin. Christ spoke the Aramaic of His day, which was the language of the people. Yet Roman priests hold that it is a sacrilege to commemorate that experience in anything but Latin!

<sup>2</sup> The requirement regarding Latin was relaxed by pope Paul VI.

The Apostle Paul, who himself was a scholar and who probably could speak more languages than anyone in his audiences, nevertheless insisted that a few words spoken with the understanding were better than many spoken in a tongue that could not be understood: "Howbeit in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that I might instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue" (1 Corinthians 14:19); and again: "If any man speaketh in a tongue, let it be by two, or at the most three, and that in turn; and let one interpret: but if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church" (1 Corinthians 14:28 ); and further: "So also ye, unless ye utter by the tongue speech easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye will be speaking into the air" (1 Corinthians 14:9). Protestants always conduct their services in language of the people and that surely is more uplifting.

There are certain benefits, however, which in a may seem to accrue to the

Roman Church as it conducts its ceremonials under the veil of a dead language. Most importantly, it adds to the air of mystery that surrounds the service, and helps to set the priest apart from the people as a man with special wisdom and special powers. Every priest at times has to bless the "holy water" with which Roman Catholics sprinkle themselves, and which is sprinkled on various objects to purify or consecrate them. The prayer by which that is done intimates that its object really is to drive the devils out of this common water, and indirectly to keep them from the people who are sprinkled. Probably not one priest in a hundred really believes that, and it doubtless would seem rather crude and awkward to go through the ritual in English. But they do not seem to mind doing it in Latin. In Medieval times it was customary for the priest to do a preliminary devil chase before the service began by going back through the audience and sprinkling holy water on the people while calling on all demons and devils to depart. The baptism of infants is an elaborate ritual in which the Devil is exorcised and commanded to depart from the child, and undoubtedly would be somewhat embarrassing if done in English. Yet the Latin ritual is accepted without question. Also, the mother who has given birth to a child is considered polluted and unfit to enter the church with respectable people until she has been "churched" through the use of an ancient ritual which if spoken in English probably would cause so much resentment that it would have to be abandoned. And in theological books detailed instructions to the priests concerning questions relating to sex to be asked of women and girl penitents in the confessional are given in Latin, and so in the main are kept concealed from the public.

Still another problem to be considered in this connection is the appearance of priests and nuns in public in their church garb, which of course is offensive to Protestants. Recently C. Stanley Lowell wrote:

"In long-suffering Mexico which finally rose up in wrath against the church, to this day the clergy are not permitted to appear on the streets in clerical garb. Resentment mounted to such a pitch that the people did not even want to look at the clergy."

And again:

"Roman Catholic politicians dote on public demonstrations of their denominational symbols and observances. Roman Catholicism is a majority faith in many areas of this country. As a majority faith Catholics frequently show insensibility to the religious sensitivities of those who do not share their faith. They may flaunt their religious practices and virtually force them on the entire community. They have an astonishing faculty for never suspecting that the symbol or observance which inspires them may be shocking and abhorrent to persons of another faith."

The fact is that Romanist religious regalia is almost always offensive to those who do not belong to that church. Oftentimes the tendency toward forcing their religion on other people of the community is also carried out by dedicating public statues, parks, schools, etc., to Roman Catholic saints or church leaders. We submit that in fairness to all the people of a community statues, parks, schools, etc., should not be given names that are offensive to the people of the community who are of other faiths.



### 3 Images

In the first commandment we are commanded to worship God, and none other. In the second commandment we are commanded to worship directly and not through any intervening object: "Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image... thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them. ..." (Exodus 20:4-5). Literally hundreds of other passages also condemn the making or worshipping of images. A few examples are:

"Ye shall make you no idols, neither shall ye rear you up a graven image, or a pillar, neither shall ye place any figured stone in your land, to bow down unto it: for I am Jehovah your God" (Leviticus 26:1).

"Cursed be the man that maketh a graven or molten image, an abomination unto Jehovah, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and setteth it up in secret" (Deuteronomy 27:15). "My little children, guard yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

"...the works of their hands... the idols of gold, and of silver, and of brass, and of stone, and of wood; which can neither see, nor hear, nor walk" (Revelation 9:20).

"What agreement hath a temple of God with idols?" (2 Corinthians 6:16).

The Jerusalem Conference warned the Gentiles:

"...that they abstain from the pollution of idols" (Acts 15:20).

How very clearly, then, the commandment against the making or use of images or idols (for they are the same thing if used in worship) is written into the law of God!

But in direct opposition to this the Council of Trent decreed:

"The images of Christ and the Virgin Mother of God, and of the other saints, are to be had and to be kept, especially in Churches, and due honor and veneration are to be given them" (Sess. 25).

Where can a more deliberate and willful contradiction of the command of God be found than that?

The practice of the Church of Rome is that she solemnly consecrates images through the blessing of her priests, places them in her churches and in the homes of her people, offers incense before them, and teaches the people to bow down and worship before them. It cannot be denied that the Roman Church has made the second commandment of no effect among her people, and that she teaches for Christian doctrine her own precepts, which are the commands of men. She has not dared to remove the commandment from her Bible, but she has withdrawn it as much as possible from view. Since her practices are contrary to the Bible, she covers up her guilt *by simply omitting that commandment* from her version of the Decalogue and from her catechisms and textbooks! She then re-numbers the commandments, making the third number two, the fourth number three, and so on. And in order to cover up this deficiency, she splits

the tenth commandment in two, thus making two separate sins of coveting—that of coveting one's neighbor's wife, and that of coveting one's neighbor's goods. As a result of this sophistry multitudes of people are misled and are caused to commit the sin of idolatry.

With this official encouragement it is not surprising that images of Christ, Mary, the saints and angels are very common in Roman Catholic circles. They are found in the churches, schools, hospitals, homes, and other places. Occasionally one even sees a little image of Jesus or Mary or some saint on the dashboard of an automobile (often the image of St. Christopher, the patron saint of travelers). Thus as one drives he supposedly has the protection of Jesus, or Mary, or the saint.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> On May 14, 1969 Pope Paul VI demoted 33 saints from the level of universal veneration to that of local or regional levels. Those included Christopher (whose existence is not certain); Nicholas, patron saint of gifts and givers; Valentine, patron saint of lovers; and Barbara, patron saint of artillerymen. There remain 58, plus Mary, Joseph, the apostles, and the angels, who are objects of universal veneration must be mentioned at mass at least once a year. And there are hundreds of others at lower levels.

Roman Catholics tell us that they do not pray to the image, or idol, but to the spirit that is represented by it. But that is the answer given by idol worshippers the world over when they are asked why they pray to their idols. That was the answer given by the Israelites when they worshipped the golden calf in the wilderness; for after making the idol they said: "These are thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (Exodus 32:4). They did not intend their worship to terminate on the image. They were worshipping their gods *through the use of an image*, or idol, a likeness which they thought appropriately represented their gods. But on other occasions the Israelites worshipped idols as such. Hosea's condemnation of idolatry in Israel: "The workman made it; there fore it is not God" (8:6), implies that the calf of Samaria was worshipped in the Northern Kingdom as a god. See also Psalm 115:4-8. Undoubtedly the better educated do make the distinction between the idol and the god or spirit which it is designed to represent. But in actual practice in Roman Catholic countries and among the ignorant, the tendency is for this distinction to disappear and for such worship to become simply idolatry. The Old Testament prophets and the Bible as a whole makes no distinction between false gods and their images, and the cult practices of the heathen tend to identify them completely. The Israelites were severely condemned for using idols in their worship of God. It cannot be otherwise with the Roman Catholics.

On numerous later occasions the Israelites attempted to worship God through the use of images, but such practices were always severely condemned. Even if it were true that Roman Catholics pray only to the person or spirit represented by the image, it still would be sin, for two reasons: (1) God has forbidden the use of images in worship; (2) there is only one mediator between God and men, and that one is Christ, not Mary or the saints.

Historically, when men have made images or idols which they could see, as an aid to worship, they later came to think of the images themselves as indwelt

by their gods. The images became the centers of attention rather than that which they were supposed to represent. Instead of helping the worshippers they confused them. This has been particularly true in regard to the larger images which are preserved from one generation to another. In the same manner as the heathen, the Romanists make gods of wood and stone, dress them up, paint them with gaudy colors, bow down before them, and worship them. The priests encourage the people to have little shrines in their homes at which they can worship. Millions of illiterate people in Europe and in the Americas attribute supernatural qualities to those images. In doing so they feel that they have the full approval of their church—which of course they do have. But the Bible calls such practice idolatry and condemns it. The Bible teaches that God is a Spirit, and that they that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24). We should never forget that one of the most heinous sins of ancient Israel, in fact the besetting sin of ancient Israel, was the worship of idols, and that Israel paid a fearful penalty for that practice.

Were the apostles to return to earth and enter a Roman Catholic church, they would scarcely be able to distinguish between the pagan worship of idols that they knew and the present day practice of kneeling before images, burning incense to them, kissing them, praying to them, and carrying them in public processions. The Roman Church today is about as thoroughly given over to idolatry as was the city of Athens when Paul visited there. Many priests do not believe in images, but they keep them in their churches because it is established custom and because, they say, it helps the worshippers, particularly if they are uneducated, to have a visual representation of the person they are worshipping.

But how very foolish is the practice of idolatry!

For life man prays to that which is dead.

For health he prays to that which has no health or strength.

For a good journey he prays to that which cannot move a foot.

For skill and good success he prays to that which cannot do anything.

For wisdom and guidance and blessing he commits himself to a senseless piece of wood or stone.

Romanism, with its image or idol worship, has no appeal at all for the Mohammedan world, which is so strongly opposed to all forms of idolatry. In fact it has made practically no attempt to win Mohammedans. The great mission field of North Africa lies only a short distance across the Mediterranean from Italy, practically on Rome's doorstep. But through the centuries that field has remained almost untouched and unchallenged by Roman Catholicism. Yet Rome sends thousands of missionaries across the oceans to India, Japan, South America, and even to the United States, which even by Roman standards is in much less need of them than is North Africa. Nor does Roman Catholicism have any attraction for the Jews, who also are strongly opposed to all forms of idolatry. Instead, the Roman Church persecuted the Jews for some fifteen centuries. The evangelization of both Jews and Mohammedans has been left

almost exclusively to Protestants. As we have indicated earlier, Roman Catholics attempt to justify the use of images by making a distinction between what they term *latria*, which is devotion given only to God, *hyperdulia*, which is given to Mary, and *dulia*, a lower form of devotion which is given to the saints, images, and relics. But in practice that distinction breaks down. The people, particularly those who are illiterate, of whom the Roman Catholic countries have so many, know nothing of the technical distinctions made by the theologians. They worship the images of Mary and the saints in the same way and often with more fervency than they worship those of Christ, or the "Blessed Sacrament" which they believe is the actual body, soul, and divinity of Christ. The only name for their practice is idolatry.

The Old Testament strictly forbade image worship, and in time such practice came to be an abomination to the Jews. With that background it seems incredible that idols should ever have been admitted into the more spiritual worship of the Christian church. But in the fourth century, with the granting of official status to the Christian church and the great influx of pagans, the heathen element in the church became so strong that it overcame the natural opposition to the use of images. Most of the people could not read. Hence it was argued that visible representations of Scripture persons and events were helpful in the church.

At the beginning of the seventh century, Pope Gregory the Great (590-604), one of the strongest of the popes, officially approved the use of images in the churches, but insisted that they must not be worshipped. But during the eighth century prayers were addressed to them and they were surrounded by an atmosphere of ignorant superstition, so that even the Mohammedans taunted the Christians with being idol worshippers. In 726 the Eastern emperor, Leo III, first attempted to remedy the abuse in his dominion by ordering that the images and pictures be placed so high that the worshippers could not kiss them. But when that failed to achieve the desired ends, he issued an order forbidding the use of images in the churches as heathenish and heretical. To support his action a council was called in Constantinople, in 754, which gave ecclesiastical sanction to his actions. This great controversy became known as the "iconoclastic" dispute, a word which means the breaking of images. The Eastern church banned all use of images or icons, and to this day that remains one of the great contrasts between the Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church.

But in 787 a council met at Nicaea (Bithynia), repudiated the work of the earlier council, and fully sanctioned the worship of images and pictures in the churches. This action was defended on the principle on which image worship, whether among the heathen or Christians, has generally been defended, namely, that the worship does not terminate on the image but on the object that it represents.

Thomas Aquinas, who is generally acknowledged as the outstanding medieval theologian of the Roman Church, fully defended the use of images, holding that they were to be used for the instruction of the uses who could not read and that pious feelings were excited more easily by what people see than by what they hear. The popes of the Roman Church have strongly supported the use of images.

The argument in favor of the use of images, that in the Old Testament God commanded the making of the cherubim and the brazen serpent, ignores the fact that the cherubim were not to be used in worship, whereas the images are. The cherubim were placed in the holy of holies where they were not seen by the people but only by the high priest, and then only as he entered once each year, whereas the images are displayed in public. A further and most important difference is that God commanded the making of the cherubim, but He strictly forbade the making of images. Likewise the brazen serpent was not made to be worshipped. When it later became a sacred relic and was worshipped by people who offered incense to it, good king Hezekiah destroyed it.

The moral and religious effects of image worship are invariably bad. It degrades the worship of God. It turns the minds of the people from God, who is the true object of worship, and leads them to put their trust in gods who seem near at hand but who cannot save.

Closely akin to the use of images is that of pictures of Christ. And these, we are sorry to say, are often found in Protestant as well as Roman Catholic churches. But nowhere in the Bible, in either the Old or New Testament, is there a description of Christ's physical features. No picture of Him was painted during His earthly ministry. The church had no pictures of Him during the first four centuries. The so-called pictures of Christ, like those of Mary and the saints, are merely the product of the artist's imagination. That is why there are so many different ones. It is simply an untruth to say that any one of them is a picture of Christ. All that we know about His physical features is that He was of Jewish nationality. Yet He more often is represented as having light features, even as an Aryan with golden hair. How would you like it if someone who had never seen you and who knew nothing at all about your physical features, resorted to his imagination and, drawing on the features of his own nationality, painted a picture and told everyone that it was a picture of you? Such a picture would be fraudulent. Certainly you would resent it. And certainly Christ must resent all these counterfeit pictures of Him. He was the truth; and we can be sure that He would not approve of any form of false teaching. No picture can do justice to His personality, for He was not only human but divine. And no picture can portray His deity. All such pictures are therefore fatally defective. Like the grave of Moses, the physical features of Christ were intended to be kept beyond the reach of idolatry. For most people the so-called pictures of Christ are not an aid to worship, but rather a hindrance, and for many they present a temptation to that very idolatry against which the Scriptures warn so clearly.

#### **4 Rosary, Crucifix, Scapular**

The rosary may be defined as (1) a series of prayers, in its long form consisting of 15 Paternosters (the Lord's prayer, addressed to God the Father), 15 Glorias, and 150 Hail Mary's addressed to the Virgin Mary; or (2) the mechanical device used in counting the prayers, the short and more common form being a string or chain of beads divided into five sections, each consisting of one large bead and ten small ones. The large rosary consists of fifteen sections. But usually one who wishes to say the complete rosary goes

over the short form three times. In some religious orders the large rosary is used, and is worn as a part of religious habit. Holding the large bead of each section in turn, one says the Our Father, and holding the small ones the Hail Mary for each separate bead. Between each section the Gloria is said: "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen." The Apostles' Creed may also be recited with the rosary.

As for the origin of the term "rosary," a book, *Things Catholics Are Asked About*, by Martin J. Scott, S. J., says: "Rosary means a garland of roses. A legend has it that Our Lady was seen to take rosebuds from the lips of a young monk when he was reciting Hail Mary's, and to weave them into a garland which he placed on her head" (p. 237). Another explanation is that the beads originally were made of rosewood. But they may also be of glass, stone, or other hard material.

The rosary has ten times as many prayers addressed to Mary as to God the Father, with none addressed to Christ or the Holy Spirit. It is designed primarily as a devotional to Mary, thus exalting a human being more than God. It is more commonly used by girls and women, and is by far the most popular and universal devotion in the Roman Church.

Peter the Hermit invented the rosary, in the year 1090, more than a thousand years after the time of Christ. It is acknowledged by Roman Catholics not to have come into general use until after the beginning of the 13th century, and was not given official sanction until after the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century.

The rosary represents a form of prayer that was expressly condemned by Christ, for He said: "And in praying use not vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask him" (Matthew 6:7-8). Yet the priests encourage their people to use the rosary frequently, and in giving penances after confession they often assign a certain number of Hail Mary's to be said. The more such prayers are said the more merit is stored up in heaven.

The Bible teaches that the true believer should pray to God reverently, humbly, and with a believing and thankful heart, thinking of what he doing and of the great King to whom he is praying. It is a distinguishing mark of Romanism, and also a matter of primary importance between Romanism and Protestantism, that a Roman Catholic "says" or "recites" his prayers, while for the most part the Protestant speaks extemporaneously, with his own words, thinking out his praise, petitions, requests, and thanks as he prays. For a spiritually minded person the mechanical use of beads destroys the true spirit of prayer.

A mechanical device similar to the rosary and used for counting prayers had been in use among the Buddhists and Mohammedans for centuries before the rosary was introduced, so its origin is not hard to trace. It is simply another device borrowed from paganism. And, strange as it may seem, Roman Catholics who condemn as pagan and foolish the use of prayer wheels by the

Buddhists in Tibet (wheels with attached prayers, placed in a stream of water or in the wind so that each time the wheel turns over the prayer is repeated), nevertheless display great devotion in counting their repetitious rosary prayers as one bead after another is pushed across the string. But surely the principle is exactly the same. A similar practice is the use of eight-day candles in little red cups, usually placed at the front and to one side in the churches, which are sold to those who are so busy they do not have time to pray. Indeed, why should Roman priests condemn the chanted incantations of African and West Indies Voodoo priests while themselves continuing the practice of sprinkling holy water with solemn exorcisms of demons or evil spirits?

*Crosses and crucifixes.* The most widely used religious symbol both for Roman Catholics and Protestants is the cross, much more so in Roman Catholic than in Protestant churches. The crucifix is a cross with the figure of Christ crucified upon it. In the Roman Church the sign of the cross has to be in every altar, on the roofs of all Roman Catholic churches, in the school and hospital rooms, and in the homes of its people. For interior use the crucifix is often displayed rather than the cross. Small crosses four or five inches long and suspended on a chain are often worn as part of the religious garb of priests and nuns, and a small gold cross on a chain suspended around the neck is often worn by the women.

But as regards the cross as a symbol of Christianity, we must point out that the Scriptures do not give one single instance in which a mechanical cross was so used, or in which it was venerated in any way. There are, of course, numerous instances in Scripture in which the cross is spoken of figuratively. Nor is there any evidence that the cross was used as a Christian symbol during the first three centuries of the Christian era. A Roman Catholic authority asserts:

"It may be safely assumed that only after the edict of Milan, A.D. 312, was the cross used as a permanent sign of our redemption. De Rossi (a Roman Catholic archaeologist) states positively that no monogram of Christ, discovered in the Catacombs or other places, can be traced to a period anterior to the year A.D. 312" (The American Ecclesiastical Review, p. 275; September, 1920).

The cross as a symbol of Christianity, then, it is generally agreed, goes back only to the days of emperor Constantine, who is supposed to have turned from paganism to Christianity. In the year 312 he was engaged in a military campaign in western Europe. According to tradition he called upon the pagan gods, but there was no response. Shortly afterward he saw in the sky a pillar of light in the form of a cross, on which were written the words, "*In hoc signo vinces,*" "In this sign conquer." Shortly afterward he crossed into Italy and won a decisive victory near Rome. Taking this as a token of divine favor, he issued various edicts in favor of the Christians. Whether he ever became a Christian or not is disputed, some holding that he remained a pagan all his life and promoted paganism and Christianity alternately as best served his purposes, although he professed Christianity and was baptized shortly before his death in 337. At any rate, the alleged sign in the sky, like so many other signs of that and later times, undoubtedly will have to be

explained on other grounds. The idea that Christ would command a pagan emperor to make a military banner embodying the cross and to go forth conquering in that sign is wholly inconsistent with the general teaching of the Bible and with the spirit of Christianity.

In any event, the cross, in pre-Christian as well as in Christian times, has always been looked upon as an instrument of torture and shame. Christians do not act wisely when they make such an instrument an object of reverence and devotion. Paul spoke of what he termed "the offense of the cross" (Galatians 5:11, KJV). And in Hebrews 12:2 we read that Jesus "endured the cross, despising the shame." In view of these things we should not regard the device on which Christ was crucified as holy or as an object of devotion. Rather we should recognize it for what it is, a detestable thing, a pagan symbol of sin and shame.

When Jesus said: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24), He did not mean that one should have a gold representation of it hanging from a chain about his neck or dangling from long cords at his side. He meant rather that one who is a faithful follower should be willing to do His will, to serve and to endure suffering as He did, since all those who sincerely follow Him will meet with some degree of hardship and suffering and perhaps even with persecution. Ever since the time that the emperor Constantine allegedly saw the sign of the cross in the sky, and took that as his banner, that banner has been raised over a half-Christian, half-pagan church. Protestant churches, too, have often offended in matter, and, like Lot, who pitched his tent too close to Sodom, these bodies have camped too close to the gates of Rome. The true Christian conquers, not through the sign of a fiery cross or the charm of a jeweled crucifix, but through the Gospel of Christ, which is "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Romans 1:16).

*Scapulars.* Another object of special devotion in the Roman Catholic Church is the scapular. This can best be described as a "charm" which is designed to give the wearer protection against all kinds of perils, such as accidents, disease, lightning, fire, and storms, and to ward off witchcraft and enchantments, and put evil spirits to flight.

The scapular was invented by Simon Stock, an English monk, in the year 1287. According to tradition this holy man withdrew into a wood where he lived in great austerity for twenty years, at the end of which time the Virgin Mary appeared to him in celestial splendor, with thousands of angels, and, holding the scapular in her hand, commissioned him to take this as the sign of the Carmelite Order to which he belonged.

The scapular consists of two pieces of brown cloth about four inches square, on which are pictures of the Virgin Mary, to be worn next to the skin, suspended over the shoulders by cords fore and back. Normally it must be of wool or other cloth, but not of silk, since it is worn in honor of the Virgin Mary and it is said that she never wore silk. It is to be worn day and night, never to be taken off until death, and it is good even to be buried with it. During the Second World War a metal scapular was supplied to Roman Catholic service men and was called the "Scapular Militia." On one square were printed



the words, "S. Simon Stock, pray for us," and on the other, "Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, pray for us."

Paul Blanshard cites the following use (or misuse) of the scapular:

"I have before me as I write a four page circular called The Scapular Militia, issued by the Carmelite National Shrine of Our Lady of Scapular, of 338 East 29th St., New York. It bears the official Imprimatur of Archbishop [now Cardinal] Spellman, and it was issued at the height of the war in 1943. The slogan emblazoned on its cover is 'A Scapular for Every Catholic Service Man,' and it carries, underneath a picture of Mary, Joseph, and St. Simon Stock, the specific guaranty in heavy capitals: WHOSOEVER DIES CLOTHED IN THIS SCAPULAR SHALL NOT SUFFER ETERNAL FIRE" (*American Freedom and Catholic Power*, p. 248).

That, we assert, is pure fetishism, the same kind of thing practiced by primitive tribes in many pagan countries. By such means do priests (and cardinals) substitute charms and superstitions in place of the New Testament which contains no such deceptions.

## **5 Relics, Pilgrimages**

A relic is a piece of bone or other part of a saint's body or some article which a saint touched during his life. Each of these supposedly has some degree of the supernatural attached to it and is regarded with more or less reverence, depending to a considerable extent on the education or lack of education of the worshipper. Such relics have an important place in the worship of the Roman Church. Paul Blanshard writes:

"Many non-Catholics imagine that relics are used by Catholicism merely as symbols of faith and devotion. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The Church, even the American Church of the present day, still operates a full-blown system of fetishism and sorcery in which physical objects are supposed to accomplish physical miracles. Sometimes it is claimed that these physical objects also accomplish spiritual miracles and change the physical or spiritual destiny of any fortunate Catholic who relies on them" (*Ibid.*, p. 248).

Relics range from pieces of the true cross, the nails, thorns from the crown of thorns, the seamless robe of Christ, the linen of Mary, her wedding ring, locks of her hair, vials of her milk, and her house miraculously transplanted from Palestine to Italy, to the more common and more abundant bones, arms, legs, hair, garments, and other possessions of the saints and martyrs. Many of the alleged relics have been proved false and have been dropped, but others continue to the present day. Some of the bones have been exposed as those of animals. In one instance the alleged bones of a famous Neapolitan saint, which it was claimed had worked countless miracles, were found to be those of a goat.

As for the actual cross on which Christ was crucified, the *Catholic Encyclopedia* says: "The so-called true cross of Christ was found in the mount Calvary by the mother of Constantine (in the fourth century), and taken to

Jerusalem by Constantine himself" (Vol. VIII, p. 238). But since that time hundreds of pieces of the true cross have been scattered over the earth for the veneration of superstitious Roman Catholics and for the enrichment of the clergy. Calvin wrote concerning the fragments of the cross alleged to exist in Roman churches in his day: "If all the pieces... were collected into a single heap, they would form a good shipload, although the Gospel testifies that a single individual was able to carry it! What effrontery, then, to fill the whole earth with fragments which it would take more than 300 men to carry." St. Paulinus, one of the Roman Catholic apologists for the veneration and defense of relics, says that "a portion of the true cross kept at Jerusalem gave off fragments of itself without diminishing." That would seem to be the only way in which the facts in question can be accounted for.

There is an abundance of nails from the true cross, and almost every city in Italy and France has one or two thorns from the true crown of thorns. Nearly every town in Sicily has one or mere teeth of Saint Agatha, the patron saint of the island. The multiplication of nearly every relic of primary interest should, of course, be sufficient to convince even the most credulous that these are nothing but pious frauds.

A report in *The Kansas City Star*, September 21, 1959, said that the Holy Robe of Christ, in a glass-enclosed case, was displayed for the first time in 26 years in the cathedral at Trier, Germany, the oldest cathedral in Germany, that during the two months of its public viewing it drew 1,800,000 pilgrims, and that the final display was attended by more than 35,600 people including Cardinal Ottaviani, pro-secretary of the Holy Office at the Vatican. About ten years ago there was returned to this country an arm of Saint Francis Xavier, famous Spanish Jesuit missionary to the Orient in the 16th century, which attracted large crowds at public showings in Los Angeles and other cities. In Spain there have been exhibited in different cathedrals two heads of John the Baptist, and in one of the cathedrals there is a magnificent ostrich feather preserved in a gorgeous case, which it is said fell from a wing of the angel Gabriel when he came to make the announcement to Mary. Perhaps the best known present day event in connection with any relic is that of the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius, patron saint of Naples, Italy, which we are told liquefies three times annually, proving that their saint still watches over the city. In Rome the Scala Sancta, the sacred stairway, exhibited as the one Jesus mounted going up to Pilate's judgment hall, is crowded continually with devout pilgrims who climb the steps on their knees, saying a prayer on each step to gain indulgences. It will be recalled that this was the stairway that Martin Luther was climbing when there dawned upon him the truth of the words, "The just shall live by faith." Luther arose from his knees, walked down the steps, and from that time did no more works of penance.

Most intriguing of all relics is "the House of Mary," or "the Holy House of Loretto," in Italy. This house is said to have been the house of the Virgin Mary at Nazareth, in Palestine. It is a stone structure about twenty-eight feet long and twelve feet wide. A booklet purporting to give the authentic history of the house as sanctioned by the Roman Church is sold to visitors. The booklet says that in this simple apartment the Virgin Mary lived with

Jesus until He grew to manhood and departed on His mission. After the crucifixion Mary continued to live in it until her death, visited frequently by the apostles and other disciples of Jesus. When Nazareth was plundered by the Roman soldiers the house was miraculously preserved in that the soldiers could not enter it or touch it. In 1291, when Palestine was overrun by the Saracens, so the booklet relates, the house was detached from its foundation by the angels, and was carried by them across the sea to Dalmatia, in Macedonia, where it was deposited on a hill. The Dalmatians gave it a friendly welcome, devoutly worshipped it, and for three years and seven months it was visited by many pilgrims. Then suddenly it removed and flew over the sea to eastern Italy, first coming to rest near the town of Loretto, about two miles from the coast. A few months later it removed again a short distance to its present home, on a hill in the town of Loretto, where it has been enshrined in a beautiful church. The Dalmatians lamented its departure, and for a long time in their prayers were wont to say: "Return to us, O beautiful lady; return to us, O beautiful lady; come back to us, O Mary, with your house." But it would not come. In its present location it is visited by many pilgrims, some of whom climb the hill leading to it on their knees, kissing the stones of the walk as they move themselves forward. This same account regarding the house of Mary is recorded by Liguori in his book, *The Glories of Mary*, 1902 edition, pp. 72-73.

The *Standard International Encyclopedia* says concerning the town of Loretto:

"It is noted as the seat of the Holy House, which according to tradition, was occupied as a dwelling by the Virgin Mary at Nazareth and, in 1295, was removed to Loretto. The building was originally of simple construction, but it has been adorned by marble sculptures. The town is visited annually by many tourists, who go there to view the structure and to witness an image of the Virgin which is reputed to be a carving by St. Luke."

That the legend concerning the house now existing in Loretto is a mere fabrication should be clear on two points: (1) Some bricks in the structure were made in an oven, while in the time of Christ bricks were sun baked; (2) the house has a chimney, while the houses of Palestine did not have chimneys, the smoke escaping through holes in the sides or roofs of the buildings.

What a varied collection of relics the Roman Church maintains to assist the faithful of its members! The whole Roman Catholic world is full of frauds of this kind, exhibited as openly and as often as seems advisable. Every Roman Catholic church is supposed to have at least one relic. The only justification that the more intelligent Romanists can give for this situation is that it is justifiable to deceive the people for their own good. But as Dr. Woods has said:

"The Church of Rome asserts that relics are intended 'to excite good thoughts and increase devotion.' But instead of doing this, for the most part they excite irreverent curiosity in careless sightseers, and disrupt true religion by exhibiting as genuine what men know to be counterfeit. The right way to 'excite good thoughts and increase devotion' is by the reverent study of God's Word and prayer. The right way to honor a good man who has passed away, is not to venerate one of his bones, but to emulate his virtues in the

service of God and our fellow men" (*Our Priceless Heritage*, p. 169).

Fraud is practiced in the Roman Church not only in exhibiting relics of the saints, but also in attributing supernatural powers to them. Each time a new saint is canonized, the church comes into possession of a new collection of relics which are alleged to have performed miracles. All of this is on a par with the customs in the pagan religions. Interestingly enough, an AP dispatch from Kandy, Ceylon, published in *The Kansas City Star*, August 20, 1959, reported that a temple elephant had run amuck through Buddhist crowds during a ceremony at the Temple of the Holy Tooth, killing 20 people and injuring 250 others. The temple houses a tooth relic of the Buddha who founded that religion 25 centuries ago, and is considered one of the most sacred spots in Buddhism. The Roman devotion to sacred relics cannot be looked upon as one whit better than the same misguided devotion paid to relics in pagan temples.

Many priests have little or no faith at all in relics, even though it is part of their work to recommend them and to supervise their use by the pious faithful. Priests who have been to Rome for any length of time lose any reverence they may have had for such things when they see the shameless traffic that is carried on in that city in bits of bones and pious objects of all kinds.

The amazing thing about this whole business is that presumably intelligent and educated Roman Catholics, clerical and lay alike, even in an enlightened country such as the United States, either tacitly accept such relics as genuine or fail to denounce them for the gross superstition that they know them to be. Veneration of such articles is of the same order as that of the heathen who, in their blindness, "bow down to wood and stone." The great lesson taught by the history of image worship and the reverencing of relics is the importance of adhering strictly to the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice.

Closely akin to the subject of relics is that of "Holy Water," so-called, which is nothing more than ordinary water with a pinch of salt added and blessed by a priest. A holy water font is found just inside the entrance in every Roman Catholic church. That is another empty superstition from the Dark Ages, borrowed from paganism, and introduced into the church in the ninth century. Pagan temples in Rome had holy water stoups or basins long before they were introduced into the Christian churches, and all of those entering were expected to sprinkle themselves.

If the reader has ever visited a Roman Catholic goods store he doubtless has seen the hundreds of statues of Mary and the saints on sale there, row on row, some highly ornamented and expensive, others quite plain, in various sizes and colors and prices. All of those are, or become, small Roman gods; for when blessed by the priest they are thought to have deep religious significance and are worshipped and given places of honor in the churches and homes. Then there are literally thousands of rosaries, crucifixes, crosses, sacred pictures, candlesticks, holy oils, incense, medals, and little charms and gadgets which the Roman Church blesses and encourages the people to use. For a Protestant it is a disturbing experience for he cannot help but feel that he is indeed in the house of the idols.

*Pilgrimages.* Another characteristic of Romanism is the idea that special merit attaches to pilgrimages made to holy places. This too is an idea that was entirely foreign to first century Christianity. Most important of the pilgrimages in our day is that to Rome. And of course no one must go empty-handed. Pope Boniface VIII (died 1303) proclaimed a jubilee with plenary indulgences granted to all who visited Rome, and the project brought such crowds and such a great amount of money that it has been repeated periodically ever since, the most recent having been the Marian year proclaimed by Pope Pius XII, in 1954, this after having promulgated the doctrine of the assumption of Mary in 1950. During the Middle Ages much virtue was thought to attach to a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Plenary indulgences were offered to those who joined the Crusades in an attempt to wrest the Holy Lands from the Mohammedans. Pilgrimages have been much in vogue in pagan religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Mohammedanism (that to Mecca being the most famous), as a means of pleasing the god or gods who are worshipped and of accumulating merit.

Famous, too, as pilgrimage cities, are Lourdes, in extreme southwestern France, and Fatima, in Portugal. At Lourdes the Virgin Mary allegedly appeared to a 14-year-old peasant girl, Bernadette Soubirous, in 1858. When Bernadette dug in a certain place as commanded by Mary, a spring of water with curative powers was uncovered. The Basilica of the Rosary was later erected on the site and every year tens of thousands of pilgrims visit the place in search of cures. Thousands of cures have been claimed, but the Roman Church officially claims but very few. Hardly more than one person in a thousand is actually helped, and those frequently are psychological cures, on the order of those sometimes achieved by the Christian Scientists and other faith healers. Yet the Roman church promotes pilgrimages to Lourdes. The place is now highly commercialized, and directly and indirectly is a source of revenue for the church. We notice, however, that when a pope gets sick he does not go to Lourdes, but instead secures the best medical help available—as was the case with the late Pius XII.

In recent years the shrine of Fatima, Portugal, has become even more popular than that at Lourdes, with as many as 700,000 people said to have visited it in a single month. There, in 1917, shortly before the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, the Virgin Mary appeared to three children, ages from ten to thirteen, who had never gone to school and, curiously enough, in messages subsequently released by the church, gave warnings against the evils of Communism, messages having more to do with present day relations between the Vatican and Russia than with anything that might be thought to concern children of those tender ages. Rome's promotion of the Fatima shrine has been coupled with her crusade against Communism.

In our western world the two most important shrines are Our Lady of Guadalupe, on the outskirts of Mexico City, and Ste. Anne de Beaupre, in Quebec. After Cortez' conquest of Mexico the Romanists practically forced their religion upon the Mexican people. Cortez and his soldiers took Mexico City. With them were a number of priests. Some of the Indians eventually were converted, despite the greed and cruelty of the Spanish soldiers. But not many could be persuaded to worship the Virgin Mary because she was not an

Indian—hence the invention of “The Virgin of Guadalupe,” in reality a Mexican goddess who was absorbed into the Roman system.

According to tradition “The Virgin” appeared to Juan Diego, an uneducated Indian, who was one of the converts, and told him that the Indian people should build a temple in her honor and that she would be their protector. At first no one would believe his story. But an allegedly miraculous picture of the Virgin imprinted on his cloak proved convincing. A giant church eventually was erected in honor of the Virgin at the place where he had seen the vision. The cloak with its picture is still preserved in the church. All indications are, however, that priestly influence was behind the entire project, and that Juan Diego was merely its tool. At any rate, today thousands of Mexicans, some of whom “walk” on their knees for miles before reaching the church, visit the shrine to bow to the image of the Virgin and to those of the saints.

The shrine of Ste. Anne de Beaupre is located on the north bank of the St. Lawrence River, about 20 miles northeast of the city of Quebec. It was dedicated to Saint Anne, who according to early legend was the mother of Mary. It is visited annually by thousands from the United States and Canada. Large numbers of crutches and canes are exhibited, allegedly left by cripples who received miraculous cures.

Religious parades or processions are common to all Roman Catholic countries. In Spain they have the procession in which the image of the “Señor Jesus del Gran Poder” is paraded; and in Portugal that of the Señor de los Pasos.” In Peru they have the procession of “The Lord of Miracles,” in which a large image of Jesus is carried through the streets, to which the people give special veneration and of which they ask all kinds of favors— healings, success in business, happiness in love, luck in the lottery, etc. Thousands of people participate in these parades, carrying burning tapers, counting their rosaries, forming a guard of honor for the painted and clothed images. But such images and parades are totally ineffective in teaching anything about Christ and the way of salvation, for the people know practically nothing about who He is or what He taught.

## **6 Prayers for the Dead**

A common practice in the Roman Church is that of praying for the dead. This is closely connected with and is a logical consequence of their doctrine of purgatory. The high Anglican Church, which holds a position about half way between Roman Catholicism and representative Protestantism, also follows that custom. But practically all Protestant churches reject it.

Prayers for the dead imply that their state has not yet been fixed, and that it can be improved at our request. We hold, however, that there is no change of character or of destiny after death, and that what the person is at death he remains throughout all eternity. We find an abundance of Scripture teaching to the effect that this world only is the place of opportunity for salvation, and that when this probation or testing period is past, only the assignment of rewards and punishments remains. Consequently we hold that all prayers, baptisms, masses, or other rituals of whatever kind for the dead are

superfluous, vain, and unscriptural.

As for the righteous dead, they are in the immediate presence of Christ, in a perfect environment of holiness and beauty and glory where their every need is satisfied. They have no need of any petitions from us. They lack nothing that our prayers can supply. Their state is as perfect as it can be until the day when they and we receive our resurrected bodies. To petition God to change the status or condition of His loved ones in glory, or to suggest that He is not doing enough for them, is, to say the least, highly presumptuous, even though it may be well intended.

As for the wicked dead, their state too is fixed and irrevocable. They have had their opportunity. They have sinned away their day of grace, and the uplifting and restraining influence of the Holy Spirit as directed toward them has been withdrawn. It is understandable that remaining relatives and friends should be concerned about them. But the determination of their status after death is the prerogative of God alone. The holiness and justice of God are all-sufficient guarantees that while some by His grace will be rewarded far above their deserts, none will be punished beyond their deserts. Consequently, the dead in Christ have no need of our prayers; and for the dead out of Christ, prayers can avail nothing.

It is very significant that in Scripture we have not one single instance of prayer for the dead, nor any admonition to that end. In view of the many admonitions for prayer for those in this world, even admonitions to pray for our enemies, the silence of Scripture regarding prayer for the dead would seem to be unexplainable if it availed anything.

## **7 Conclusion**

Such is the background of ritualism and superstition against which the Roman Catholic people have to struggle. Forms and ceremonies and rich clerical vestments impress the eye, but they deaden the soul to spiritual truth. They are like opiates in that they take the attention of the worshipper and cause him to forget the truths they were originally intended to convey. By absorbing his attention they tend to hide God rather than to reveal Him. And the people, like wide-eyed children at a circus, see the showy ritualism but nothing of the shoddy meanness that lies behind it.

Most Roman Catholics have a fear of entering a Protestant church. They have been forbidden by their priests to do so, under penalty of mortal sin. It is a revealing experience, therefore, when for the first time they are persuaded to do so. They find no images, no musing angels, no confessional, no incense, no mention of purgatory or of salvation by good works, no penance, indulgences, etc. Instead they hear the simple Gospel message and a plain invitation to accept Christ as Savior. The sermon is delivered in English, not in Latin which they cannot understand, as in the mass. And with a minimum of ritualism, they find that the sermon is the principal part of the service. How rich they find the hymnology of the Protestant church, and how free and spontaneous the singing! The Roman Church has nothing to sing about. The best it can promise is the flames of purgatory, of greater or lesser intensity and of longer or shorter duration, depending on how good or bad their works have

been.

Multitudes of Roman Catholics, ensnared in a religion that teaches salvation by works and merit, are searching for the truth that makes men free. Protestantism has that truth, due largely to its emphasis on the reading and study of the Bible. That truth is set forth as a life to be lived, not as a formula or a ritual. Its emphasis is upon a change of heart and a life of fruitful service. It behooves us as Protestants, therefore, to see to it that when Roman Catholics do come to our churches, where they miss the ritual and pageantry and the outward things that so appeal to the senses, they find compensating values—first of all an evangelical sermon, and then a group fellowship that is spiritually uplifting and rewarding beyond anything that they have experienced in the more formal church.

Continued in the next chapter: [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Chapter XIV Celibacy](#)

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