

Test all things

*An invitation
to examine your
Catholic faith
in the light of
Scripture*



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Preface

God commands us in Scripture to “test all things; hold fast what is good.”¹ The roots of the Roman Catholic religion reach back to the early Christian church, as witnessed by a precious heritage of holy and orthodox doctrines embraced and defended by the modern Catholic Church. Sadly, like Israel of old, the churches of Christ are not immune to contamination by the leaven of false doctrine and heresy. The church of Rome is no exception. Throughout the centuries, human traditions were introduced, often insidiously, resulting in a significant distortion of the original apostolic faith.

The purpose of this book is certainly not to tear down everything Catholic, but to provide an opportunity to test important Catholic doctrines in the light of Scripture. Consider it a spring-cleaning of the house of your faith, not its demolition. I hope that you would arrive at a better understanding of the all-important Gospel message, the power of God for salvation to all who believe in Christ. Test everything. Hold on to the good.

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1 What will it profit a man?

The Lord Jesus challenges our world and life view: “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?”²

Our age is increasingly materialistic. People are crazily driven to seek comforts and pleasures to such an extent that they are entirely oblivious of eternal verities. Life seems to have become a short trip from the maternity ward to the cemetery. That’s all. Apparently a huge vacuum lies beyond the grave. Admittedly, most western nations have made great economic and social progress, but can the world’s affluence even begin to be compared to our soul’s salvation? What will we be able to carry over to the next life?

I was raised up in a Roman Catholic family. My parents always taught me to believe that God exists, and that there is an eternal destiny for all: either in heaven or in hell. From childhood I was trained to think about my relationship with the Creator and about eternal life. I am so thankful to God for my parents: they have certainly given me a good start. I am now writing this book to my Catholic friends, who have similarly taken notice of Christ’s solemn warning. We would all be losers if we manage to accumulate what this world has to offer only to be consigned to an eternal punishment in hell.

As a Roman Catholic I was sure of walking along the right path. I was aware of other roads that lead to perdition. Jesus Himself had warned us: “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.”³ But I had hardly anything to worry about. As a member of the Catholic Church, the true church of Christ, I knew what a great heritage I enjoyed within her bosom. I only had to pay attention, lest I would be led astray by other religions and fall away into the wide road that leads to destruction.

Quite unexpectedly my brother accosted me one day and remarked, “Did you know that we go to heaven by faith in Christ, apart from the merits of our good works?”

“Nonsense,” I readily retorted, “we acquire salvation both by faith as well as by our good works.” Animatedly, I continued to defend the Catholic religion. He read out some portions of Scripture; I remained unconvinced.

I soon learned what had happened. My brother had been confronted by some Irish tourists, evangelical Christians, to be exact. They met with him several times, and apparently had won him over to their religion. Naturally enough, I felt sorry for him. I was worried how he had deviated from the teaching of Mother Church, and since I had implicit trust in the doctrine of my church, I resolved to study the Holy Bible for myself with the purpose of convicting him of his error. For several months I continued to pester him, making every attempt to turn him back to the fold.

Many years have now elapsed since that wintry evening. Today I too, like my brother, am an evangelical Christian. My convictions have changed radically. I confess today that I am saved simply through my faith in Christ alone; my good works have nothing to do in order to merit eternal life.

But I assure you that I have not changed in everything. My love for all Catholics has not diminished in the least. Rather it has been strengthened.

Truth and salvation

I sincerely desire to share the good news about Jesus Christ with Catholics; all the more since I know what zeal they can display towards God. Nevertheless religious zeal is no guarantee of truth or salvation. The apostle Paul sorrowfully mentions his own countrymen, the Jews. He says: "For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge."⁴

The Jews assumed that they were treading on the path of life. After all they enjoyed a rich tradition going back to the times of the patriarchs, to Moses and the prophets. They were distinctively religious; they fasted, prayed regularly, gave alms and worshipped God. Perhaps you too are prone to reason: "I am a member in a church backed up by a tradition dating back to Christ and His apostles; I attend Mass and confess to the priest; I make every attempt to obey the commandments and I am not forgetful of the poor and needy. How can I be in error?"

In spite of their religion and tradition those devout Jews were lost. They did not know God. Unknowingly they were on their way to hell, yet tragically, they were sure of being in the right. The apostle Paul testifies: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved."⁵ In spite of their self-confidence, in reality they were still lost and in need of salvation. Why? Because their devotion did not agree with the truth of God's Word. They thought that they had the privilege of drinking from the pure water of life whereas, in fact, they were drinking poisoned water. Do you dare, then, to wait until the Day of Judgement to discover where you really stand? It would be too late then. Do not confuse religious zeal with the truth. They should exist together, but often they do not.

Your own eternal destiny is at stake. Are you acquainted with the truth, God's message of salvation to humanity? Quite appropriately we shall tackle this question first of all.

2 God's Word is truth

Left to our own resources we can never come to know God in truth. Scripture unequivocally states that “the world through wisdom did not know God.”⁶ Man has invented many gods and countless religions, but by himself he is unable to find the true and living God.

How then can we ever come to know the Creator, the Lord of heaven and earth? The biblical answer is both simple and sublime: God makes Himself known to us. God has spoken. Throughout history God communicated His message to man through His appointed messengers, the prophets and the apostles. They were “holy men of God [who] spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”⁷ The mighty miracles they performed by God’s power witness to the fact that they were the voice of God on earth.

God’s self-manifestation reached its pinnacle in the coming of His Son, Jesus Christ. God “has in these last days spoken to us by His Son”⁸ Jesus is the Word of God, the perfect image of the invisible God, the truth, God with us! God’s revelation is now complete, and the Christian church is duty-bound “to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”⁹ We should not be looking for some new message, but we should learn and believe what God already said.

The Scriptures

We happen to be on the scene long centuries after the prophets, Jesus and His apostles. How can we know God’s revelation entrusted to them? How can we know what they taught? In His wisdom, God saw to it that His Word would be recorded in written form, and this process culminated in what we know today as the Holy Bible. Moses and Paul have died, but their doctrine is still extant in their writings. Though Jesus ascended into heaven, we can still know what He said and did in the pages of the four Gospels.

The Bible has a dual authorship. It was written by various men (Ezekiel, Luke, Matthew and others) and at the same time it is the Word of God. The Holy Spirit guided the human authors to write exactly what He wanted them to write, no more and no less. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.”¹⁰ When we open the Holy Bible we should always keep in mind that we are reading God’s book. There is no need to doubt the words of Scripture for God can neither lie nor err. In praying to the Father, Jesus said: “Your word is truth.”¹¹

Tradition

The concept of “tradition” per se is perfectly acceptable. Tradition simply means teachings and practices transmitted by example, verbal and written means. That is the way we share our faith (through sermons, books, articles, personal

witness and other means) with one another, and with the next generation of Christians. Now of course, traditions may be true or false; traditions may have their origin in God or in the human mind. The Bible uses the word “tradition” to describe both false and true teachings.¹²

In Scripture we do not expect to find everything the prophets, the apostles and the Lord Jesus ever said. However what is recorded is sufficient to teach us the way of salvation, and that’s the point. “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”¹³ The Bible does not give exhaustive information, but what is sufficient to know God in truth.

It is dangerous to seek spiritual information outside the Scriptures, assuming that there are other crucial doctrines absent in the written Word. Sad to say, the Jews committed this grave error. They were not content to rely solely upon the books of Scripture; alongside these, they held “tradition” in high esteem. The teachings of their forefathers acquired an authority similar to that of Scripture, and the result was tragic. Listen to Jesus’ own evaluation of tradition:

“Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honours Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men...making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down.”¹⁴

God will not approve of our religion if it is not grounded upon His revelation as recorded in Scripture. Neither will He be pleased with that kind of worship based on Scripture mangled by tradition.

The Catholic Church receives Scripture as the Word of God, but alongside Scripture she places tradition, which supposedly brings to us the teachings of Christ and His apostles in a living way. Vatican Council II states: “Thus it comes about that the Church does not draw her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Hence, both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honoured with equal feelings of devotion and reverence.”¹⁵

According to the church of Rome, Scripture is not enough. The church places tradition on a par with the Bible. History repeats itself. The Jewish nation, as custodian of the Scripture, added its own sacred tradition; the Catholic Church similarly elevates tradition and esteems it just as reliable as Scripture. Doesn’t such a position make you uneasy? Remember God’s judgement: “In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”

Of course the Catholic Church maintains that her tradition is the Word of God and not “commandments of men.” Nevertheless, if it can be proved that

Catholic tradition is nothing else but “the commandments of men,” then we must conclude that Roman Catholic worship is useless before God.

In subsequent chapters we will mention several conflicts between Scripture and the teaching of the Catholic Church. To give just one instance at this stage, we may refer to the use of statues in worship. The second Commandment (not generally taught to Catholics) reads as follows:

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.”¹⁶

At face value this commandment is quite straightforward. Nevertheless the Catholic Church permits and even encourages her laity to bow down and pray before statues of Christ, Mary and other saints. A number of arguments are put forward to justify this practice, but whatever reasons might be given, at the end of the day the fact remains that God prohibits such religious use of graven images. The authority of His Law is final, and if we feel free to lay it aside, then we fall into the same condemnation as the Jews of Jesus’ day: “All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition”¹⁷

Teachers are subject to Scripture

The Lord gave leaders and teachers to the church in order to have His Word proclaimed and explained. We are meant to follow them as they follow Christ, but it must be kept in mind that not everyone who claims to be a “minister of Christ” is necessarily genuine. The Lord Jesus warned us: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.”¹⁸ So you will have no excuse on the Day of Judgement if you would have followed false teachers. Be on the alert: “If the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch”¹⁹

But what kind of test should you apply to know whether a certain teacher is a minister of Christ or not? The prophet is known by his teaching, in the same way as a tree is known by its fruits. If anyone claims to teach God’s Word, yet in actual fact he contradicts Scripture, he is thereby proved to be a liar and deceiver.²⁰ Be sure that you are building your house upon the solid rock of God’s infallible Word.

The apostle Paul and Silas preached the gospel to the people in Berea, who welcomed the message with enthusiasm, but they did not stop there. They made it a point to search the Scriptures for themselves, privately, to check the doctrine they had heard from Paul and his companion. “They received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.”²¹ Luke, the author of Acts, calls them “fair-minded.” May you

be granted such a disposition of mind so that you too would be willing to test the teaching which you learned since childhood in the light of the Bible.

Can I understand Scripture?

God communicated with men in human language. The Bible is not some mysterious book. Its separate books were not addressed to recognized theologians, the clergy and wise men, but to the covenant people of God. For instance, the letters penned by Paul, Peter, James and John were sent to all Christians indiscriminately. "I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren,"²² ordered the apostle Paul at the conclusion of his first letter to the Thessalonians. It would have been to no purpose should the letter be read out publicly if it was too difficult to understand. God spoke in such a fashion that His message would prove beneficial and helpful to us. "The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple."²³

You can understand the Bible if you read it diligently. Of course you will never appreciate Scripture if you leave it a closed book. Neither will you profit from it if you read it with an attitude of pride, as if you are sitting in judgement over it. Again, never try to approach Scripture assuming that you are wiser than its Author, or with the intention of twisting its plain meaning in order to justify your present beliefs. You will understand the Bible only if you read and meditate upon it with due humility, with faith, with the intention of obeying it and thus magnifying the Lord Jesus Christ in your life. Trust only in the Holy Spirit, who gave us Scripture and is therefore able to make its meaning known to you. Only the Lord can grant you wisdom to grasp His message. "He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures."²⁴

Scripture is enough

Have you ever desired to have lived in the time of Christ? What an experience it would have been to hear the words of eternal life as they issued from His lips! "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" What do you think He would have answered? There's no need to guess. On one occasion a certain lawyer posed this same question to the Lord Jesus. He answered: "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?"²⁵ The Lord referred him to Scripture, and that answer applies to us all. In Scripture we find the correct and full answer with regards to our eternal salvation. You may be confident that it will not disappoint you. There's no need for human philosophy or tradition. The contents of Scripture are sufficient for all our spiritual needs.

The Holy Scriptures "are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."²⁶ Where can you find truth? Where can you be taught the way of salvation? Don't ever forget the answer: the Holy Scriptures!

3 Built upon Christ

On whom is the church built? Who is her Head?

The Bible exhorts all the faithful: “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught.”²⁷ The church is built upon Christ, as proclaimed by God’s chosen messengers. “Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.”²⁸ The Bible clearly states that Jesus is the foundation of the church: “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”²⁹

Who is the Head and Leader of the church? The Bible answers: “Christ is head of the church; and He is the Saviour of the body.”³⁰ The beloved Son of God “is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence.”³¹ Christ alone holds the primacy in the church! Jesus rules His church from His throne in heaven, by the Holy Spirit whom He sent after His ascension, according to the rule of His Word written in Scripture and through the office of His faithful ministers, the pastors and teachers.

Upon this rock

The Catholic Church affords different answers. “The Lord made Simon alone, whom he named Peter, the ‘rock’ of his Church.” “The Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, and as pastor of the entire Church has full, supreme and universal power over the whole Church.”³²

To evaluate properly these statements, we must first of all acquaint ourselves with the portion of Scripture the Catholic Church uses as evidence for the pope’s authority:

“When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, ‘Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?’ So they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.’”³³

When I was still a school-boy, our teacher told us the church is built upon Peter, because Peter means “rock.” Later on I was quite surprised to learn that

“Peter” (petros) and “rock” (petra) are two distinct words with separate meanings. The Catholic interpretation assumes that “Peter” and “rock” are strictly synonymous, whereas they are not.

Christ builds His church upon the rock. The question is: What is this solid rock upon which the house of God rests? The subject of Matthew 16 is not Peter, but the true and full identity of Jesus. The rock is therefore the Peter’s confession, namely, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” After all, both Paul and Peter describe Jesus Christ as “the rock” (petra).³⁴ Elsewhere Scripture asks, “For who is God, except the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God?”³⁵

You may perhaps consider that the above is a novel interpretation of this important text. Although some Church Fathers explain “this rock” to mean Peter or the apostles, many of them interpret the rock to mean Christ Himself or else Peter’s confession about Christ. For instance, Augustine of Hippo writes: “Therefore,’ he saith, ‘Thou art Peter; and upon this Rock’ which thou has confessed, upon this rock which thou hath acknowledged, saying, ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,’ will I build My Church; that is upon Myself, the Son of the Living God, ‘will I build My Church. I will build thee upon Myself, not Myself upon Thee’”³⁶

Interestingly enough, even today’s Catholic Church admits that this is a correct interpretation. In her Catechism, paragraph 424, we read: “Moved by the grace of the Holy Spirit and drawn by the Father, we believe in Jesus and confess: ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ On the rock of this faith confessed by St Peter, Christ built his Church [emphasis mine].” Truly, the rock is the faith confessed by Peter. How then does the Catholic Church contend that “The Lord made Simon alone, whom He named Peter, the rock of his Church”?

The apostle Peter

Peter was an outstanding leader in the early church. He is consistently mentioned first in the list of the apostles; he is often their spokesman; and he had the privilege of first preaching the Gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. Peter was prominent, but that does not mean that he was a pope. Prominence is altogether different from a “full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the whole church.”³⁷ The Catholic bishop of New York may be more prominent than the bishop of Malta, yet the former does not exercise authority over the latter.

We all agree that Christ gave authority to Peter. “And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” At issue is whether this authority was unique to Peter. Evidently it was not, for soon afterwards Jesus gave exactly the same authority to all the apostles, “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”³⁸ Hence Peter had an authority identical to that of the other apostles; not an authority over them.

Peter and his fellow-apostles never understood the Lord's saying as appointing Peter to be the chief leader and the head of the entire church. Even on the eve of Christ's crucifixion "there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest."³⁹ The Lord did not remind them what He had said earlier to Peter in Caesarea. He only told them that they should not exercise lordship over the people as the kings of the Gentiles do, but rather to be servants of the church.

Peter took the lesson to heart. Although he was so prominent in the early church, Peter simply called himself an apostle and servant of Jesus Christ. In addressing elders, he referred to himself as "a fellow elder," but never is it intimated that he is absolute leader, or pope, or even the chief among the apostles, or the vicar of Christ, or universal bishop. The Catholic Church calls Peter the church's "supreme shepherd." Peter disagrees; on the contrary, he calls Christ, and not himself, "the Chief Shepherd."⁴⁰

According to the witness of the New Testament, Peter did not exercise supreme authority over the whole church. So, even if the bishop of Rome were his successor, he would have no right to call himself universal bishop.

Not only so, the bishop of Rome has no right to Peter's apostolic authority. Beside the temple gate, Peter and John met a lame man. The invalid expected alms from them. Instead, Peter told him: "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."⁴¹ The lame man instantly leaped up, stood and walked, praising God. The bishop of Rome claims to be Peter's successor, but he can hardly say, "Silver and gold I do not have." Much less does he exercise the miraculous power with which God endowed the apostle Peter. I do not make this observation disrespectfully, but since the pope pretends to such lofty titles, we are entitled to examine his credentials too.

The struggle for power

The Lord never gave authority over the whole church to the bishop of Rome or to some other person. The power and influence wielded by the Vatican today were gained gradually through much political and religious intrigue over the centuries. According to Scripture, presbyters are called to take care of the local church. Nevertheless, as early as the second century, it became fashionable for one presbyter to have jurisdiction over other presbyters, and act as chief leader (known as the bishop).

In the fourth century, Emperor Constantine, and others succeeding him, showered the bishops with many honours since Christianity had become the empire's official religion. The highest dignity was accorded to the bishops of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. Several bishops of Rome, particularly Leo I and Gregory the Great endeavoured with all their might to enhance their own prestige and that of the church of Rome. The main battle was fought out between the bishops of the two main cities of the empire:

Rome and Constantinople, and the rivalry and pique between them grew to such an extent that eventually Christendom suffered a schism in the eleventh century. The effect can still be seen today: the Roman Catholic Church on one hand and the Greek Orthodox church on the other.

The patriarch of Constantinople, John IV, assumed the title of “Universal Bishop.” Pope Gregory I (590-604) readily rebuked him for his arrogance, declaring that the title was proud and foolish, that it came from the devil, and that it was unfit for any Christian bishop to use. Ironically, his successor, Pope Boniface III, became the recipient of the title “Universal Bishop.” This appellation, originally given by the wicked emperor Phocas, is still inherited by the leader of the Roman church to this very day.

Who is your Rock?

If the pope had been accorded the title “Universal Bishop” by the Lord Jesus, we would be duty-bound to submit to him. The biblical and historical facts, however, do not warrant us to take such a step. In spite of this, the pope declares that for salvation, it is absolutely necessary for people to be subject to him.⁴² Vatican II asserts that “it is only through Christ's Catholic Church, which is ‘the all-embracing means of salvation,’ that they can benefit fully from the means of salvation.”⁴³ The apostle Peter did not teach so. He did not exalt himself or the church of Rome, because salvation is not in the hands of some human leader or the monopoly of a particular church. Peter was intent on preaching Jesus Christ, for as he said: “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”⁴⁴

Whom will you believe? To whom will you entrust your soul’s salvation? The Lord Jesus blessed Simon Peter in confessing Him, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” If like Peter you believe wholeheartedly that Jesus is the promised Messiah, God’s unique Son, trusting your salvation in His hands, you too will receive unspeakable blessing from above and eternal life.⁴⁵ How I wish that this Psalm will be your song:

“Truly my soul silently waits for God; from Him comes my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved.”⁴⁶

4 Guilty!

God is the Creator and all-powerful King of the universe. He fashioned all nations and takes care of every individual. It is consequently not only our responsibility, but also our privilege to glorify Him and render unto Him grateful and joyful obedience. A God-given conscience outlines for us what is right and wrong; moreover we were taught the Ten Commandments from our infancy. Undoubtedly our main duty is to love God with all our hearts, and to love our neighbour even as we love ourselves.

In the beginning, when the Lord created our first parents, Adam and Eve, He placed them in the Garden of Eden. Their whole blessedness depended on their obedience towards Him. “The LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’”⁴⁷ Perfect obedience leads to life and friendly fellowship with God; disobedience brings misery and death. The options were laid out clearly.

Adam ate the forbidden fruit. He disregarded God’s command and thus became a sinner, guilty before his Maker. Adam’s transgression brought a curse upon the whole creation. Not only so: since Adam was the representative head of the human race, his sin is justly reckoned as the sin of all. Scripture teaches that “through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation... by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners.”⁴⁸

We are sinners by nature. Just as seeds taken from a corrupt tree give rise to similarly corrupt trees, even so, as Adam’s descendants, we were conceived sinners, exactly as our father was. Every person makes decisions according to his own will, nobody compelling him, but, being a sinner, all his thought, words and actions are tainted with sin. As it was in the days before the Flood, it could be said of every individual that “every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”⁴⁹

Man holds an inflated opinion of himself. “Weaknesses” and “mistakes” brushed aside, he is convinced of his essentially “good heart.” Scripture, however, presents an altogether contrary diagnosis: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.”⁵⁰ Is it conceivable that spiritual good can issue out of a deceitful heart? Do we pick figs from a bramble-bush, or grapes from thorns? Even so, man born enslaved to sin cannot produce acceptable righteousness before the thrice-holy God.

How serious is my sin?

The vileness and gravity of sin appear from God’s just punishment meted out to the sinner. “The wages of sin is death”⁵¹ - not only physical death, but spiritual death as well, that is, the exile of man from the comfortable presence of God in the conscious and eternal punishment of hell. Whatever sin it might be, its

inevitable payment is death. There is no such thing as a “venial” sin, which supposedly is not serious enough to deserve death.

Some sins are worse than others and there will be different degrees of punishment in hell.⁵² Anger or a lustful look are not as serious as murder or adultery. Yet Jesus warns us that anger deserves punishment just as murder does, and a lustful look is just as punishable as the act of adultery.⁵³ Moreover, the Lord makes no distinction as if some sins deserve death while others do not. Every sinner deserves to be punished in hell forever.

This truth must be etched upon our heart. By our sins we challenge the sovereign and holy God, the fount of all blessedness. He sits enthroned in His Temple, surrounded by holy and spotless seraphims, who nonetheless cannot endure to gaze upon the brightness of His glorious majesty. They hide their faces and unceasingly say, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts!” Can we begin to comprehend the heinousness of our rebelliousness and treasonous heart in defying the will of the one true and living God? Undoubtedly, God is upright and just in meting out punishment for sin - every kind of sin! - and its punishment is nothing less than the darkness of death, the eternal separation from Him who is light.

People underplay the issues: “What’s so baneful in enjoying a bite of forbidden fruit? After all, it looked quite inviting. Was God really prepared to punish Adam with death simply for tasting a piece of fruit?” God had solemnly warned his creature, “You shall surely die.” Satan begged to differ - “You will not surely die.”⁵⁴ In my career as a medical doctor I frequently meet face to face with death. I have seen adults, elderly and even infants die. Death’s chill, the tears and sorrow, constantly remind me of Satan’s deceit and of the sinfulness of man.

Whom are you going to believe: God, or the father of lies? Don’t be led astray: every transgression of the Law of God is deadly sin.

All these things have I kept!

The hour will come when you will appear before God for judgement. “He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained.” “For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ... So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.”⁵⁵ Sobering and solemn thoughts, indeed.

What will the outcome be? When God will search your innermost being and all your deeds, do you think He will pronounce you righteous or will He condemn you? The sin of every man is evident. You have often striven against your own conscience. Nevertheless, the sinner is prone to excuse himself. He shifts the blame on someone else, “She forced me”; he minimises sin, “God will certainly overlook a white lie”; he hides himself in the crowd, “Everybody else is does the same”; and such other banal excuses. The religious person has an even greater

problem because his “goodness” blinds him to his own wicked and ungodly heart.

In the Gospels we read of a rich young ruler who excitedly ran to meet Jesus. He prostrated himself before Him and asked: “Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?”⁵⁶ Perhaps you too are driven by an earnest desire to rid yourself of hell’s punishment and obtain eternal life. Consider carefully, then, the Lord’s reply:

“If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments... You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, honour your father and your mother, and, you shall love your neighbour as yourself.”⁵⁷

A fearful answer, I should say! How can we ever enter into life? Who among us has ever kept the commandments of God? Scripture itself indicts us all: “There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one.”⁵⁸

To the extent that Christ’s directive is terrifying, the youth’s response is ridiculous. He bragged: “All these things I have kept from my youth.” How come? If he had never lied, certainly he did lie then! Christ brought him face to face with the perfect Law of God and yet he did not perceive the filthiness and enormity of his sin. Only then did the Lord Jesus put His finger on the sore spot. Since he pretended having obeyed the second tablet of the Law, it would never have crossed his mind of having broken the first tablet, introduced by the all-comprehensive commandment, “You shall have no other gods before Me.”

The inquirer thought he was worshipping the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; he professed to detest pagan idols made of wood and stone, but tucked away in his heart, the youth cherished another ‘god.’ Jesus therefore told him: “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”⁵⁹ Emmanuel, ‘God with us,’ extended a personal invitation to him, to obey the foremost commandment and be loyal to Him. The youth could not: his allegiance was elsewhere, he was serving wealth, his ‘god.’ So he departed, without realising his sinfulness and much less who the ‘good Teacher’ really was, the true God, Redeemer and Life.

The Lord Jesus wants you to examine yourself thoroughly in the light of the holy Law of God. Don’t brush this exercise aside, saying, “I’ve committed a few mistakes, but all in all, I’m good.” Every sin, whether heinous or apparently petty, is essentially breaking the Law of God; it is an upstart against God’s wise and benevolent government. Do you still congratulate yourself, saying conceitedly, “I’m fine as I am”? If so, God despises your pride and hypocrisy. As long as you consider yourself righteous, Christ will not save you. Should you think that your sin may be treated lightly, you will see no reason of applying to the unique Doctor for the soul. Jesus said: “Those who are well have no need of

a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”⁶⁰

To be brief, had Adam never sinned and if we had, without the least failure, obeyed the Law from birth onwards, we would obtain life. As the apostle Paul says: “The man who does them shall live by them.” In reality, everyone is born in sin and the matter of fact is that no mere man ever kept the whole Law without defect. That’s why the same apostle continues: “But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident.”⁶¹

Had the Law been the only entrance into life, you would have had no possibility to enjoy God in heaven. Our transgressions will witness against us and will bar our way to heaven.

The Law brings us to Christ

Since we cannot earn life by our obedience, then what’s the whole point of the Law? Paul explains one of its main purposes as follows: “Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”⁶²

The Law resembles a mirror. Looking steadfastly into it you will come to realise how spiritually unclean you really are, but of course it cannot wash you clean. To employ another simile: the Law acts like an x-ray, penetrating beyond the surface and revealing your heart, sick unto death, but it cannot heal you. Only the Lord Jesus Christ is able to wash sinners from their filth and give them a new heart.

As a teenager I remember reading the Sermon on the Mount. I was much impressed and resolved to adopt it as my rule of life. I did my very best, but it eventually dawned upon me that the more I endeavoured to keep the standard, the more my frustration increased and my failure became apparent. How could I ever be perfect even as the heavenly Father is perfect?

But the Lord was teaching me a simple yet profound lesson. Simple, I said, but so difficult a lesson for a “good” teenager to grasp. The “good” teenager is a guilty sinner! Then I began to appreciate the Lord Jesus Christ; I began to understand what the Bible means when it speaks about the grace of God manifested so bountifully on Calvary. Only then was my soul ready to flee to Christ for refuge.

Initially God deals with man on Mount Sinai, creating a wholesome fear of judgement and a sure conviction of sin. God again deals with the sinner on Calvary’s hill. There He bestows full forgiveness, freedom and life. God’s use of His Law would have reached its fundamental purpose: “Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.”⁶³

5 Justified!

The biblical doctrine of Justification is the very heart of the Gospel. It is so central to the Christian faith that the Holy Scripture curses anyone who perverts it.⁶⁴ This doctrine deals with the question of how God, the righteous Judge of the world, actually pronounces a favourable sentence on men who are guilty of breaking His law. How can He who detests sin acquit us of the punishment due to our transgressions, and receive us into His fellowship?

All of us are born sinners by virtue of Adam's sin put to our account. Adam, the first man and father of the human race, was our representative. Therefore when he sinned, we fell with him. "Through one man's offence judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation."⁶⁵ Moreover, we daily increase our debt with every sin of commission and omission, in word, thought and deed. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."⁶⁶

How then can a person be righteous before God? According to Scripture, there is only one way, and that is to be justified by faith in Christ. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."⁶⁷

God justifies the ungodly

Roman Catholics are taught that justification is initiated in baptism and that justification merely "conforms us to the righteousness of God, who makes us *inwardly just* by the power of his mercy."⁶⁸ According to this position, the sinner is made righteous or "inwardly just" and if he manages to maintain this righteousness to the end, through the sacraments, good works and penances, God will finally reward him with eternal life.

Can anyone hope to be justified because he receives divine help to reform, clean and make himself righteous? Does God look at such a man at the end of this process and declare, "He is justified because he is now a good and righteous fellow"? No! The Gospel does not say that God justifies the "godly." On the contrary, the Scriptures triumphantly announce the amazing truth that God justifies the "ungodly"!

The apostle Paul writes: "Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness."⁶⁹

God graciously justifies the believing sinner even though he is *ungodly*. This proves that justification is not based on personal righteousness. Nor does God justify the sinner because he does his utmost to convert himself and become a good man. God justifies those who have no good deeds to their credit – only "him who does not work but believes" is counted as righteous by God. This is the true gospel, comforting balm for the poor sinner's soul! "Not by works of

righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.”⁷⁰

Well then, how can God justify the believer, seeing that he is still a sinner? Negatively, God does not charge his sins against him any longer. “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute (does not charge) sin.”⁷¹ Positively, God credits to the believing sinner a perfect righteousness for which he has neither striven for nor earned by his endeavours. “David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes (credits to one’s account) righteousness apart from works.”⁷²

In other words, God does not account the believer’s sins against him but credits to him a righteousness for which he did not work. This raises serious and important questions. Is God just when he justifies the believer, since he is still a sinner and sin ought to be punished? Does God simply disregard the Law in order to show mercy?

The Bible answers these questions clearly. God justifies the sinner because of what Christ, His Son, did for the sake of His people.

The apostle Paul explains that believers are justified “through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”⁷³ God frees them from condemnation because Jesus bought their liberty with His own blood. Jesus took away their guilt when He suffered and died on the cross in their place. The cross of Calvary is the eternal proof of the justice of God in the salvation of sinners: “to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be *just* and the *justifier* of the one who has faith in Jesus.”⁷⁴ God is both just and the justifier: *just* because sin has been punished in Christ; *justifier* because through Christ, God frees the believer from guilt and punishment.

Moreover His people are credited with Christ’s righteousness even though they did not perform it. “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous.”⁷⁵ It is no wonder that believers call the Lord “our righteousness.”⁷⁶ Christ took away their black and dirty clothes; in exchange, they are dressed in the white robe of His righteousness. God “made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”⁷⁷

The righteousness of God

As a Roman Catholic I was taught that I was justified by my baptism as an infant. Throughout my life I had to work hard to remain right with God. As soon as I committed a “mortal sin,” I lost my justification. So I had to go to confession and do penance to regain it. However, after a while I proved myself a loser of all blessings because of another “mortal sin.” I was caught up in this vicious circle, going in and out of a revolving door. Ultimately, though, it is my final state that counts. At the moment of death, would I happen to be in or out?

As a Catholic I could never be certain of salvation – indeed, I could never be saved at all because my religious works were keeping me from trusting fully in the Lord Jesus.

By God’s grace, today I no longer rely on the merits of personal righteousness for my eternal salvation. Now I depend solely upon the Lord Jesus Christ, my glorious Redeemer, who actually and effectively delivered me from sin’s condemnation. With a clean conscience I can adopt the Apostle Paul’s confession as my own:

“Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.”⁷⁸

I have been justified by the Judge of the world on the basis of “the righteousness which is from God” – that is, the perfect righteousness of Christ - - and not on account of “my own righteousness.” I do not have to wait until the Day of Judgement to know His verdict. I am already “justified by faith” and I fear no judgement because I am hid in Christ my righteousness. “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus”⁷⁹

Be merciful to me, a sinner

God wants us to trust in Him, to yield ourselves to His mercies. We should depend completely upon Him, not on our self-righteousness. The Lord Jesus once narrated a parable in the hearing of some “trusted in themselves that they were righteous.”

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men -- extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other.”⁸⁰

Ponder a little while upon these two men. The first one presented his own righteousness and good works to God. The second approached God empty-handed. The Pharisee considered himself righteous and came confidently forward. The publican was ashamed of himself, knowing he was spiritually bankrupt. Both went up to the temple to pray: the Pharisee presented his merits while the publican pleaded for mercy. Both returned home. One was trusting in himself to be spiritually acceptable, but in God’s sight he was not. The other one depended solely upon God’s mercy - nothing but His mercy, and it was this believing sinner that went home justified. He trusted only in the

mercy of God. The mercy of God is His promise to justify the ungodly through faith alone in Christ alone. Christ is our righteousness.

Which one of them is your model? In what do you trust for your acquittal? In your own attainments, or in the mercy of God as revealed upon Calvary's cross? Are you seeking to be accepted by God because of your deeds, or are you leaning upon the all-merciful God in Christ, by faith?

Everyone makes a choice between these two alternatives. Either you are trusting in God's mercy alone, or else you are depending on your co-operation and best efforts. The Roman Catholic Church pronounces a curse on those who say that "justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in the divine mercy that remits sins on account of Christ."⁸¹ Jesus says the very opposite. He blesses the man who, having no merits of his own, has nothing but full confidence in God's mercy. This man will be certainly justified on account of Christ's blood and righteousness.

Sola fide

Together with the apostle Paul, evangelical Christians "conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law."⁸² Historically this biblical position has been known as *sola fide* – "by faith alone." A person is justified by faith alone in Christ alone. While good works always accompany the living faith of every genuine Christian, his standing before God is not based on the merits of such works. Whereas the Catholic Church only admits that "faith is the *beginning* of human salvation, the fountain and root of all justification."⁸³ According to Rome, faith is necessary but it's not enough. To obtain justification, Rome prescribes faith plus works. "He who says that the received righteousness is not preserved and even increased before God by good works... let him be accursed."⁸⁴

The Catholic message is: faith and the merits of personal works lead to final justification. The gospel embedded in Scripture is of a radically different sort. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'"⁸⁵

"From faith to faith," for Christians do not seek their salvation in Christ together with their personal achievements; "from faith to faith," because the Christian forever depends completely on Christ.

Could my tears forever flow?
Could my zeal no respite know,
These for sin could not atone –
Thou must save, and Thou alone:
In my hand no price I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling.

6 Baptism

Having completed His redemptive work on earth, just before He returned to His Father, the Lord Jesus commissioned His disciples to proclaim the Gospel to all people, and to baptize new believers in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.⁸⁶ The rite is performed by immersing the disciple in water.⁸⁷

Who should receive this rite? Christ commanded that “disciples” and those who “believe” should be baptized. Infant baptism was introduced gradually in the early church but there is no convincing evidence that it was practiced in the apostolic churches. All recorded baptisms in the New Testament follow personal conversion to Christ, as indicated by such words as *believe*, *repent* and *calling on His name*.⁸⁸

Baptism is God’s sign to the new disciple of fellowship with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, and of remission of sins.⁸⁹ Baptism is a sign (symbol, picture) because it shows spiritual realities by means of physical elements and actions (immersion in water). That baptism is a sign is acknowledged by all, including Roman Catholics.⁹⁰ However, for the Catholic Church, baptism is something more than a sign. It is an “efficacious” sign; it “makes present” the grace that it “signifies.” Baptism is both a “sign” and the “instrumental cause” of justification, and brings about the new birth.⁹¹ This doctrine, known as baptismal regeneration, confuses the sign with the reality it signifies.

Baptismal regeneration

The Catholic Church teaches that baptism is necessary for salvation because it causes regeneration and justification. “Through baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God.”⁹² Moreover, as with other sacraments, baptism acts “*ex opere operato*” - literally, by the very fact of the action being performed. The right application of the outward sign is always followed by the gift of internal grace if the sacrament is received with the right dispositions.

In the case of infants, baptism removes original sin and brings about regeneration even though the infant does not personally believe in Christ. In adults, faith is necessary, but it is not sufficient on its own for forgiveness or eternal life. Faith is considered as one of the factors constituting the “right disposition” for baptism. “Besides a wish to be baptized, in order to obtain the grace of the Sacrament, faith is also necessary.”⁹³ It is implied that the believer does not receive grace (forgiveness or regeneration) until and unless he is baptized with water.

A few Bible verses are cited as evidence for the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. John 3:5 is perhaps the key “proof text.” Speaking to Nicodemus, Jesus said: “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” For instance, the Catechism states

that the Church “takes care not to neglect the mission she has received from the Lord to see that all who can be baptized are ‘reborn of water and the Spirit.’”⁹⁴

We notice immediately that the word “baptism” does not appear in the text. Jesus speaks of being born “of water and the Spirit” and not “of baptism and the Spirit.” Catholics tacitly assume that “water” means “baptism.” But there is no compelling reason why it should be so. Jesus speaks of ordinary things like the birth process and the blowing of the wind to illustrate great spiritual realities; why can’t we also understand water in its scriptural symbolic meaning of cleansing and life? Moreover Jesus chides Nicodemus for not understanding that a man must be born of water and the Spirit: “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?” Are we to believe that Nicodemus was rebuked for not comprehending Christian baptism which had not yet been introduced?

The new birth is the sovereign work of God the Holy Spirit. “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.” And again, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”⁹⁵ Man cannot determine when and who will be born again; God regenerates whenever and whoever He wishes. The new birth is not “according to the will of man.” Now if water baptism automatically causes regeneration, we must say that the wind blows where *man* wishes, who can tell exactly where it goes because the administration of baptism is very much a matter of the human will.

Other verses mention baptism in relation to salvation, but none of them remotely prove baptismal regeneration.⁹⁶ It is not enough to show from Scripture that “faith and baptism” or “repentance and baptism” are closely related. Evangelical Christians also believe that “faith and baptism” are closely related without teaching the heretical error of baptismal regeneration.

Christians affirm that a person is saved by faith while baptism is the *sign* of salvation. Catholics cannot show that faith is insufficient to save, a mere predisposition, or that cleansing is actually brought about by baptism. They need to demonstrate that baptism without personal faith saves (as in the case of infant baptism); and for adults, that faith does not save before baptism. This they cannot do!

Take Mark 16:16 as an example: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” Jesus commands that baptism should be administered after personal belief in the gospel message; but infants, by reason of their age, cannot exercise personal faith in Christ. At best this verse is irrelevant as evidence for baptismal regeneration of infants. As for adults, the same verse says nothing about the specific roles of faith and baptism in salvation. Is faith the instrument of salvation, or simply a predisposition; is baptism the sign of salvation or the instrumental cause?

These questions cannot be answered from the immediate context. Therefore, Mark 16:16 cannot be forced to teach that “faith is insufficient” or “baptism regenerates”. If anything, Jesus emphasizes the primacy of faith, for He singles out unbelief as the cause of damnation.

Saved by faith

While scriptural proof for baptismal regeneration is absent, evidence for the efficacy of faith in salvation is by no means lacking. “Your faith has saved you,”⁹⁷ Jesus reassured the sinful woman who came to Him in the Pharisee’s house; and so will He say to every sinner who believes in Him.

The New Testament sets forth two men as typical examples of salvation by faith – Abraham the patriarch, and the first Gentile convert, Cornelius. Both were saved by faith; Abraham, of course, was never baptized; Cornelius was baptized only after he had been spiritually cleansed. One was saved without baptism; the other was saved before baptism. Faith, not baptism, is shown to be the “instrumental cause” of salvation.

It is significant that in order to illustrate the way of salvation in the New Testament era, the apostle Paul chooses an Old Testament character, Abraham. He writes, “Abraham ‘believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, ‘In you all the nations shall be blessed.’ So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.”⁹⁸ The blessing of justification is received by faith in our time, just as Abraham had been justified by faith.

Elsewhere the apostle Paul writes, “What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.”⁹⁹ Abraham was justified by faith apart from the merits of any good works; and so is every person who will ever be saved.

The apostle Paul even goes a step forward to emphasize the efficacy of faith. He points out that Abraham was justified by faith years before he received the sign of circumcision. “For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed

to them also.”¹⁰⁰ All are justified like Abraham – by faith; not by an external rite, whether circumcision in the Old Testament or baptism in the New.

The apostle Peter presented Cornelius and his family, the first Gentile converts, as the pattern of salvation for everyone, Jews and Gentiles alike. He declared before the other apostles and the elders at the Jerusalem council: “We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.”¹⁰¹

The apostle Peter recounted the experience: “Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.”¹⁰²

Peter interpreted the coming of the Holy Spirit on all those who heard the word as divine testimony that they had believed in Jesus and that their hearts had been purified by faith. It is true of course that the apostle Peter baptized Cornelius and the other converts. But he baptized them only after he was convinced that they had believed in Christ. Peter did not baptize them in order to cleanse them from sin because he knew that God had already accepted them and purified their heart by faith. “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?”¹⁰³

Cornelius heard the Gospel’s promise: “To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.”¹⁰⁴ He believed in Christ, he was forgiven and purified through faith, and last of all, he was baptized. We would do well to follow the same sequence, and not to attribute to baptism what the Word of God attributes to faith.

Faith and baptism

We do not speak a single word against baptism. Every believer is duty bound to submit to baptism soon after conversion as the Lord has commanded. We do criticize, however, the wrong use of this holy ordinance. It is a terrible distortion of biblical truth when personal faith is effectively substituted by baptism, as happens in the Catholic Church. Worse still, faith is reduced to a mere predisposition, a paralyzed arm that cannot reach out and take hold of God’s salvation, contrary to the plain teaching of the Bible.

Faith saves. Not because faith is meritorious or powerful in itself. Faith saves because it unites the weak and guilty person with the all-powerful and righteous Saviour. Let baptism, and all sort of good works, follow and fill the life of every believer. But let no believer depend for salvation on anything he does. Faith must always be in Christ alone. Baptism does not cause what is already achieved by faith.

7 Forgiveness

Sin is the transgression of God's Law, and as a consequence, it frequently offends and hurts our neighbour. God commands us to confess our sins to each other and to forgive one another. If you offend me, I should be willing to forgive you. Thus far could I go, but no further. I cannot possibly forgive the guilt of your sin and liberate you from the condemnation of God's Law. We break God's Law; therefore only God can forgive or condemn.

David offended a number of people when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and plotted the murder of her husband, but nobody could cleanse him from his iniquity. David eventually confessed to God, "Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight."¹⁰⁵ So David prayed to God whose Law he had despised: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions."¹⁰⁶ God forgave him, and since His mercy is from generation to generation, He will likewise forgive us if we apply ourselves unto Him. Then we can say to the Lord, as David did: "I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin."¹⁰⁷

"I absolve you"

During my adolescence I was taught differently. I was instructed to go to the priest, for, as I was told, the priest has power to forgive sins. The priest not only informs me of God's forgiveness, but he himself forgives me. I well remember the absolution formula on the priest's lips: "I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." The Catholic Church teaches clearly that the sacrament of penance "does not consist in the mere ministry of proclaiming the Gospel or of declaring that the sins have been forgiven, but it has the pattern of a judicial act in which the priest pronounces sentence as judge."¹⁰⁸ According to the Catechism, the priest fulfils the ministry "of the just and impartial judge whose judgement is both just and merciful."¹⁰⁹

Such teaching openly defies the biblical position: "There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?"¹¹⁰ If you happen to be a Roman Catholic priest, I urge you to answer that question before God. Who are you to prevent a repentant sinner from praying and receiving forgiveness directly from God? Why do you compel him to come to you as judge in the place of God? Are you able to examine his heart perfectly? And if not, how can you judge righteously and pronounce a sentence that bears upon his eternal destiny, since the Scriptures say that God alone knows the human heart? "Then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, and act, and give to everyone according to all his ways, whose heart You know (for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men)."¹¹¹

During His ministry on earth, the Lord Jesus was accused of impiety when He was heard saying to a paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you." They complained, "Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Their criticism would have been valid if Jesus were a mere man; only the scribes were unwilling to fairly consider Jesus' claim to divine power.

The forgiveness of sins is an act far greater than bodily healing, but before a human audience it is easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven you," than to command a paralytic, "Arise and walk." For if the man remains stiff in bed it will become very apparent whether yours is mere pretension or true power. Jesus therefore challenged His detractors: "But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"--He said to the paralytic, "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."¹¹² That's exactly what the paralytic did--he arose and went home! Such a miracle provides ample evidence of Christ's judiciary power, and therefore of His deity as well, but is the Catholic priest, who is supposed to be endowed with the same power, able to perform such miracles? If he is unable to heal mere physical ailments, how are we to believe that he heals the soul from sin?

The Apostles' Mission

How can a sinner obtain God's forgiveness? According to His eternal plan, God, in the fullness of time, desired to bring the proclamation of forgiveness to all the nations. It was on Resurrection Sunday; the Lord Jesus appeared to His disciples when they were gathered together. He addressed them thus:

"Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.' And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'¹¹³

What exactly was the mission with which the early disciples were entrusted? According to Roman Catholics, with these words Christ instituted the sacrament of penance, giving judiciary power to the priests to forgive sins. Evangelical Christians understand this passage differently. Christ was sent by God, among other things, in order to preach the good news. Before He ascended into heaven He gave a commission to the disciples to proclaim the wonderful news of salvation. Whoever believes the Gospel will be saved and his sins will be forgiven. All those who remain in unbelief will not be forgiven.

Judges or preachers?

Did Christ constitute His disciples judges or messengers of the gospel? Where they called to hear confessions and grant absolutions, or where they commissioned to proclaim the Gospel and forgiveness to those who believe in Jesus?

The correct interpretation of the Lord's commission recorded in John 20 should be consistent with the rest of Scripture, for God does not contradict himself. Naturally, then, we ask: "How did the early apostolic church bring God's forgiveness to the world? Was it through the confessional? Or was it through the preaching of the gospel?" Like John, Luke the evangelist includes the Lord's commission and adds important information; he specifically informs us how this forgiveness was meant to come to us. He does not leave us at liberty to apply the Lord's instructions in any capricious way. He quotes the Lord Jesus just before His ascension:

"Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."¹¹⁴

The method is plainly outlined. According to God's plan, forgiveness is to be brought to the nations by the preaching of the gospel. The apostles announced God's forgiveness through their preaching; they urged men to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thus enjoy full forgiveness of sins. Trusting in Jesus, thousands experienced God's gracious forgiveness.

Christ did not establish auricular confession to a priest. The church in the apostolic age did not so understand His words. When we investigate the Acts of the Apostles and all their writings we find no single instance of any of the apostles or early Christians granting sacramental absolution. In no case do the apostles hint that Christians should confess to a priest. Rather we find the apostles proclaiming forgiveness in Christ and pronouncing forgiveness to all who believe.

The apostle Peter preached: "To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins."¹¹⁵ Similarly, the apostle Paul explains: "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins."¹¹⁶ On his part, the apostle John assures believers that they are right with God: "I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake."¹¹⁷

Historically, private confession to a priest was introduced gradually; it was only in 1215 that it was established officially by Pope Innocent III. The Catechism of the Catholic Church admits that from the seventh century onwards "the sacrament has been performed in secret between penitent and priest" and calls it a "new practice."¹¹⁸

Look to Me

To whom should you go to obtain forgiveness? To a human priest, a sinner just as you are, who claims to be a judge in the place of God? Or to the only God, the Judge of all the earth? Take heed of the gospel, faithfully preached by the apostles and recorded infallibly in the Holy Scriptures; they taught everyone to call upon the name of the Lord. The Lord's Himself, whose Law we have set

aside and broken, opens His arms to all of us: “Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other”¹¹⁹

The idea of obtaining priestly absolution is totally foreign to Scripture. Rather, God invites you to look to Him. He knows you through and through, including your secret sins. You can turn your heart to God right now. He will certainly forgive you if you come to Him in sincere repentance and genuine faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our Father, forgive us

God’s grace is truly marvellous. Through His only-begotten Son, God bestows upon His children all spiritual blessings. Not only does He cleanse them of all their iniquities, but He also adopts them into His family. Formerly they were far away and enemies of God because of their disobedience; now they are His beloved children. All this comes about because of Christ’s death and glorious resurrection. Before their conversion they neither feared God nor sought Him; but now they sincerely desire to magnify His Name, and walk in new obedience. Before they did not know God; now the Holy Spirit lives in them.

Nevertheless, while on the earth, sin still clings to God’s children and a relentless spiritual battle is waged within their souls. As much as they yearn and endeavour to lead a holy life, all genuine Christians humbly admit that they often fail and sin.

But God the Father does not cast them out of His family. They are forever His children; He remains forever their heavenly Father. So, when they sin, they do not approach a stern Judge, but in the Name of their Mediator Jesus, they flee unto the bosom of their Father. “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”¹²⁰ They draw near confidently, for God has promised them that “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”¹²¹ They confess directly to God, and to nobody else, for they are mindful of their Master’s instructions who specifically taught His disciples to ask the Father for forgiveness: “In this manner, therefore, pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name... forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.’”¹²²

8 Purgatory

The idea of purgatory is not an invention of the Catholic Church. From ancient times, many civilizations believed in some form of after-life purification. Plato, the Greek philosopher, taught that beyond the grave man must suffer for his guilt before achieving final bliss. Even among the Jews the notion of reparation for sin after death was not unknown. Judas Maccabee ordered that sacrifices should be offered for certain soldiers who had died in idolatry during a battle, even though in the Law of Moses no provision for such sacrifices was to be found.¹²³ Within the church, the idea of a purifying process after death started to creep in quite early; Tertullian gives us the first intimation of it in the second century.

The doctrine of purgatory is popular because it is quite logical. Man, burdened down with a guilty conscience, feels the need for cleansing from defilement. He knows that he cannot enter the glorious presence of God for as long as he is polluted with sin. Even the Bible warns us that anything that defiles shall by no means enter Paradise.¹²⁴

The Catholic Church officially affirms the existence of purgatory. In her understanding, the priest's absolution "takes away sin." Nevertheless, the penitent "must still recover his full spiritual health by doing something more to make amends for the sin: he must 'make satisfaction for' or 'expiate' his sins. This satisfaction is also called 'penance.'"¹²⁵ Penance can take the form of prayer, an offering, and an act of mercy, voluntary abstinences or other things. Besides, the Eucharist "is also offered in reparation for the sins of the living and the dead."¹²⁶ Nevertheless, many Catholics expect that "after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven... The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect."¹²⁷

God's forgiveness

The Catholic doctrine raises doubts about God the Father. Does He really forgive? If He does, why does He still demand "expiation" (recompense) from man? True, sin brings about grievous consequences even in this life. We also readily confess that God the Father disciplines His children, but "expiation" is radically different from "discipline." If He demands expiation, as the Catholic Church insists, then His forgiveness is only a sham. According to the Catholic religion, God's forgiveness is incomplete.

Not so according to the biblical Faith. Jesus demonstrates the Father's readiness to forgive and welcome repentant sinners.¹²⁸ He tells a story of a young man who spent all his share of the father's wealth in riotous living. When he came to himself and decided to return home, he felt it was unworthy of him to be called a son. His failures were too heavy; he had rebelled against his father, abandoned him and misused his money to satiate his own passions.

How would he be received back? Perhaps the father will reluctantly open the door for him? Will he be severely punished?

When the son was still far away, his father ran up to him, embraced him and kissed him fervently. The boy told him: "I am no longer worthy to be called your son." True. What he really merited was rejection because he had disgraced his father, but his father loved him! Instead of punishment to make amends for his sins, he ordered the servants to put on him the best robe, and put a ring on his hand. He even threw a party for him and the festivities engendered jealousy in his brother's heart. Such is the heavenly Father's love and forgiveness to all those who approach Him repentantly through His Son.

But, you may ask, what will compensate for my debt, that is, for all my spiritual failures? Very significantly the Bible does not point us to personal penances in this life or torments in purgatory. The Bible points us to Jesus: "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."¹²⁹

Christ has made full amends for the believers' indebtedness towards God by His death on the cross. His disciples praise God remembering how "He has made [them] alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross."¹³⁰ The saved person does not even attempt to pay sins' debt because his Saviour Jesus Christ took the responsibility for those sins upon Himself. He paid the sinner's debt. God does not demand punishment for sin twice: from Christ's hands it is enough.

So when God forgives, he really forgives! Listen to God's marvellous promise to His children: "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins."¹³¹ God will certainly prove faithful to His Word. If I, as one of Christ's redeemed, am promised the free and full forgiveness of all my sins, then I can rest assured that God will not bring them to account again after I die.

The Lord Jesus and the apostles often mention heaven and hell, but not even once do they mention an intermediate place called purgatory. Again, the Bible never directs us to pray for the dead. Catholic authors misuse a few references from Scripture in their attempt to build a biblical case for purgatory.¹³² However, when these passages are properly understood in context, it will become evident that they do not prove that Christians have to endure punishment for sins after they die. For instance, in the Corinthian epistle, Paul is speaking about the Day of Judgement in which the Christian's work and ministry will be tested. The Lord will award every person according to the quality of his labour - he will receive reward for acceptable work, and lose

reward for any ill-performed ministry. The notion of an intermediate state of purification is foreign to the apostle's thought.

Washed in the blood

Scripture sets the believer's heart to rest. "But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."¹³³ It's not purgatory's flames that cleanse the sinner from his evil. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."¹³⁴ His blood is purification, not just from some, or even most sins, but from all sins. The blood of Christ, shed on Calvary, is thoroughly effective and purifies from all defilement, whatever it is. His blood really and actually cleanses "from all sin." Whatever the Lord engages to accomplish, He does it perfectly and thoroughly: "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool."¹³⁵

Nobody in heaven will ever be heard bragging that he succeeded in entering the City of God because of his penances and sufferings. Heaven will be populated only by those who trust completely in the Son of God; and from their heart they sing: "To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."¹³⁶

Does any punishment remain?

The Catholic Church insists that although God forgives, you must just the same make amends for your guilt. She warns: "If anyone says that after the grace of justification has been received the guilt is so remitted and the debt of eternal punishment so blotted out for any repentant sinner, that no debt of temporal punishment remains to be paid, either in this world or in the other, in purgatory, before access can be opened to the Kingdom of heaven, anathema sit."¹³⁷ A solemn and official curse is laid on anyone who tells the repentant sinner that none of his debt remains to be paid (since Christ paid it all) before he enters heaven.

Two thieves were crucified with Jesus. By the grace of God one of them realized his sinfulness, repented and turned to Christ by faith: "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom" Do you recall the reply he received? Jesus promised him: "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."¹³⁸ No time spent in purgatory to pay any debt!

Do you believe in purgatory?

Christians confess the following about their Lord Christ: "When He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."¹³⁹ Jesus Christ, and nothing and nobody else, is their purification, their purgatory.

Perhaps up till now you have hoped to go to a place of suffering to undergo cleansing from sin. Such a place does not exist. The opportunity to experience purification and complete forgiveness is now, while you are still living. You have challenged God's lordship over you by your disobedience; but He is truly merciful and compassionate. He really forgives: He cancels the debt of all those who turn to Him by faith. Look to Jesus the Deliverer, whose death on Calvary is a full and adequate payment for the sins of His people. His blood was not shed in vain; it actually purifies the soul from all defilement.

Do you believe in purgatory? I hope you will affirm, "Yes, I believe in God's purgatory. My purgatory is the Lord Jesus Christ!"

9 The Sacrifice of Christ

The Son of God came down to earth in order to die. The cross is His masterpiece. Not everyone can appreciate the glory of the cross; many consider it a scandal or even foolishness, but Christians never cease to boast in the cross of the Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

To better understand the significance of Christ's death it is worthwhile having a closer look at the ceremonies performed during the Old Testament. Through Moses, God gave instructions to His people in Israel concerning the tabernacle, the priesthood and various sacrifices.

The tabernacle consisted in two sections: the holy place and the Holy of Holies. The glory of God's presence shone in the Holy of Holies. Nobody was allowed entrance into this sacred place except the high priest. A veil separated the two sections from each other, signifying, among other things, that sin debars us from the presence of the thrice-holy God.

From among the Jewish nation certain men were appointed by God to serve as priests, whose ministry was to represent the people before Him. Thus God teaches us that we cannot approach Him by ourselves.

The priests used to offer different animal sacrifices on the altar every day. Once a year the high priest used to kill the animal, take some of its blood in a container and enter beyond the veil in the Holy of Holies. God is righteous and His justice demands due punishment for every transgression of the law. The death of countless animals reminds us what the punishment is for our disobedience. The wages of sin is death, as God had forewarned man from the beginning.

Old Testament sacrifices also show us the way we can get rid of our sin's punishment. The Lord instructed His people: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul."¹⁴⁰ The blood makes "atonement" or "covers" the sin. Elsewhere the Scripture declares that "without shedding of blood is no remission."¹⁴¹

See how marvellous God's grace is. His justice requires the full punishment for sin: death, but in order to deliver the sinner from the necessary punishment, God has provided for him a substitute to die in his place. The blood of the animal is shed on the altar; its life is taken so that the sinner would not have die.

The Old Testament rites were only a picture of Christ and His work as Redeemer. Scripture calls these things a "copy and shadow," and "shadow of the good things to come." "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and

goats could take away sins.”¹⁴² Christ is the true Lamb of God who bears upon Himself and takes away the sin of the world.

Christ, the priest and sacrifice

Sin separates us from the holy God, and arouses His anger and wrath, but God, who is rich in mercy, was pleased to deliver His people from their sins. The Father appointed the Son as High Priest to intercede for them. The eternal Son of God became a human being so that He could represent us before the Father.

Christ is both the priest and the sacrifice. Jesus, as priest, offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin. “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”¹⁴³ Do take time, then, to meditate upon the significance of the cross.

The apostle Peter explains to believers: “Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness--by whose stripes you were healed... For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.”¹⁴⁴ Jesus died on the cross instead of His people, that they would not suffer eternal death in hell. He suffered the punishment that was properly and rightly theirs, therefore they are no longer liable to hell’s punishment.

The apostle Paul reminds us of the misery and peril because of sin. “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.” The Law convicts us of sin, condemns us, but has no power to deliver us. There is only one way that effectively delivers us from God’s wrath. “Christ has redeemed (freed) us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.’”¹⁴⁵ Believers are free because the curse on their heads was transferred to Christ, their Redeemer.

With good reason Christ feared and was sorrowful in the garden of Gethsemane! He who knew no sin was willing to drink the cup of divine wrath so that His people would be saved and enjoy fellowship with God. His cry during that hour of darkness is as meaningful as could be, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” that is, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”¹⁴⁶ On the cross, Christ endured and experienced the punishment of hell instead of those whom the Father had given! How blessed are they who are able to praise Christ from their heart: “By your cross and your death you have redeemed us.”

I am the bread of life

Christ is the Saviour of the world, but it cannot be implied that every human being will be saved. Many will hear their terrible condemnation on the great and awesome Day of the Lord: “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire

prepared for the devil and his angels.”¹⁴⁷ They were never delivered from their curse. Who then has the right the say to the Lord Jesus: “You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation”?¹⁴⁸ Who is actually saved?

In John’s gospel we have a satisfactory explanation. Jesus compares Himself with bread: “I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”¹⁴⁹ Jesus offered His sacred body and shed His precious blood as a sacrifice for sin. Now how can a sinner actually benefit from His sacrifice? Quite obviously bread will neither nourish nor satisfy if it is not eaten and digested. Even so the body of Christ, given on the cross, and His shed blood will be unprofitable if we do not actually participate in His infinite merits. Jesus explains: “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”¹⁵⁰

Such a step is absolutely necessary to obtain eternal life, but how can we eat this divine bread? How can we drink Christ’s blood? His audience murmured greatly when they heard this the first time, and protested, “How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?”¹⁵¹ Their carnal misunderstanding of Jesus’ words was merely a cloak for their unbelief. He had already explained, but they were hard-hearted and refused to listen. Those who wilfully persist in unbelief will find their hearts even more callous and insensitive to divine truth.

When Christ said, “I am the living bread,” He was using a metaphor to explain profound spiritual truths as He was accustomed to do. In the same gospel, Jesus uttered similar expressions:

- “I am the light of the world” - His disciples follow Him.
- “I am the door” - whoever desires to be saved must enter through Him.
- “I am the good shepherd” - His sheep listen to and obey His voice.
- “I am the true vine” - Christians are vitally united to Him as branches are to the vine.¹⁵²

Nobody would dare suggest that Christ is literally light, or a door, or a shepherd, or a vine. Neither are His followers sheep or branches. They do not follow Him by walking literally after Him; neither do they enter through Him literally. In the same manner, we would be in serious error if we take His speech about eating His body in a literal way.

How then are we meant to eat His body and drink His blood in order to obtain eternal life? Several times the Lord Jesus gives us a direct and uncomplicated answer in His same speech. “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.” “And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day” “Most

assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.”¹⁵³ Jesus’ answer cannot be missed: He grants eternal life to all who believe in Him. Eating and drinking is believing in Christ.

The Jews desired eternal life. They rested in the law. They trusted in their own good works, in circumcision, in Moses and in their genealogical line going back to the patriarchs. But this was not God’s requirement. God simply wanted them to believe on the One whom He had sent. He who believes in Christ has eternal life. Think this crucial issue through: on whom are you depending to have eternal life? In your obedience to God’s commandments, in your own holiness and good performance, in baptism or in Mary and the saints? Christ leaves us in no doubt as to God’s requirement: “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.”¹⁵⁴

Once for all

Was the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary sufficient to save all those who trust in Him? Was that offering for sin enough to obtain eternal redemption? Was the death of Christ enough to actually and really cancel out sin? Was His sacrifice effective so that by it He sanctifies His people and makes them perfect? How many times did Christ have to do it? The following quotations from the letter to the Hebrews give us a plain answer:

- With His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.
- Now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.
- By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.
- For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.¹⁵⁵

Christ’s sacrifice is an accomplished historical fact. It need not be repeated because His purpose was fulfilled. He gained His people’s redemption, the cancellation of their sin, their holiness and their perfection in glory. It was a thoroughly perfect sacrifice: He has no need to go through it again.

The Catholic Church affirms that Jesus offered one sacrifice once for all. We cannot but be disappointed to discover that Rome’s doctrine of the Mass contradicts this blessed truth. You may retort: “Why do you say this? The Mass is the remembrance of the Lord and a proclamation of His death.” If it were so, we would find no difficulty whatsoever, but the official teaching of the Catholic Church goes far beyond this. The Catechism teaches: “As sacrifice, the Eucharist is also offered in reparation for the sins of the living and the dead.”¹⁵⁶ Not only so, but the Catholic Church insists that the Mass is the same sacrifice of Christ on the cross: “The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice... In this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the

Mass, the same Christ who offered Himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner.”¹⁵⁷

How can today’s Mass be the same sacrifice that occurred two millennia ago? If they are the same, where are the cross, the crown of thorns, the nails, the suffering, the shedding of blood and the death of Christ? We all know that is impossible for Christ to die again: “I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore.”¹⁵⁸ Now since He cannot shed His blood or die once more, what is the value of such an “unbloody” sacrifice in the light of Scripture’s affirmation that “without shedding of blood there is no remission”?¹⁵⁹

Yet the Catholic Church insists that “the Eucharist is thus a sacrifice because it re-presents (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross” and that Christ instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice “in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again.”¹⁶⁰

Since they could not take away sins, the sacrifices of the Old Testament were offered repeatedly year after year and even day after day. Not so in the New Testament. “Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many.”¹⁶¹ For as long as the Catholic Church insists on the necessity of renewing and perpetuating the sacrifice of Christ, she is doing nothing less than bringing Christ’s offering of Himself to the level of animal sacrifices of the Old Testament.

Continuing or finished?

What is the truth? Is Jesus still offering the same sacrifice daily on the Catholic altars? Scripture answers: “Every priest (in the Old Testament) stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God.”¹⁶² Christ’s uniqueness consists in not having to continue offering the same sacrifice. He completed His mission successfully because His sacrifice is effective in every way. Neither is He a victim on earthly altars, but is exalted and glorified in heaven. He “sat down” because His sacrificial work is complete and finished.

The Holy Spirit also affirms Christ’s perfect sacrifice. Referring to the partakers of New Covenant blessings, He says, “Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” The author’s reasonable conclusion is pointedly powerful: “Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.”¹⁶³ Since all believers’ sins are wiped away, what need remains for the sacrifice of the Mass?

Christ Himself commented on His own redeeming work. Should it continue to be offered throughout time? While still hanging on the cross, Christ uttered a triumphal cry: “It is finished!” The debt is settled; redemption accomplished; forgiveness is obtained. One offering, effective for all time and eternity!

To enter before God's holy presence, you need a bloody sacrifice to cleanse you from sin. What will be your choice? Will it be the unbloody sacrifice of the Mass? Or will it be the perfect sacrifice offered on Calvary once for all?

10 The Eucharist

Our Lord Jesus is true God and true Man. Just before ascending into heaven, the Lord promised His disciples: “I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”¹⁶⁴ He is able to keep such a promise because He is divine and therefore everywhere present. Christ is spiritually present with His people, but He is absent physically. Jesus told His disciples: “For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always.”¹⁶⁵ The Lord Jesus is now in heaven. He promises the Church, “Surely I am coming quickly,” and His bride eagerly replies, “Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”¹⁶⁶

But before departing He left His disciples a memorial feast. “The Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’”¹⁶⁷

Just like in apostolic times, evangelical Christians today celebrate the Lord’s Supper with joy and thanksgiving (“Eucharist” comes from a Greek word which means thanksgiving). We share the bread to remember how Christ loved us and gave His body as a sacrifice for us. Similarly we drink of the fruit of the vine in commemoration of the blood shed on Calvary for our justification and our peace with God. We are exhorted to examine ourselves properly before partaking of the holy elements. “Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord”¹⁶⁸ - in the same way that if a nation’s flag is burned it signifies contempt and disdain for the nation it symbolizes.

Transubstantiation

Throughout church history several interpretations of the Lord’s Supper have vied for acceptance. Some Church Fathers, such as Cyril of Jerusalem and Ambrose, interpreted the words of Jesus, “This is My body... this is My blood” rather literally, but many others continued to propose a symbolical and spiritual significance. Eusebius and Augustine of Hippo were among those who expounded the words spiritually, though their language was never trivial or frivolous when they spoke of this holy ordinance.

In the ninth century Paschasius Radbertus strove with might and main to see the literal interpretation prevail. He was opposed principally by Ratramnus, a contemporary monk at the monastery of Corbie. It was only in the Lateran Council (1215) that the literal interpretation was declared as official dogma of the Catholic Church. Doctor Duns Scotus admits that this doctrine was not an article of faith before the thirteenth century.

The Catholic Church teaches: “In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist ‘the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained.’” “By the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation.”¹⁶⁹ “Transubstantiation” means a change in substance. Hence the bread does not remain bread and the wine does not remain wine; they become the body and blood of Christ respectively, even though in appearance they still look and taste like bread and wine. I invite you to compare this Catholic dogma with the Bible’s teaching.

The bread and the fruit of the vine

In ordinary speech, as well as in Scripture, the words “this is” could be used either in a plain literal sense or in a figurative sense (i.e. “this represents”). By looking at the context it is usually not difficult to determine the intended meaning.

I can introduce you to an elderly man and say, “This is my father.” But if I show you a photograph, and repeat the same words, “This is my father,” now you will not take my words literally. In this case “this is” means “this represents” my father because the photo is his likeness, not my father in person. Similarly, when Jesus uttered the words of institution, “This is My body,” He was physically present with His disciples. It was only natural for the disciples to take His words figuratively – the bread represents the body which they could still touch with their hands and see with their eyes. Christ gave the disciples a symbol because He was about to leave them.

Perhaps an illustration from Scripture will be fitting. It is told how three brave men once risked their lives and passed through the Philistines’ armies to bring David some water from a well. Seeing the water, the king responded: “Is this not the blood of the men who went in jeopardy of their lives?”¹⁷⁰ He called the water in the vessel “blood,” not because it was transubstantiated, but simply because it represented the danger to the lives of those three men who brought it.

Furthermore, though Christ spoke about “My blood,” He made it unmistakably clear that the wine still remained wine. “I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.”¹⁷¹ After speaking about the institution of the Lord’s Supper, the apostle Paul explains its import, and affirms that the bread remains bread: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.”¹⁷² The bread remains bread; the wine remains wine.

In remembrance of Me

If transubstantiation is true, the consecrated host should be worshipped. But Jesus simply said: “Take, eat... drink from it, all of you.”¹⁷³ Nowhere are we instructed to bow down on our knees and adore the host. In apostolic times, Christians used to meet and break bread together, not worship the bread. The Catholic Church goes beyond Scripture and encourages the worship of the sacrament. When her members adore the Eucharist, in reality they are worshipping bread. That is idolatry.

Besides all this, Catholic doctrine disregards the biblical truth about the humanity of Christ. Jesus arose from the grave with a real glorified body. The disciples trembled and feared when He met them after His resurrection for they thought that they saw a phantasm, but He reassured them: “Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.”¹⁷⁴ The question naturally arises: How can Christ be a real human being, with a fleshly body, and yet be in thousands of places at the same time? Jesus’ human body must be either in heaven or on earth, and since we confess in the Apostles’ Creed that “He ascended into heaven, He is seated at the right hand of the Father, and He will come again to judge the living and the dead”, it is inconsistent to believe in His bodily presence on earth.

Finally, in insisting upon a real and substantial presence of Christ in the Eucharist, Catholic tradition goes well beyond Christ’s intention. He simply said, “Do this in remembrance of Me.” In the Lord’s Supper, Christians remember Him because He is physically absent, and they continue to do so until He comes again. The memorial celebration implies our eager expectation that someday in the future we will be united with our Saviour.

10 The High Priest

Do we still need the priest's ministry as the people of God had during the Old Testament? Without hesitation we must answer, "Yes, we do." We say so because we cannot approach God's majestic presence with our sin's defilement. We need a priest who is competent to intercede for us and bring us to God.

The Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament has been laid aside. Actually there has been a change in the priesthood. Who then is our priest today? The epistle to the Hebrews is replete with references to Jesus Christ as our High Priest. We are exhorted to "consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus." Further on, "seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession."¹⁷⁵

Our High Priest has offered one perfect sacrifice on the cross. God the Father accepted His offering and, to make His approval evident, raised Him back to life the third day. After forty days, the Lord Jesus ascended into heaven where He is glorified by the Father and the hosts of heaven.

There the Lord Jesus, our priest, intercedes for His people before the Father. "Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us."¹⁷⁶ Christ represents His people and intercedes for them on the basis of the infinite merits of His sacrifice. "Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption."¹⁷⁷ All those who sincerely trust Him have the privilege to enter boldly and reverently into God's presence. "Having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith."¹⁷⁸ At Christ's death the veil of the temple was torn apart from top to bottom, a token that through Christ we may now enter the Holy of Holies, in the very presence of God.

Other priests?

The Word of God invites us to draw near to the Father through His Son, whom He has constituted as our Mediator and Priest. Is Christ sufficient or do we need other priests just as Israel had their Levitical priests?

In the Catholic religion, the clergy is sharply distinguished from the rest of the faithful, the laity. The common Catholic depends upon the ministry of the priests to offer the sacrifice of the Mass on their behalf and to receive absolution from their hands. The Catechism teaches that Christ "instituted the Eucharist as the memorial of His death and Resurrection, and commanded His apostles to celebrate it until His return; 'thereby He constituted them priests of the New Testament.'"¹⁷⁹ The Catholic Church warns: "If anyone says that by the words 'Do this as a memorial of me' Christ did not establish the apostles as

priests or that He did not order that they and other priests should offer his body and blood, *anathema sit*.”¹⁸⁰

It is hard to understand why the words, “Do this as a memorial of me,” must be interpreted as the appointment of the apostles to a new priesthood to continue offering sacrifice for sin. As we have already observed, Christ’s sacrifice occurred once for all. It is a historically unique event, and therefore it can neither be renewed nor perpetuated. Christ left us a memorial, not a sacrifice.

For the sake of argument, let us suppose that Christ appointed the apostles as priests, and these in turn consecrated others to continue offering sacrifice for sin. In that case, we would reasonably expect this fundamental doctrine to be evident in Scripture. In the New Testament the term “priest” (*hiereus*, and words from the same root) refer to the following: Jewish priests, a pagan priest, all Christians, Christ, and Melchizedek (an Old Testament king and priest prefiguring Christ).¹⁸¹ The church’s leaders are denominated by various terms: presbyters (elders), overseers (bishops) and shepherds (pastors). Curiously enough, they are never called priests. The presbyter or elder was generally a married man; his call consisted in teaching the Word and affording spiritual protection to the flock of God. It is never intimated that his principal duty is to offer a sacrifice for sin. Similarly the apostles were entrusted with the preaching of the gospel. We never find them re-presenting the sacrifice of Christ. Do read the New Testament for yourself and see how glaringly true this observation is.

Priests to God

In the New Testament no mention is made of a priesthood, distinct from the laity, with the purpose of offering sacrifice for sin. Not only so, the apostles Peter and John teach us that all Christians are priests. Addressing ordinary Christians, Peter says: “You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”¹⁸²

The people of God do not offer sacrifice to atone for sins. This type of sacrifice was offered once for all by Christ, their High Priest. Only He was qualified to do that. His people are made priests because they have been granted confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Christ, and have boldness to draw near the throne of grace.¹⁸³ All of Christ’s disciples are “priests to His God and Father.”¹⁸⁴ As priests, Christians are called to offer themselves, their goods, the praise of their lips, and their contributions to the poor, as proper and pleasing sacrifices. They are not expected, nor are they competent, to offer sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins.¹⁸⁵

Christ, the Priest of the New Covenant

In the letter to the Hebrews, the author contrasts the Levitical priesthood with the unique priesthood of Jesus Christ.

- Levitical priests were constrained to transfer the priesthood from one generation to another because they were mortal, but Jesus, “because He continues forever, has an unchangeable (untransferable) priesthood.”
- They used to serve in a temple built with human hands. By contrast, “Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.”
- Levitical priests were sinful just like the rest of the people; consequently they were obliged to offer sacrifices for their own sins as well. Not so Christ: “For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.”
- Old Testament priests used to offer the same sacrifices daily, while Christ offered one sacrifice, once for all.¹⁸⁶

Catholic priests are nothing better than Levitical priests, for they too are sinful, serve in earthly temples, daily offer the same sacrifices, and die. God did not abrogate the Levites in order to establish an order of priests just as weak. Rather, the Old Testament priesthood was laid aside and discontinued because a better, effective and enduring priesthood was established: that of Christ. He lives forever; He is perfect, and has entered into heaven itself on behalf of His people on the infinite merits of His sacrifice on Calvary.

Through whom then will you approach God? Through a mortal, sinful priest, appointed by men, who repeatedly offers the same sacrifice in a building of stone? Or through the priest, who lives forever, chosen by the Father, who offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice once for all, and who is now interceding for His own in heaven?

The Word of God presents us with Jesus Christ, the unique and competent High Priest. There is no other. “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”¹⁸⁷

12 My soul magnifies the Lord

The Son of God became man to obtain the salvation of His people. “When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman.”¹⁸⁸ The humble woman from Nazareth was God’s chosen vessel so that the eternal Son might take upon Himself a human nature. From among all women Mary was granted the unique privilege of being the Lord’s mother according to His flesh. With good reason we refer to Mary as “blessed.” Mary said: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.”¹⁸⁹

Mary is an example and model for all Christians with regards to faith, obedience and humility. She realized her own lowly estate; her ambition was only to praise and exalt God: “My soul magnifies the Lord.” Her desire was not at all her own exaltation. Against her own will, throughout the greater part of church history, Mary was accorded such titles and worship that are fitting to God alone. The image of “Our Lady” in Catholic religion jars against what the Bible has to say about her.¹⁹⁰ A brief survey of the more important Marian titles reveals that they are non-biblical, misleading or even untrue.

“Ever virgin”

We confess in the Creed that Christ “was born of the virgin Mary.” The gospel includes the narrative how Jesus was miraculously conceived in Mary’s womb by the power of the Holy Spirit. The angel explains to her betrothed, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.”¹⁹¹

Joseph and Mary were married, but they had no sexual relation until Jesus was born. Joseph “took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS.”¹⁹² The implication is plain, but the Catholic Church insists that Mary remained a virgin all her life. She is called “the all-holy ever-virgin Mother of God.”¹⁹³

What is the purpose of this doctrine, the perpetual virginity of Mary? Could it be to give the impression that celibacy is a higher and purer state than married life? Indeed, the Catholic Church curses anyone who says that “it is not better and more blessed to remain in virginity, or in celibacy, than to be united in matrimony.”¹⁹⁴ Moreover, some Church Fathers had the mistaken notion that sex is always sinful, even among married couples.¹⁹⁵ Given this bias, it is not surprising that they wanted to defend Mary from such “sin.” For example, Epiphanius wrote: “And to holy Mary, the title ‘Virgin’ is invariably added, for that holy woman remains undefiled.”¹⁹⁶ But God’s gifts are all holy and pure, “marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled,” so much so that the

Bible compares the relationship between Christ and His church to the bond of man and woman in marriage.¹⁹⁷

“Mother of God”

The Creed of Chalcedon (451) refers to Jesus “born of Mary the virgin, who is God-bearer in respect of his humanness.” The purpose of the expression “God-bearer” (or as it is sometimes translated, “Mother of God”), was to emphasize that Mary’s child, Jesus, is also truly God.

However the term is easily misunderstood, and indeed it has acquired a meaning far different from that intended by the early church. When Mary is called “Mother of God” it is often implied that she has maternal authority over the Lord.

Scripture teaches us how Christ, who is God from eternity, also became human. He humbled Himself and was subject to Joseph and Mary as long as He lived with them in Nazareth. As soon as He entered His public ministry He was no longer under their authority, but was subject only to the Father’s will. Quite significantly, at the beginning of His public ministry, during the wedding at Cana, the Lord Jesus told His mother, “Woman, what have I to do with thee?”¹⁹⁸

As God, Christ is eternal. God has no beginning; therefore it would be absurd to say that God has a mother. Mary does not exercise authority over the Lord; rather, she is His maidservant. Christ is the Lord over her and everyone else, for He is Mary’s creator, Her Master and Saviour.

“Mother of the church”

Catholic tradition holds that Christ appointed Mary “the mother of the church” when He was dying on the cross and told John, “Behold your mother.” However, if it was Christ’s intention to give Mary as mother to the whole church, why did He address John only, and not all the disciples near the cross?

“Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, ‘Woman, behold your son!’ Then He said to the disciple, ‘Behold your mother!’ And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.”¹⁹⁹

Did Christ mean to make Mary the mother of the church? Or was it Christ’s intention to entrust His mother to the care of John after His death? The answer is found in the immediate context: “And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.” Jesus simply wanted to make sure that His mother would be taken care of by his intimate friend, John, as a son would take care of his mother.

The Lord Jesus draws a sharp distinction between His relationship with Mary and His brothers according to the flesh, and the spiritual relationship with His church. On one occasion His mother and brothers stood outside seeking to speak with Him. One said to Him, “Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You.” Did Jesus snatch the opportunity to teach the people the appropriateness of seeking Mary’s intercession, or praying to her? Not at all. His reaction is rather startling - and instructive: “He answered and said to the one who told Him, ‘Who is My mother and who are My brothers?’ And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, ‘Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.’”²⁰⁰

The Lord Jesus points out that our relationship with Him, characterized by joyful submission to the Father’s will, is extremely more important than a physical relationship with Him, even though it be His own mother. It is a dangerous presumption, then, to think that you will be able to appeal to His mother when you appear before Him for judgement. Remember: to those who made the observation, “Behold, your mother,” the Lord answered, “Who is my mother?”

“Immaculate Conception”

A controversy sparked off in the twelfth century eventually led to the dogma of “the Immaculate Conception” proclaimed in 1854 by pope Pius IX: “We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful.”²⁰¹

The English monk Eadmer wrote in favour of this doctrine, while other Catholic scholars opposed it, among them Bernard of Clairvaux, Peter Lombard, Bonaventura and Thomas Aquinas. In the fourteenth century the monk, Duns Scotus, developed the doctrine that was to give victory to the Franciscans over against the Dominicans who sharply opposed it.

The Catechism refers to two Bible passages as evidence in favour of this doctrine.²⁰² One of them (Ephesians 1:3, 4) does not even refer to Mary but to all Christians. The other text is the announcement of the angel Gabriel. “Through the centuries the Church has become ever more aware that Mary, ‘full of grace’ through God, was redeemed from the moment of her conception”, but does “full of grace” actually imply that she was “conceived without sin”? No, for the same term describes all believers in Ephesians 1:6. Certainly no-one would suggest that all Christians were conceived without sin!²⁰³

Being descended from Adam, Mary was born with original sin just like every other human being. “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world,

and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.”²⁰⁴ The Word of God pronounces this verdict upon all humanity: “There is none righteous, no, not one... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”²⁰⁵ Mary herself confesses her need of salvation; she said: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour.”²⁰⁶ As the doctor heals the sick, so God saves the sinner from sin. Even the Catholic Church admits that Mary “was redeemed.” If she were sinless from the beginning of her existence, (as the angels are), Mary would not have needed redemption, that is the forgiveness of sins.²⁰⁷

Redemption

The Catholic religion teaches that the mother of Jesus “was associated more intimately than any other person in the mystery of his redemptive suffering.”²⁰⁸ “And from this community of will and suffering between Christ and Mary she merited to become most worthily the Reparatrix of the lost world and Dispensatrix of all the gifts that Our Saviour purchased for us by His Death and by His Blood.”²⁰⁹ With such a stance, no wonder that the average Catholic looks to Mary also to achieve salvation. This is a fatal error.

When Mary presented baby Jesus in the temple, Simeon announced to her, “Yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also.”²¹⁰ We can only imagine what Mary felt as she saw her Son hanging on the cross. John, Mary Magdalene, Salome, and Mary the wife of Cleophas, loved the Lord and stood by the cross too. Like Mary, they too suffered greatly as they saw their Beloved in agony.

Nevertheless the sufferings and death of Christ served a totally different purpose than theirs. They suffered because of their compassion towards Him, but Christ suffered and died for their sins and for the sins of all His people.²¹¹ The apostle Peter explains how He who committed no sin, “Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree.”²¹²

Moreover, Scripture consistently relates our redemption, not to His sufferings, but rather to His death. “We were reconciled to God through the death of His Son;” “He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions;” “In Him we have redemption through His blood;” “Washed us from our sins in His own blood;” Christ came “to give His life a ransom for many.”²¹³ The Catholic Church teaches that “with her suffering and dying Son, Mary endured suffering and almost death... together with Christ she has redeemed the human race” and Mary “died in her heart with Him, stabbed with the sword of sorrow”²¹⁴ Actually Mary did not die on Calvary; Christ alone gave His life as a ransom for His people!

The statues and pictures of the Immaculate Conception represent Mary crushing the serpent’s head. The Bible shows us something totally different. God said to the serpent, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall

bruise His heel.”²¹⁵ “He,” the woman’s Seed, the Lord Jesus Christ, crushed the Devil’s head. He alone was conceived without sin, lived a perfectly sinless life and died as the Substitute of the unrighteous, to bring them to God.

More blessed

In his gospel Luke narrates a curious incident. “And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, ‘Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!’” In His response, Jesus does not deny that Mary was uniquely blessed for being His mother, but He leads us to a higher consideration and points to a blessing that is greater still. “More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”²¹⁶

The faithful are blessed “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,” (chosen, predestined, adopted, redeemed, forgiven, made heirs of God, sealed with the Spirit)²¹⁷ – and that is infinitely more important even than the unique privilege that Mary enjoyed. Indeed, as Augustine rightly observes, “It means more for her, an altogether greater blessing, to have been Christ’s disciple than to have been Christ’s mother.”

Let us therefore follow Jesus’ counsel and learn the Word of God, believe and obey it from the heart (even as Mary did), that we too may magnify His Holy Name and enjoy His richest blessings.

13 One Mediator

An infinite chasm separates the Holy God from sinful man. Left to our own resources we could never reach Him who dwells in the highest heaven, but praise be to God who Himself opened a way that reaches from heaven to earth. God's bridge is His Son, Jesus Christ, who brings lost sinners back to the Almighty God. "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all."²¹⁸ With the Word of God open before us, we can answer the following crucial questions:

Question: How many mediators are there between God and man?

Answer: There is one Mediator.

Question: Who is this Mediator?

Answer: Jesus Christ.

Question: Why is He alone the Mediator?

Answer: Because He gave Himself a ransom for all.

Nothing complicated here. There is one Mediator. In spite of Scripture's plain language, the Catholic Church maintains that Mary fulfills a role as "mediatrix" too. In the Catechism we read: "Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation... Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix."²¹⁹ She is even called "the Mediatrix of all graces."²²⁰ Sadly this doctrine is a departure from the plain teaching of God's Word: there is one mediator, Jesus, and not Mary or anybody else.

Other Mediators?

During the marriage at Cana, as soon as Mary came to know about the lack of wine, she approached the Lord and informed Him of the need. During Christ's public ministry, the disciples and the Jewish people often came to Him, making various requests. In the same way, Christians pray to the Lord for each other's needs. However, when we pray for each other we do not become mediators. Jesus alone is mediator because He alone gave himself on the cross as a ransom, paying the price for the liberty of His people ("one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all").

It is sometimes argued, "Why can't we ask Mary to intercede for us, just as we ask fellow believers to pray for us?" An honest Catholic knows that praying to Mary or the saints is completely different than asking a fellow believer for prayer.

Suppose a Christian brother comes and kneels before you, imploring you with great devotion to pray for him. Would you allow him? How would you react if he

calls you his advocate, his hope and refuge? What if he thanks you for the many graces you conferred on him and for delivering him from hell? Suppose he tells you that he confines his salvation to your care and pleads with you to stay with him until you see him safe in heaven? Does that sound like asking a fellow believer to pray for you? Of course not! That kind of prayer and confidence is nothing less than divine worship and it should be directed only to the Lord Jesus Christ. And yet that is exactly the kind of prayer that Catholics offer to Mary and the saints.²²¹

Besides, Scripture teaches us to pray for one another as long as we are still alive. There is no communication between living Christians on earth and the dead saints, whose souls are in heaven. Invoking the departed is a practice of the occult, not Christianity. “Should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living?”²²² Mary and the saints in heaven are unable to hear the prayers of thousands of people simultaneously. Only the omniscient God can hear the prayers of all His children for He “alone know the hearts of all the sons of men.”²²³

To whom should we pray? To Mary and the saints, or to God only? Our Master, Jesus Christ, instructed us to pray to “Our Father in heaven.” The true disciples of Jesus obey Him and pray to God. In Acts 1:14 Mary was praying with the first disciples to the Lord. We should not pray to Mary but rather should pray like Mary, addressing our prayers to the Lord.

The hour of death

In the Rosary, devout Catholics pray to Mary: “Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death.” This form of prayer witnesses to their confidence in Mary. “We give ourselves over to her now, in the Today of our lives, and our trust broadens further, already at the present moment, to surrender ‘the hour of our death’ wholly to her care.”²²⁴

In whom does God want us to trust and hope? The Bible says, “Those who know Your name will put their trust in You; for You, LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You.” “Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.” At his martyrdom, Stephen entrusted himself to his Lord and Saviour. “They stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’” The Good Shepherd has never, and will never, lose one of His sheep. He promised: “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.”²²⁵ Why then don’t you trust Him?

Come to Me

I still remember the teacher explaining to class why we should pray to Mary. “Jesus is the Judge and we fear Him, while Mary is our merciful mother. So we go to her with all our needs. Then she tells her Son, and He gives us whatever she asks.” Such reasoning is easy to follow but is completely misleading. I

thank God for my mother's love, tenderness and care because she is a reflection of Him who made her. Why then should we suppose that God is somewhat indifferent or reserved in mercy? If a mother is loving and kind, God is infinitely more so. Mary herself praises God whose "mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation."²²⁶ Undoubtedly, God is holy and righteous, and has every reason to show His displeasure against the sinner. But the same God "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."²²⁷ Can you imagine a greater love than this?

Why do you linger? Why don't you approach the Lord Jesus directly? Did Jesus ever forbid anyone from coming to Him? The disciples hindered the little children, but He rebuked them, saying, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them."²²⁸ The demoniac was rejected and feared by everybody; Jesus gave him liberty. The crowd rebuked the blind man and ordered him to be silent; Jesus heard him and restored his sight. Society put lepers in a separate colony; Jesus touched them and healed them. The people were ready to stone the adulteress; Jesus had compassion on her and forgave her. To the thief nailed beside Him, Jesus obtained a place for him in His kingdom.

Do you think, then, my friend, that the Lord Jesus will reject you if you turn to Him by faith? Listen to His wonderful promise: "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out." His invitation is just as bright: "Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."²²⁹

The Name above every name

Contrary to Scriptural doctrine, the Catholic religion has spawned a rivalry between the Lord Jesus and Mary. Christ was conceived without sin, gave His life as a ransom for many, and subsequently was exalted into the glory of heaven, where He is presently reigning and interceding for His own. Throughout the centuries, the Catholic Church developed a strange teaching to the effect that Mary too was conceived without sin, has a vital part to play in the redemption of mankind, was assumed into heaven, crowned queen of heaven and ordained as mediatrix.

In the Litany, Mary is invoked with a number of titles: gate of heaven, morning-star, refuge of sinners, comfort of the afflicted, help of Christians, but it is noteworthy how Scripture never accords any of these appellations to Mary. On the contrary, such titles are only descriptive of the Lord Jesus. He alone is the door; He, and none other, is called the morning-star; Scripture says that the Lord is the refuge, the help and comfort of all Christians.²³⁰

In 1950, pope Pius XII proclaimed the Assumption as a dogma of faith. Yet in all Scripture there is not even one hint of this doctrine. By contrast, much emphasis is laid upon the death, the resurrection and the ascension of the Lord Jesus into heaven. After humbling Himself unto the death of the cross, it was

the Father's will to have His eternal Son exalted and lifted up above all the heavens.

"Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."²³¹

All give honour to Jesus Christ; many do so wilfully, but even His enemies must worship Christ. Even now, the spirits of the redeemed in heaven, including Mary, countless numbers of angels, and millions of Christians in the world, worship and adore the Lord Jesus Christ. We should do the same.

To whom are you praying? In whom are you trusting? Whom do you love with all your heart? To whom do you say: *Totus Tuus* – I am all yours? The children of God answer uncompromisingly: "For to me, to live is Christ."²³²

My Saviour

What will be your choice in the light of God's Word? Perhaps you will answer: "I trust in the name of Jesus and in the name of Mary for my salvation." But how can you call on the name of Mary since the Scripture plainly states that "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved"²³³

Perhaps, by God's grace, you will answer: "Like Mary and all other Christians, I trust in the name of the Lord alone for my salvation, for it is written that 'whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'"²³⁴

Then with Mary and all the redeemed you will be able to sing: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour."²³⁵

14 Salvation is not by works

Is salvation God's work? Or is it man's? Or could it be that both God and man contribute to it? In other words, on what basis should God forgive us and receive us into heaven?

You may perhaps answer, "I hope to go to heaven because my good works are more numerous than my sins. God will place the evil I've performed on one side and my good performance on the other, and I trust the balance will be in my favor. To this end I attend church, pray, take Holy Communion, fast and do penance, contribute to charity and whenever I can I help my neighbor. Such good works merit the grace of eternal life."

The Catholic Church insists that "We can have merit in God's sight because of God's free plan to associate man with the work of his grace." The grace of salvation is the fruit of a joint-effort between God and man: "Merit is to be ascribed in the first place to the grace of God, and secondly, to man's collaboration."²³⁶

A friend of mine explained this teaching in a simpler way. "God did his part. Now it's up to you to do your part too." I used to believe this, and did my utmost to "do my part" but never did I find rest and peace for my soul. How could I know whether I've done enough? If I die, would I go to heaven or would I go to hell? These doubts held me captive in a gloomy prison cell, and I know many Catholic friends who are in the same predicament.

I thank God, who was pleased to set me free from these uncertainties and fears, and show me the glorious light of His love and mercy. The Lord used the following portion of Scripture as a key to open my prison doors:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."²³⁷

Not of works

According to Scripture, is salvation by God's grace and our own good works? The Holy Spirit leaves us in no doubt: salvation is "by grace" and "not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." Salvation comes from God alone. We can do nothing to deserve it. We cannot contribute anything to earn it. Salvation is "not of works, lest anyone should boast."

Even a little child can understand this simple statement, but how difficult it is for man's proud heart to accept this truth! Ironically enough, the sinner cannot experience liberty and peace with God unless he first stops depending, even partially, on himself and his own performance. The way to freedom is to trust

completely on Someone else, the Lord Jesus Christ. By faith, a person receives salvation and justification from God. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.” “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.”²³⁸

Can we perhaps say that we deserve to be saved because we believe? Certainly not, for genuine faith does not lean upon itself but rather upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith resembles the empty hand which gratefully receives the gift of salvation, accomplished by Christ and given freely by God.

The Holy Spirit moved Saul of Tarsus to leave it on record that the sinner is not saved at all by what he himself does. At one time Saul too used to trust in himself in order to obtain eternal life. He boasted in his rite of circumcision; he flattered himself for being one of the children of Israel (the covenant people of God); he took note of how zealous for his religion and how obedient he was to the Law. Similarly you too may be found in such a mind-set: you may point out that you are baptized, that you hold membership in the Catholic Church, and lead a devout and obedient life, observing the Ten Commandments and the church’s precepts.

As it happened, there came an extraordinary change in Saul’s attitude. He no longer continued to trust in his own works and accomplishments. Rather, he affirmed: “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.”²³⁹ Good works, if performed with the intention of meriting salvation, become a stumbling-block and rubbish (as the apostle describes them), because they hold the sinner back from trusting completely in the Lord Jesus Christ. Such works, though commendable in themselves, block your way to the Saviour.

Saved by grace

The sinner is delivered from sin by God’s grace. But what does “grace” mean? The apostle Paul explains the exact significance. He writes: “Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.”²⁴⁰

Imagine if you were to find a note with your pay-cheque, “This cheque is given to you as a gift, by grace!” I can guess your reaction! “Oh no, I earned the money. I have a right to the cheque; I worked for it. My employer is indebted to me for the service I have rendered. I merit, I deserve, I earned that payment!” So “grace” is the very opposite of “merit” gained by works. Grace is an unmerited favour.

God does not save us because we deserve to be saved on account of our work or cooperation. God is not obliged to give anything to any sinner except punishment, but it pleased God to save sinners, even though they did not deserve it! What sinners really deserve is His wrath and condemnation, but

instead they receive eternal life freely on account of Christ. How unsearchable are the riches, love and goodness of God!

To my sorrow I notice how many Catholics do not understand what God's grace really is. They assume that they can "earn grace" by their good deeds or through the intercession of saints. The Catholic Church teaches that "moved by the Holy Spirit, we can merit for ourselves and for others all the graces needed to attain eternal life, as well as necessary temporal goods."²⁴¹ Such statements are self-contradictory. You cannot pay for a favour, for in that very moment when you pay for it, it ceases to be a favour. Salvation and eternal life are gifts of God (please read Ephesians 2:8 and Romans 6:23). A genuine gift is given freely from the heart and not because you have a right to it.

You cannot be saved by grace and by your good deeds at the same time. It's either by grace or by works. It is certainly not by both, for Scripture declares: "And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace."²⁴²

His workmanship

As we insist that we are not saved by our good works, by our obedience and by our participation, we should not assume that salvation is cheap and easy. Salvation is a grand accomplishment - a far greater work than the creation of heaven and earth. It is a work that only God could perform. "We," that is, all those saved by grace, "are His workmanship." Saved people are God's work. In no way does salvation originate in man or can be accomplished by man. God alone can provide and apply salvation. "Salvation is of the Lord."²⁴³

Jesus Christ insists upon this truth. When questioned about who would be saved, he answered: "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible."²⁴⁴ He did not say, "Salvation is difficult for man." No, it's way beyond man. For man it's impossible! God alone can, and actually did the humanly impossible: in His Son he accomplished salvation for sinners.

You must realize that you have a debit account with God - an infinite one - and you can do nothing to make good for it. Your so-called merits and cooperation avail for nothing. The wages of sin, according to Scripture, is death, not your good deeds. Lost sinners will pay the penalty for their sin by dying the second death, when they will be cast into the lake of fire forever, far away from the comfortable presence of God. Nevertheless, a way of deliverance has been inaugurated for us - Jesus Christ. He became personally responsible for the failures of His people by paying the price Himself, dying on the cross. In Christ "we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."²⁴⁵

The sinner is justified (declared right with God) "freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."²⁴⁶ Man does not pay anything, but far be it

from us to think that salvation is cheap! Salvation is free for us; but for Christ to obtain it for us, it cost Him His own life!

To do good works

What about good works, then? Ephesians 2:8-10 affords us a precise answer. Firstly, it teaches us that we are not saved because of our good deeds (“not of works”). However that does not imply that good works have no place at all in salvation. On the contrary, the apostle Paul insists that we are saved for the very purpose of engaging ourselves wholeheartedly in doing good works - “created in Christ Jesus for good works.” So, we are saved not “of” but “for” good works. Good deeds are not the cause, but rather the result of salvation.

The apostle James asks: “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?”²⁴⁷ Good works are the fruit produced by the branch engrafted in Christ, the true vine. The absence of fruit reveals that the branch is not vitally united to Christ by living faith. So if someone claims to have faith but does not produce good works, it shows that his so-called “faith” is dead and useless.

Good works and obedience to the holy Law of God are the concrete evidence of salvation. Those to whom God granted the forgiveness of sins are the same ones in whom God has inscribed His Law, and wrote it upon their hearts.²⁴⁸ He who says that he has a good relationship with God and yet does not keep His commandments, albeit imperfectly, is a liar. He who boasts that he believes in God and yet his “faith” is barren, producing no good works, is only deceiving himself.

A new song

We are not saved because of our good works. We are saved that we may do good works. It is every Christian’s ambition to live a fruitful life in order to express his gratitude to God. Every genuine Christian does not boast in himself; he knows well enough that he did nothing to merit salvation. The Christian’s boast is rather in the cross of Christ, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.”²⁴⁹

In heaven a new song is sung to the Lamb, the Lord Jesus: “You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation.”²⁵⁰

Who will dare to change such a hymn of praise to Christ, and instead say, “You are worthy, O sinful man, for by your works and by your own efforts you have obtained salvation for yourself”?

15 Jesus is the Way

At the time when the Catholic Church was amassing wealth by selling indulgences, the Augustinian monk, Martin Luther, confessed publicly: “The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.”²⁵¹ The church should cherish and fervently protect the gospel because it is our only hope of salvation. We need not be surprised, then, when we discover how Satan, throughout history, has endeavoured to twist and distort the gospel of God. In fact, even in the time of the apostles, a fierce attack against the gospel had already been launched.

The apostle Paul had preached the good news in the regions of Galatia. He taught how man is reckoned as righteous before God through believing in His Son, Jesus Christ. God does not justify us on account of our good works; rather, justification is His free gift, purchased for us by the obedience and blood of Christ. As soon as Paul left the area, false teachers crept in, posing as Christian brethren, and stealthily attempted to overturn the apostolic gospel. They dared not deny the cross of Christ directly; again, they still said that believing in Him is quite necessary, but, alongside faith, they added the ritual of circumcision and the deeds of the law.

At first glance, these changes in the gospel message do not appear to be fatal. However, Scripture pronounces a curse on all those who pervert the gospel as preached by the apostles. Paul writes: “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.”²⁵²

Why so sharp and uncompromising? Simply because the addition of works as a means of salvation denies faith, grace and the cross of Christ. A nutritious and attractive dish will hardly do you any good if even a few drops of cyanide are mixed with it. Even so, whatever is added to faith in Christ negates and poisons the gospel.

The Catholic Church amended a good number of abuses so prevalent in the Middle Ages. The crusades, the inquisition, the gross immorality and intrigues of many popes, and the trafficking in indulgences are largely shameful episodes buried within history books, but this is not our main interest. The question, so relevant and urgent, is: “What must I do to be saved? What is God’s answer to our predicament?”

In this book we have searched for the Scriptural answer and having found it, compared it to the Roman Catholic official position. Does Rome uphold the apostolic gospel, or does she promote “another gospel”? We have to admit that she has forsaken the right way and embraced a gospel that is no gospel at all. We have proved how she adds works to faith; she adds human merit to grace. She is still intent in teaching the mediation of Mary, the saints and her priests. In addition to the sacrifice of Christ, Rome prescribes penances and purgatory.

All this practically and effectively hides Christ from the devotion and faith of the people.

Now if Scripture calls the addition of circumcision and the Law to faith in Christ “another gospel,” how much more does the Roman Catholic gospel stand condemned! Before God, I am constrained in my conscience to warn you that the message of Roman Catholicism is false. If you continue depending upon it, nothing will deliver you from the wrath and righteous judgement of God at the Last Day.

I am the way

Fifteen years ago I stood at the crossroads of my life. For two years I had been studying the Bible, especially the Gospel according to John, and the epistles of Paul to the Romans and Galatians. By God’s grace I realized my guilt and I was terrified of the danger of eternal punishment in hell. I knew how helpless I was and I lost all confidence in myself. The glory and majesty of Christ, in His sufferings and resurrection, dawned upon my soul; and by the enablement of the Holy Spirit I entrusted my soul’s well-being and salvation completely to Him.

At that time I compared Catholic doctrine with the message of Scripture and discovered a gaping chasm between the two positions. I could no longer be identified as a member in a church that has twisted the gospel. I neither had any desire to disappoint my parents nor was I seeking my friends’ criticism and rejection. My choice was as clear as daylight: it was either the Word of God or human teaching; either be faithful to Christ, my Lord and Redeemer, or else be a man-pleaser.

Today you stand in a similar situation. You must choose for yourself. Will you continue professing a religion founded upon a false gospel? Or will you forsake the Roman religion and embrace the biblical gospel, and so be united to Christ, the all-sufficient Saviour?

In the Lord Jesus Christ’s Name I appeal to you, be reconciled to God! Abandon all confidence in your own efforts, your merits and penances, in a fake sacrifice and an imaginary purgatory. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, who died and rose again the third day, and who is reigning in glory. Do not dare any longer to approach God through Mary, or the saints, or Catholic priests. Approach God through His beloved Son, the High Priest and sole Mediator. He Himself said: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”²⁵³

References

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References to the Catechism of the Catholic Church are marked “CCC” and followed by the paragraph number.

1 1 Thessalonians 5:21.

2 Mark 8:36.

3 Matthew 7:13, 14.

4 Romans 10:2.

5 Romans 10:1.

6 1 Corinthians 1:21.

7 2 Peter 1:21.

8 Hebrews 1:2.

9 Jude 1:3. The Roman Catholic Church also teaches that God’s message has been given to us in full. “The Christian dispensation, therefore, as the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away and we now await no further new public revelation before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Dei Verbum, no. 4).

10 2 Timothy 3:16.

11 John 17:17.

12 Negatively: Mark 7:9; Colossians 2:8; 1 Peter 1:18; positively: 1 Corinthians 11:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:6.

13 John 20:30,31.

14 See Mark 7:6-13.

15 Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Dei Verbum, no. 9.

16 Exodus 20:4-6.

17 Mark 7:9.

18 Matthew 7:15.

19 Matthew 15:14.

20 See Deuteronomy 13:1-4; Isaiah 8:20; Proverbs 30:5, 6.

21 Acts 17:11.

22 1 Thessalonians 5:27.

23 Psalms 119:130.

24 Luke 24:45.

25 See Luke 10:25, 26.

26 2 Timothy 3:15.

27 Colossians 2:6, 7.

28 Ephesians 2:20.

29 1 Corinthians 3:11.

30 Ephesians 5:23.

31 Colossians 1:18.

32 CCC 881, 882.

33 Matthew 16:13-19.

34 1 Corinthians 10:4; 1 Peter 2:8.

35 Psalms 18:31.

36 Augustine, Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament, 26.

www.ccel.org/fathers/NPNF1-06/ecf3-26.htm

37 First Vatican Council, session 4, chapter 3.

38 See Matthew 16:19; 18:18.

39 Luke 22:24.

40 Compare Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes*, no.5., with 1 Peter 5:4.
41 See Acts 3:1-10.
42 “Furthermore, we declare, we proclaim, we define that it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff” (Pope Boniface VIII, *Bull Unam Sanctam*, 1302).
43 See Second Vatican Council, Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Rredintegratio*, no. 3.
44 Acts 4:12.
45 See John 20:30, 31.
46 Psalms 62:1, 2.
47 Genesis 2:16, 17.
48 Romans 5:18, 19.
49 Genesis 6:5.
50 Jeremiah 17:9.
51 Romans 6:23.
52 John 19:11; Matthew 10:15. Luke 12:47, 48.
53 Matthew 5:21, 22, 27, 28.
54 Genesis 2:17; 3:4.
55 Acts 17:31; Romans 14:10-12.
56 Matthew 19:16.
57 Matthew 19:17-19.
58 Romans 3:10-12.
59 Matthew 19:21.
60 Mark 2:17.
61 See Galatians 3:10-12.
62 Romans 3:19, 20.
63 Galatians 3:24.
64 Galatians 1:6-9.
65 Romans 5:18.
66 Romans 3:23.
67 Romans 5:1.
68 CCC 1992.
69 Romans 4:4, 5.
70 Titus 3:5.
71 Romans 4:7, 8.
72 Romans 4:6.
73 Romans 3:24.
74 Romans 3:26.
75 Romans 5:19.
76 Jeremiah 23:6.
77 2 Corinthians 5:21.
78 Philippians 3:8, 9.
79 Romans 8:1.
80 Luke 18:9-14.
81 Council of Trent, session 6, *Canons Concerning Justification*, canon 10.
82 Romans 3:28.
83 Council of Trent, session 6, *Decree Concerning Justification*, chapter 8.
84 Council of Trent, session 6, *Canons Concerning Justification*, canon 24.
85 Romans 1:16, 17.
86 Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16.
87 See CCC 628, 1239, 1262.
88 See Acts 2:38; Acts 2:41; Acts 8:12,13; Acts 8:36, 37; Acts 10:47,48; Acts 16:14,15; Acts 16:32-34; Acts 18:8; Acts 19:4,5; Acts 22:16.
89 Romans 6:3, 4, 5; Colossians 2:12 and Acts 2:38; 22:16.
90 See CCC 1131, 1214.

91 Council of Trent, session 6, chapter 7: “The causes of this justification are: ... the instrumental cause is the sacrament of baptism, which is the sacrament of faith, without which no man was ever justified finally...”

92 CCC 1277, 1213.

93 Catechism of Trent, The Sacrament of Baptism.

94 CCC 1257.

95 John 3:8; John 1:12, 13.

96 Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38, 1 Peter 3:21; Acts 22:16; Romans 6:3, 4; Colossians 2:12. See www.justforcatholics.org/a114.htm for further discussion.

97 Luke 7:50.

98 Galatians 3:6-9.

99 Romans 4:1-5.

100 Romans 9-11.

101 Acts 15:11.

102 Acts 15:7-9.

103 Acts 10:47.

104 Acts 10:43.

105 Psalms 51:4.

106 Psalm 51:1.

107 Psalm 32:5.

108 Council of Trent, session 14, The Most Holy Sacraments of Penance and Extreme Unction, chapter 6.

109 CCC 1465.

110 James 4:12.

111 1 Kings 8:39.

112 Mark 2:5-11.

113 John 20:21-23.

114 Luke 24:46, 47.

115 Acts 10:43.

116 Acts 13:38.

117 1 John 2:12.

118 CCC 1447.

119 Isaiah 45:22.

120 1 John 2:1.

121 1 John 1:9.

122 Matthew 6:9-13.

123 See the apocryphal book, 2 Maccabees 12:38-46.

124 See Revelation 21:27.

125 CCC 1459.

126 CCC 1414.

127 CCC 1030, 1031.

128 Luke 15:11-32.

129 Isaiah 53:5, 6.

130 Colossians 2:13,14.

131 Isaiah 43:25.

132 1 Corinthians 3:9-14. Other passages include Matthew 5:25, 26; 12:32; Revelation 21:27 and 2 Maccabees 12:38-46, the latter is an apocryphal book.

133 1 Corinthians 6:11.

134 1 John 1:7.

135 Isaiah 1:18.

136 Revelation 1:5, 6.

137 Council of Trent, Session 6, Canons Concerning Justification, canon 30.

138 Luke 23:42, 43.

139 Hebrews 1:3.

140 Leviticus 17:11.

141 Hebrews 9:22.

142 Hebrews 8:5; 10:1,4.
 143 Mark 10:45.
 144 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18.
 145 Galatians 3:7-14.
 146 Matthew 27:46.
 147 Matthew 25:41.
 148 Revelation 5:9.
 149 John 6:51.
 150 John 6:53, 54.
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 152 See John 8:12; 10:9; 10:11; 15:1.
 153 John 6:35, 40, 47.
 154 John 6:29.
 155 Hebrews 9:12, 26; 10:10, 14.
 156 CCC 1414.
 157 CCC 1367.
 158 Revelation 1:18. The Catholic Church does not teach that Christ actually dies during the Sacrifice of the Mass. "On the cross He completely offered Himself and all His sufferings to God, and the immolation of the victim was brought about by the bloody death, which He underwent of His free will. But on the altar, by reason of the glorified state of His human nature, 'death shall have no more dominion over Him,' and so the shedding of His blood is impossible..." (Pope Pius XII, Encyclical, Mediator Dei, no. 70).
 159 Hebrews 9:22.
 160 CCC 1366; 1323.
 161 Hebrews 9:28.
 162 Hebrews 10:11,12.
 163 Hebrews 10:15-18.
 164 Matthew 28:20.
 165 Matthew 26:11.
 166 Revelation 22:20.
 167 1 Corinthians 11:23-25.
 168 1 Corinthians 11:27.
 169 CCC 1374, 1376.
 170 See 2 Samuel 23:13-17.
 171 Matthew 26:29.
 172 1 Corinthians 11:26.
 173 Matthew 26:26, 27.
 174 Luke 24:39.
 175 Hebrews 3:1; 4:14.
 176 Hebrews 9:24.
 177 Hebrews 9:12.
 178 See Hebrews 10:19-22.
 179 CCC 1337.
 180 Council of Trent, session 22, Canons On The Sacrifice Of The Mass, canon 2.
 181 See Matthew 8:4, etc.; Acts 14:13; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 1 Peter 2:5; Hebrews 5:6, etc.; Hebrews 7:1.
 182 1 Peter 2:5.
 183 See Hebrews 10:19; 4:16.
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 185 Romans 12:1; Hebrews 13:15, 16.
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 187 Hebrews 7:25.
 188 Galatians 4:4.
 189 Luke 1:46-48.

190 The following are the main references to Mary in the whole New Testament: Matthew 1,2; 12:46-50; 13:55,56; Mark 3:31-35; 6:3,4; Luke 1,2; 8:19-21; John 2:1-12; 6:42; 19:25-27; Acts 1:14; Galatians 4:4.

191 Matthew 1:20, 21.

192 Matthew 1:25.

193 CCC 721.

194 “If any one saith, that the marriage state is to be placed above the state of virginity, or of celibacy, and that it is not better and more blessed to remain in virginity, or in celibacy, than to be united in matrimony; let him be anathema” (Council of Trent, session 24, Canons On The Sacrament Of Matrimony, canon 10).

195 For example, Augustine writes, “Who, then, denies that it [intercourse between married couple] is a sin?” (Augustine, *Enchiridion*, chapter 21, www.ccel.org/a/augustine/enchiridion/enchiridion.html).

196 Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion* 78:6.

197 Hebrews 13:4; See Ephesians 5:31, 32.

198 John 2:4 (KJV).

199 John 19:25-27.

200 See Matthew 12:46-50.

201 Pope Pius IX, *Encyclical, Ineffabilis Deus*.

202 CCC 491, 492: “Through the centuries the Church has become ever more aware that Mary, “full of grace” [Luke 1:28] through God... The Father blessed Mary more than any other created person ‘in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places’ and chose her ‘in Christ before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before him in love’ [Ephesians 1:3, 4].”

203 The term translated “full of grace” in Luke 1:28 can be simply translated “favoured one” (as in the Catholic American Standard Bible) or “highly favoured” (as in the King James Bible). In Ephesians 1:6, it is translated “graced us” or “made us accepted.”

204 Romans 5:12.

205 Romans 3:10-23.

206 Luke 1:46, 47.

207 See Ephesians 1:7.

208 CCC 618.

209 Pope Pius X, *Encyclical, Ad Diem Illum Laetissimum*, no. 12.

210 Luke 2:35.

211 See Romans 6:10; 1 Peter 3:18.

212 See 1 Peter 2:21-24.

213 Romans 5:10; Hebrews 9:15; Ephesians 1:7; Revelation 1:5; Mark 10:45.

214 Pope Benedict XV, *Apostolic Letter, Inter Sodalicia*; Pope Leo XIII, *Encyclical, Iucunda Semper Expectatione*, no. 3.

215 Genesis 3:15.

216 Luke 11:27, 28.

217 See Ephesians 1:3-14.

218 1 Timothy 2:5, 6.

219 CCC 969.

220 Pope Pius XI, *Encyclical, Caritate Christi Compulsi*, no. 31.

221 The Prayer of Confidence in Mary, by St Alphonsus, is a typical prayer to Mary. “Most holy, Immaculate Virgin and my Mother Mary! To you who are the Mother of my Lord, the Queen of the world, the Advocate, the Hope, and the Refuge of sinners, I have recourse today, I who am the most miserable of all. I render you my most humble homage, O great Queen, and I thank you for all the graces you have conferred on me until now, especially for having delivered me from hell, which I have so often deserved. I love you, O most amiable Lady; and for the love which I bear you, I promise to serve you always and to do all in my power to make others love you also. I place in you all my hopes; I confide my salvation to your care. Accept me for your servant and receive me under your mantle, O Mother of Mercy. And since you are so powerful with God, deliver me from all temptations; or rather, obtain to me the strength to triumph over them until death. Of you I ask a perfect love for Jesus Christ. Through you I hope to die a good

death. O my Mother, by the love which you bear to God, I beseech you to help me at all times, but especially at the last moment of my life. Leave me not, I beseech you, until you see me safe in heaven, blessing you and singing your mercies for all eternity. Amen. So I hope. So may it be.”

222 Isaiah 8:19.

223 1 Kings 8:39.

224 CCC 2677.

225 Psalms 9:10; Psalms 2:12; Acts 7:59; John 10:28.

226 Luke 1:50.

227 John 3:16.

228 Mark 10:14.

229 John 6:37; Matthew 11:28.

230 See John 10:9; Revelation 22:16; Psalms 46:1; 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4.

231 Philippians 2:9-11.

232 Philippians 1:21.

233 Acts 4:12.

234 Romans 10:13.

235 Luke 1:46, 47.

236 CCC 2025.

237 Ephesians 2:8-10.

238 Acts 16:31; Galatians 2:16.

239 See Philippians 3:1-11.

240 Romans 4:4.

241 CCC 2027.

242 Romans 11:6.

243 Jonah 2:9.

244 Mark 10:27.

245 Ephesians 1:7.

246 Romans 3:24.

247 James 2:14.

248 See Hebrews 8:10-12.

249 See 1 Corinthians 1:31.

250 Revelation 5:9.

251 Disputation of Doctor Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences, (1517).

252 Galatians 1:8.

253 John 14:6.