

NIGHT JOURNEY FROM ROME



By CLARK BUTTERFIELD



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In 1978 the Lord called a priest, Clark Butterfield, out of the Roman Catholic system. God gave him a mission to write this autobiography before he went home to be with his Savior.

Butterfield graciously reveals to both Roman Catholics and Christians the teachings of the Vatican and how they differ from God's Holy Word. **NIGHT JOURNEY FROM ROME** is tactful, compassionate, and candid. Any honest reader will be touched and enlightened by its contents.

This is a beautifully written book for your library, and one you could put into the hands of Roman Catholics or Christians. The contrast between scripture and the teachings of Rome is very clearly explained.

J. T. C.

NIGHT JOURNEY FROM ROME

**By
Clark Butterfield**

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Dedicated To

JIM MacKINNON

whom the Lord used mightily on my behalf. I am grateful for his suggestions and for his unfaltering encouragement and prayers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I extend my personal thanks to Sgt. James Thomas of the Detroit Police Department, who volunteered to read and check my manuscript. He performed that task untiringly and efficiently, offering numerous practical criticisms.

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Alberto Rivera
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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

When Clark Butterfield wrote this book and sent it to the publishers across the country, they turned him down. The tremendous hold the Roman Catholic system has on the media and communications is such that publishers are frightened to print a book like this for fear of pressures.

I thank God for Clark Butterfield coming forth as an ex-priest who openly admitted that what we have published on Catholicism is true. We needed another voice from the ranks of the Roman Priesthood to verify what Dr. Rivera has revealed to us.

Before this book was published Clark Butterfield went to be with the Lord on May 5, 1981. I am sorry he isn't around to read his story, but I pray many will profit from his message.

JACK T. CHICK

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The Most Reverend Timothy Manning, D.D.

Auxiliary Bishop of Los Angeles

Through the Imposition of His Hands

Will Ordain

The Reverend Clark Butterfield

To the Priesthood of Jesus Christ

Saturday, the Twenty-ninth of May

Nineteen Hundred and Sixty-five

At Nine O'clock in the Morning

Saint Monica's Church

Seventh Street and California Avenue

Santa Monica, California

To Give Thanks to God Our Father

You Are Invited to Attend the Ordination

And to Join Him in Offering His

First Solemn Mass

Sunday, the Thirtieth of May

At Twelve-fifteen O'clock

Saint Monica's Church

Santa Monica, California

**Reception and First Blessing
Sunday, Three to Five O'clock
in the Parish Auditorium**

**R. S. V. P.
715 California Avenue
Santa Monica, California**

INTRODUCTION

"AND I SAW THE WOMAN DRUNKEN WITH THE BLOOD OF THE SAINTS, AND WITH THE BLOOD OF THE MARTYRS OF JESUS: AND WHEN I SAW HER, I WONDERED WITH GREAT ADMIRATION."

(Rev. 17:6)

Beloved reader, this book is in your hands as a result of Clark Butterfield's desire, my desire and the desire of those who knew him when he was with us. Although there was a great urgency to get this book published during his lifetime, God, in His sovereignty, determined the book would be more effective after Clark Butterfield's death. The urgency was, first of all, because he was a Roman priest; second, after Clark Butterfield became a Christian, he read "Alberto" and "Double-Cross" and testified to the truth of these publications historically, doctrinally and prophetically. He testified from his own personal knowledge that I was telling the truth.

Third, it was his departure to heaven through the most strange circumstances that brought about the greatest confirmation that we are in the perilous times, prophesied in the book of Revelation. Yes, his departure to be with the Lord under the most unnatural circumstances backs up what he states throughout the pages of this book, that the dangers which America faces, and the American families are facing under the constant penetration and infiltration of Roman Catholicism into Christianity are more real now than ever before. His death, as well as his life and conversion to Christ, has witnessed to that.

Before he was called home by the Lord, Clark Butterfield wrote in his will that at all costs there was not to be "any attempt to impose a Roman Catholic funeral or burial of my remains." At this point, we remember the great, great army of

the saints of Christ who, with Clark Butterfield, have never been and never will be canonized or elevated to the altars by the harlot of Rome, but on the contrary, have been accused, slandered and victimized under her own drunkenness and darkness.

Another martyred ex-priest comes to mind, Charles Chiniquy, who wrote in his will:

The will of Chiniquy is in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Being through the accordance of my God in sound body and mental health; but knowing that I may die at any moment, I hereby express my last wishes:

First, I die in the faith and union of our Lord Jesus Christ, such as the Holy Gospels reveal it, and according to the tenets of the Presbyterian church, I renounce more than ever the errors of the church of Rome. Believing more than ever that the "church" and its pope are in error, but being more than ever convinced that the church of Rome and its popes, that its priests, its religious orders and its monks are the greatest enemies which Jesus Christ has had and still has on earth. I pray my dear compatriots more than ever to abandon that false religion of the popes of Rome, which deceives them, seduces them and ruins them both for time and eternity.

January 10, 1899

Clark Butterfield is now present with the Lord, another saint martyred for Jesus. The question now has been answered for him, but what about you? As a Christian, are you fulfilling Christ's will, and regardless of the cost, are you living a complete, separated life for Christ and His church? And to those Roman Catholics to whom this book mainly is dedicated, are you prepared with an open heart to receive, accept, and live in

the will of Jesus Christ rather than the doctrines, teachings,
and commandments of man?

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Rivera', with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

ALBERTO RIVERA
P. O. Box 1076
Alta Loma, Ca 91701

PREFACE

"...forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

(Phil 3:13-14)

Praise God, claiming the above Scripture, I do not ever look back with vain regret, and certainly not with nostalgia, to the years I lived in bondage under the Roman Catholic religious system. Rather, I look forward in Christ to liberty, joy and peace, and being conformed to Jesus Christ, and in expectation of His glorious return. Truly Jesus has set this captive free and liberated this oppressed former Roman Catholic! He is faithful to His promise in the Holy Gospel. (Luke 4:18)

I am honored to associate myself in any manner with the ministry of Dr. Alberto Rivera. The A.I.C. ministry is of God. The devil seeks to destroy it (1 Peter 5:8), but the Spirit of God sustains it, for it preaches the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ — and there is no other Gospel. So each day in prayer I lift up the needs of Dr. Rivera's ministry as we bear each other's burdens.

In common with so many other thousands of persons, I first learned of A.I.C. through the booklet ALBERTO. It was mailed to me by my closest Christian friend, with an accompanying note, "Please read this booklet which was left by somebody on one of the Teen Mission buses. Let me have your comments on it when we get together later this year."

There are no accidents with God. That copy of ALBERTO was left on that bus in Florida, more than 1200 miles from me. The young man who retrieved it, Jim MacKinnon, is the same man who, as a Detroit Police Officer, witnessed to me and led me to the Lord more than two years ago. This was God's

design. It could not have been coincidence. The Spirit led my friend to pick up the copy of ALBERTO and mail it to me. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." (Rom. 8:28)

You see, like Dr. Rivera, I am a former Roman Catholic priest. Two months before I received the copy of ALBERTO, I had completed writing a book of personal testimony and witness and had submitted it to several of the major so-called "Christian" publishers, with negative results. After reading ALBERTO, I realized I was not alone in my desire, as a former Catholic priest, to bring Christ's plan of salvation to the millions of captives in the Roman Catholic system. So I immediately wrote to Chick Publications, the publishers of ALBERTO, as follows:

"Gentlemen: I was recently given, by a Christian friend, a copy of your publication entitled ALBERTO. It intrigued me. I am a former Roman Catholic priest. I abandoned Catholicism and the priesthood in 1973, with no scandal involved, and as a matter of conscience. Since that time I have been a civilian member of the Detroit Police Department. Two years ago, through the witnessing of a Christian police officer, I was led to rebirth in Christ, and I became a born-again, evangelical Christian."

"During the past two years I have written a book which is now complete, entitled NIGHT JOURNEY FROM ROME. It is a full-length book of 10 chapters. It recounts my spiritual odyssey from Rome to the Cross and then sets out to demolish the pretensions, the human traditions, the heresies, the gross errors, and the arrogance of Rome. I have submitted the manuscript to a couple of the major "Christian" publishing houses in the United States, but they have rejected it as being too controversial, too anti-Catholic, too anti-ecumenical, etc., though they acknowledge it is competently written. I am looking for a fearless publisher who would be willing to take on my book in the cause of Christ, on its own literary merits and its worth as a tool for witnessing to Roman Catholics. "

"I am convinced that God will see that it is published. When

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it is, I will, no doubt, become the target of at least verbal harassment from the Roman Catholic establishment, both liberal and conservative branches. But I must get my message to the widest possible readership. Your assistance or further information will be appreciated."

Now, through the valiant Christian efforts of Dr. Rivera, the book is about to be published. As I inferred in my initial letter to Chick Publications, it is partially autobiographical, detailing the story of my Roman Catholic years—my childhood and adolescence, my adulthood, the years in the seminary, my ordination to the priesthood, my ministry in that priesthood, my subsequent disillusionment and my rejection of both the priesthood and the Roman Catholic heresy definitively. Then I recount the further five years I spent in danger of losing my immortal soul without Christ. And finally, Praise the Lord, I narrate my being witnessed to, my repentance, my acceptance of Christ as my Lord and Savior and therefore my rebirth and my being indwelt with His Holy Spirit, to become an active witnessing Christian.

Then I proceed, in the book, to refute the major Roman errors that trouble former Catholics and acting Catholics: The role of Mary the mother of Christ, and the Roman idolatries concerning her; The nature and identity of the true Church of Jesus Christ; The abominable practice of obligatory private confession to a priest, or "the sacrament of penance"; The idolatry of the Roman Catholic teaching of "**transubstantiation**" in the Holy Communion, and the sacrilegious doctrine of the continuous sacrifice of the mass; the inspiration of the Holy Bible and its true, indispensable place in our Christian belief and practice; The true role of the Holy Spirit, divorced from the Catholic dogma of the infallible guidance of their religious organization; and finally, A consideration of the prophetic message of the Bible in regards to the End Times and the return of Jesus Christ, which is largely ignored in Catholic doctrine and practice. Moreover, I criticize the "Catholic Charismatic Movement" for its **misleading appropriation of a born-again evangelical vocabulary, and its simulated baptism or indwelling of the Holy Spirit**, and I regretfully dismiss it as, at best, a tool of the

Spirit for leading Roman Catholics to rebirth and an exodus from the Roman Church. I sorrowfully admonish some liberal Protestant denominations for their casting away of some Christian fundamentals. And lastly I expose the "ecumenical movement," which is being pressed in our day by the nefarious designs of Rome and the naivete of liberal Protestantism. I identify that movement as "**Satan's last lie**," the whore prophesied in the Book of Revelation, from which we are commanded to "come out." (Rev 18:4-5)

Did I write the book out of a spirit of vengeance toward Rome, or for self-aggrandizement? Never! I undertook the writing in the simple belief that it was God's present will for me, and in the hope it would give glory to Him, discounting any literary pretensions by myself. I wrote in response to Christ's mandate, "You shall be my witnesses." The book constitutes my witness. I hope my readers will be former Catholics who have not found Christ; confused nominal Catholics who are in a pilgrimage of search but have not completely severed their bonds with Catholicism; others who find themselves prohibited from fully practicing Catholicism because of the stringencies of Roman Catholic canon law in regard to marriage; former Catholics who are now genuine born-again Christians and who would like some printed help in witnessing to their relatives and friends still in the Catholic Church;(1) Protestants who have become victims of theological liberalism in their denominations; and all who are weary and heavily burdened and have been invited by Christ to find refreshment in Him. An ambitious listing of potential readers, it is indeed. But man proposes, and God disposes. If my message reflects Christ's message, the proper readers will be found.

I have not, as of this writing, been subjected to any physical harassment or dangers because of my open espousal of evangelical Christianity in place of the old Roman bondage. Dr. Rivera has been the target of physical abuse and more, but God's angels surround him! Yet I have been the object of some

(1) PUBLISHER'S NOTE: Use of the word "Church" in this context should be viewed as a gross misnomer. This pagan, idolatrous INSTITUTION bears little resemblance to the church as Jesus Christ intended it.

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verbal abuse, mostly in the form of senseless and vitriolic outbursts from practicing Catholics of an ecumenical leaning or sympathetic to the Catholic Charismatic Movement. I care not. Jesus Christ predicted that His followers would be persecuted even as He was persecuted. (John 15:20 ff.) We deem it an honor to follow in His footsteps. And He provides the strength we need to bear Him witness: *"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."* (Phil 4:13)

In NIGHT JOURNEY FROM ROME I have not intended offense to any individuals nor to any ecclesiastical institution. If, with my new understanding of Gospel Truth, I have had to be highly critical especially of the Roman Catholic Church and some of its doctrines, that is the demand of Truth. No personal rancor should be attributed to me. The Word of God requires that I confess openly my conversion and rebirth. Some of that confession is understandable only in view of my former Roman affiliation. Serving the Truth, I have attempted to serve equally the demands of Love! I love each of my potential readers in Christ: that love impels me to aid them in seeking salvation. Any seeming abrasiveness in my presentation is an honest reflection of my past anguish and bondage; any love that shines through my narrative is a dim mirroring of that Love which is in Jesus Christ.

Should but one soul be led to Jesus through my witness, the power of the Holy Spirit will be vindicated in my efforts. I pray that any person reading my message who has not received Jesus as his personal Savior will be led by the Spirit to make a decision. Christ has accomplished all that is necessary for our salvation. Our part is solely a trusting faith in God's promises. Such faith involves a decision on our part—an act of our will—through which we claim salvation, and trust that Jesus' atoning blood on Calvary is all-sufficient.

"How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

(Heb 2:3)

Briefly, for the record, I entered St. John's College Seminary, Archdiocese of Los Angeles, in 1958, where I completed

the required Philosophy program and the first two years of Theology (corresponding to graduate work in a secular university). The final two years of Theology I spent at St. Thomas Major Seminary, Denver, Colorado, still for the Los Angeles Archdiocese. I was ordained in Santa Monica, California on May 29, 1965. I subsequently served in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, Archdiocese of Kansas City, Kansas, the Diocese of San Diego, California, and a temporary assignment in the Archdiocese of Detroit, Michigan. I voluntarily left the priesthood in April, 1973, as a matter of conscience and with no scandal involved, officially going on indefinite leave of absence. From May 1973 I have been a civilian member of the Detroit Police Department in their Internal Controls Bureau, where I remain to this date.

CHAPTER ONE

SUNDAY, AUGUST 6, 1978

It was true to form, a dank, hot morning, typical for August in southeast Michigan. I rolled the Sunday Detroit News under my arm and entered the restaurant to a wave of frigid, conditioned air. The church where I had just attended Mass had been cool. But, outside after the service, the heavy mugginess had washed over me, and in the short drive to the restaurant I hadn't bothered with my car's fitful air conditioning. So the contrast when I entered the near-cold cafe was a minor shock, and a relief.

A smiling hostess—wearing a sweater—inquired, “Are you by yourself, sir?” I told her I would have a friend joining me, and she led me to a window booth. I sat on one side of the spotless table, more or less dumping the bulky Sunday News atop the neatly-arranged place mats and settings.

“I'll have coffee, please, while I'm waiting,” I informed the departing hostess. The color comics confronted me from the table top. Not being a fan of the News' comics, I riffled through the ponderous Sunday edition for Section A, the world and local news. As I was digging, a waitress arrived with a steaming coffee pot. We exchanged pleasantries—she was the mother-in-law of a co-worker in the Police Department. I began my coffee/sugar routine and picked up the news section:

POPE PAUL DIES! The headline leaped at me.

I was stunned. Popes die, true. Nonetheless, I was stunned. The world knew of the precarious state of the Pontiff's health. But I had not prearranged a Pope's demise into my plans for this

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strangest of all my summer Sundays.

My coffee remained untouched. I did not read the detailed news report. My eyes remained on the headline, and a host of jumbled thoughts demanded my attention. Rome—where I had once attended a papal audience—far away and long ago! Paul was an old man; it was his time. A Pope dies, and the Roman Catholic Church plods on! Why hadn't they said anything about it at Mass only a few brief minutes earlier? Or had the officiating priest announced it, and I was out of it because of what had happened to me during the Mass? No—incredible! The Pope who reigned during my personal pilgrimage was dead, and I learned of it from a Sunday News headline, in an air-conditioned restaurant, amid the comfortable sounds of commercial breakfast activity, waiting for an affable pagan friend to join me in a leisurely meal.

From some obscure baggage of ecclesiastical knowledge I dredged up the Latin words, "Sic transit gloria mundi"—"Thus passeth the glory of the world." When a newly elected Pope is being born to his coronation, an accompanying cleric lights a beeswax taper before the face of the Pontiff, then extinguishes it saying, "Sic transit gloria mundi," to remind him of his human frailty and that his reign will be, in any case, of relatively short duration. And I thought: "This is 1978; for Paul the Sixth the temporal glory of his reign had passed and he has faced his Maker."

But I wasn't doing the usual, automatic Catholic thing; I wasn't praying that the Pontiff's soul be released swiftly from the bonds of Purgatory! Rather, I was asking myself: "Was he saved? Had he, before his death, in the deepest recesses of his soul, accepted Christ in repentant faith as his total Savior?"

Awareness that I asked myself such questions invaded my consciousness, and I knew that what had happened to me that morning at Mass was the conclusion of a journey of many years, and I realized that I was at the beginning of a second pilgrimage that would be the very substance of whatever years remained for me in God's good plan. The transitory, stunned feeling evaporated. The Pope had died and I wasn't mourning. I was instead elated!

"Hey, Butter, how's it going?"

The words snapped me from my reveries. I looked up to see Jim Monnig standing at the open end of the restaurant booth. Jim is your standard extrovert, aged 31, bearded, dancing intelligent eyes, casually dressed, very literate, engaging, almost totally pagan—ex-Catholic, in fact. He slid into the opposite side of the booth, smiled easily at me, and said, “I see your ex-boss is dead.” For a moment I didn’t grasp what he meant. Somebody in the Police Department is dead? I wondered. And then Jim went on, “I guess he wasn’t too bad as Popes go.” So I knew.

Jim Monnig was constantly upbraiding me for the traces of Irish-Catholic guilt he claimed to find lurking in my personality. “Completely liberated from Rome,” as he described himself, he was zealous to likewise liberate me. But I, with corresponding zeal, resisted his efforts on my behalf because I considered myself sufficiently liberated from Rome, and because I observed in his self-proclaimed liberation an obvious flaw—he had not replaced his “former Roman bondage” with anything of substantive value. (And neither had I found a replacement until that very morning!)

As we ate together, Jim guided the conversation, relating the papal passing to my present state. “What gives with you, Clark? You never go to Mass. Why this morning? I know it couldn’t be because old Paul is gone.”

I assured him I had only learned the news a few minutes earlier right there in the restaurant from the pages of the Detroit News. But Jim probed on:

“And why are you looking so happy this muggy morning? I’m sure that’s not because old Paul is out of the picture; that doesn’t interest you any more.” Jim doesn’t always await answers to his relentless questions. “You Irish are always up or down—disgustingly happy or morbidly sad,” he continued. Jim is Irish also, so that required no answer.

I’m certain I was radiantly and obviously happy. But it was all too new to share with Jim, and maybe I passed up an opportunity. Later I could tell him. We finished our meal in a light and pleasant mood and arranged to get together later in the week at the bookstore he owns and manages on the far east side of Detroit. I

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took my leave with something like relief—and a tinge of sadness. A bond between us had been severed. We had been two, cynical, Irish, mavericks, ex-Catholics, close to each other through a mutually-rejected heritage and our current interest in books and other mild intellectual pursuits. Now I had freely placed an obstacle between us, and the obstacle was strangely also the source of the happiness that possessed me. I left the restaurant and began a new life.

Does this all sound commonplace? Surely and literally, millions of people on this troubled planet met the news of the Pope's death as they went about their daily routines that morning. The world's 700 million Catholics would have reacted with feelings ranging from relief to deepest grief. The majority of mankind would have regarded it as just the passing of another international figure. And many other millions would not even have been aware it had occurred.

Well, my acceptance of the news didn't quite fit into any of those categories. This was a special Sunday for me, and in God's design I was special that day. Sounds prideful? OK, we'll see.

In retrospect, I have allowed the images of a lifetime's Sundays to flicker through my mind. But none of those images evokes anything to compare with August 6, 1978. Today I can recall with absolute clarity the succession of my thoughts as I left the restaurant. I continued to marvel that, though a Pope had died, yet I was happy. This was the fourth such death in my life to date. Earlier papal passings had cast me into periods of gloomy introspection about the vagaries of temporal life, and nagging doubt about the possibility of a future immortality. Many Catholics had disclosed to me that their thoughts had been similar during periods of mourning for a Pope. But such morbid thoughts no longer had validity. So, we can ask, whence came my pervasive joy?

Now I can tell you. I carry about with me a pocket-size daily journal provided by the Detroit Police Lieutenants' and Sergeants' Association. In it I make notations each day, usually relative to my job—overtime worked, contacts with members of the Department, appointments and the like. But also I note daily weather condi-

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tions and other trivia. This is the entry that tells it all:

Sunday, August 6
87 degrees
Pope Paul died today!
7 o'clock Mass at St. Clare's.
Reborn!

Here we have a hot, August, Sunday morning. A Roman Pontiff has just completed his earthly reign, and I am writing "Reborn!" Reborn? Who? —how? —what does it mean?

Dear reader, on that day I was born again. I, a proud and sinful former Roman Catholic priest, a nearly lifelong adherent and zealot of the Roman Catholic Church, was born again—saved!

If you be Catholic, or a former Catholic, the expression "born again" either means nothing to you, or you regard it with disdain as a fanatical fundamentalist term indicative of cheap, Bible-banging salvation; or you accept it as a password of the "with-it" renewed and liberalized Catholic Church, meaning just about anything you choose. But I am using it in the startling, simple, undiluted sense in which Jesus Christ first used it.

Come with me and see! Look in your Holy Bible, John 3:3 to 3:7. (2)

"... Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is

(2) Dear Catholic or ex-Catholic reader: This textual reference means that it appears in the Gospel According to John, the 3rd chapter, the 3rd to 7th verses. The Gospel According to John is a book of the New Testament — the latter part of the Holy Bible — which announces the good news of salvation in Christ. If you have not a Bible, any born-again friend or acquaintance will freely give you one; or you may purchase one at a wide range of prices at a bookstore. The King James Version will probably fit your inquiring needs. God speed you!

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spirit. Marvel not that I said to thee, Ye must be born again."

This is the heart of Christ's message of salvation—you cannot gain eternal life unless you have been born again . Water baptism doesn't save you! A church or a denominational affiliation doesn't save! Leading a good life doesn't save you! Even believing in God in itself doesn't save you (the very demons believe in God)! To gain eternal life you absolutely must be born again!

On Sunday, August 6, 1978, I was led to the born-again experience while present at a Roman Catholic Mass, in the act of violating the legalistic precepts of that church by presuming to receive Holy Communion. Think of it—a former Roman Catholic priest, steeped in traditional moral and dogmatic theology and all the teaching and traditions of Catholicism, ordained for ministry in the church. And I was not born again into Christ's body and certain of my salvation until some years after departing from the priesthood. My new birth was the occasion of my rejoicing that morning. I was a new creature in Christ and brought my shining new birthright to that restaurant. Small wonder that Jim asked me, "Why are you looking so happy this muggy morning?" The work of the Spirit is perceptible even to unbelieving eyes.

It is no common happening that a Roman Catholic priest should put aside his religious heritage and become a born-again Christian. Tens of thousands of men have left the ranks of the Catholic priesthood in the past 15 years. Few, it seems, have subsequently become evangelical Christians. These are the facts; there is nothing of self-inflating pride in these statements. I personally have yet to meet an evangelical Christian who is a former Roman priest. All evangelical Christians share two basic beliefs: (1) The Bible is God's inspired Word, infallible and inerrant. It is the sole rule of Christian faith and the final arbiter in all doctrinal matters. (2) Salvation is freely bestowed upon the repentant sinner who, by the impulse of the Holy Spirit, confesses his sin and turns to Jesus Christ in trust and faith that he is saved through the Blood of Christ. Evangelical Christianity is, of course, a rich and universally-diffused way of life. But this simplification serves our purpose for now. I am saying that I discarded the incredibly complex and confusing burden of Roman Catholicism in favor of the

straight-forward New Testament doctrine of Atonement by Christ's shed Blood, and salvation through invoking the power of His Blood for the forgiveness of sins. I find the clarity and beauty of this doctrine so compelling that I must reluctantly attribute to demonic influence the failure of other ex-priests to embrace it.

But "born again!" What in the world does it mean? In the decade of the 70's the words have been tossed about with alarming frequency and ease. Pick up a newspaper or magazine; switch on your TV; turn on the radio; join a group of coworkers for lunch; strike up a conversation with a stranger; go to a bar, even. Somebody will mention being "born again".

A president of the United States is born again! A publisher of a pornographic magazine has been born again! A convicted Watergate criminal writes a book entitled, "Born Again!" A world-renowned and respected evangelist writes a book, "How to be Born Again." Fine.

But some sub-Christian cultists claim a born-again experience and we end up with a Jonestown orgy of horror. Or, some sectarians—Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Mormons, for example—with disconcerting facility invoke a "born again" vocabulary while denying the divinity of the One who first said that we must be born again. Secular newscasters and pundits, with sly disdain refer to born-again Christians as a pressure group seeking to impose their rigid moral standards on this free nation. The media poo-bahs would have us believe that nobody of intellectual stature could possibly accept such an unsophisticated idea. Well-intentioned "Catholic Charismatics" claim the born-again status, while clinging to traditions that effectively negate such a claim. There are even homosexual groups forming churches of "gay" "born-again Christians," pastored by unreformed "gay" ministers who flaunt their deviancy under the guise of religion. Confusing, isn't it?(3)

The gospel concept of "born again" is clear and simple (not simplistic). So how can the very kernel of biblical Christianity in this advanced era of instant communication be so widely distorted and cheapened? Again, my considered, prayerful conclusion is that

(3) ALBERTO, 1979, Chick Publications, Chino, CA, P. 12

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Satan is working to reduce the "born again" concept in men's minds to banality; to anti-intellectualism; to anti-freedom; even to the level of the graffiti found on public walls.

And yet with all this, God's Holy Spirit is gathering for Himself a company of truly born-again Christians, recruited by His initiative from the halls of universities, from the capitols of government, from the boardrooms of corporations, from the newsrooms of the media, from prisons, from drug pads, from churches, from bordellos, from the ranks of the military, from factories, from gutters, from lily-white suburbs, from every conceivable geographic, economic and ethnic grouping of men—from wherever the enduring love of God can effectively reach captive man. And He is building up His church—the unified Body of all regenerated Christians—without regard to conventional denominational lines.

By the Blood of Jesus Christ anybody can be saved—born again: A Pope, a Teamster's Union official, a rapist, a nun, a rock star, a neurotic, a scrubwoman, a junkie, a state governor, a humble cop, a millionaire, an astronaut, even a miserable ex-Roman Catholic priest—all are targets of the divine love; all can be born again!

Many may say: "Born again? Sure, but so what? What possible relevance can such a subjective religious experience have for harried mankind under the continuous threat of nuclear destruction? You go ahead and have your salvation—accept Jesus. But tell me what has that to do with the paralyzing energy crunch we face? We are headed for recession, unemployment, more inflation, increased welfare rolls, racial unrest—and you want me to be born again, to squander my limited, busy hours in "religious" activities? For you, OK, if that's your thing. But for me, no. God may just take care of the world without me becoming a Jesus freak. I probably am as saved now as I'll ever be anyway. Count me out."

If that's your position, it is understandable and merits my concern. It is the naturalistic attitude of the man who believes in God but has never accepted the plan of salvation presented in God's

Word. Your objections deserve an answer from the committed Christian. I can best answer them, not by learned disputations, but simply by relating what God has done for me. I will not bombard you with theological or philosophical references—hopefully this book will contain a minimum of footnotes. But of necessity, theological and philosophical points must be raised as we trace my path from Rome to the Cross. And enroute, God willing, we will consider negatively what born again is not; what are the obstacles to a “religious” person’s being born again; and finally, what it does mean to experience salvation through the new birth.

My journey from devoted practicing Catholic, to ordained priest, thence to disillusionment, to abandonment of the priesthood, to cold intellectual consideration of “Christianity,” and finally to a re-birth in Christ, was a simple and yet an involved odyssey, mysterious and miraculous. It was a simple journey because, in retrospect, it was a coming out from the practice of institutionalized religion followed by biblical acceptance of Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour. It was complex because it had its roots in my adolescent years and extended to the present, often regretfully hindered by my personal sins, and needlessly prolonged by my intellectual approach to Christ. It was a mysterious journey—many of its facets remain hidden in the unfathomable mind of God. It was a miraculous journey because its end result was a miracle—that I, a most unlikely candidate, became saved.

Please don’t reject this as being a shallow, confused Catholic who loses his faith, deserts the priesthood, and grasps in desperation at a sectarian offer of easy salvation to ease his conscience and to comfort his declining years. If I “lost my faith” (as Catholics say), then I did indeed renounce the Roman Catholic system. If I “deserted the priesthood” (again as Catholics phrase it), indeed I did leave the priesthood. But then in desperation to grasp at an anti-intellectual, fundamentalist and sectarian concept of easy salvation? Never! I may have lost the Catholic faith, but I did not lose my God-given reason.

Easy salvation? Oh, no. Even when I have disclosed the complete story I may not have managed to convey how difficult it was, in human terms, for a proud ex-churchman to finally submit to the humble Carpenter from Galilee. From the world’s standpoint, it

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was not easy to renounce a relaxed and enjoyable lifestyle that would constitute a hindrance to my new Christian walk, and then to embrace a more austere design for living. It was not easy to turn from the facile camaraderie of pagan and culturally-Christian friends to the less intimate demands of Christian fellowship. It was not easy to part with a close friend whose overall view of life and whose practical moral standards no longer coincided with mine. By the yardstick of human endeavor it was not easy at all for a middle-aged ex-cleric, set in many of his ways, to take on this radical spiritual, mental, emotional—even physical—change of orientation and commitment.

But in the most profound sense it was all easy, because God was in charge. And there were positive recompenses to supplant all the apparent negatives. The Christian fellowship is in many cases genuine and caring. New and more profound friendships may supplant the old. And the Christian life has its own built-in compensations:

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance...”
Galatians 5:22-23.

The supreme compensation, of course, is the wondrous new intimate union with Jesus Christ Himself!

And to “ease my conscience”? Again I say, “Never!” I am just now building a Christian conscience, with much fear and trembling. But, praise God, I am saved. Still a sinner, I now have remedies never before available to me, which we will consider later.

Paradoxes remain: I have said it was difficult, but withall it was easy because the Holy Spirit was at work. The process of conversion stretched across many, many years; however, within the fullness of time it was a rapid development, coming to fruition in but a few short days. Our human notion of time has no applicability to God, Who is the eternal present.

A disaffected, poorly-instructed but very vocal Catholic co-worker recently referred to me in anger as “just a renegade priest.” His implication was that since I had abandoned the priest-

hood I was not qualified to discuss "religion" (his term). "Renegade" in this instance was meant in its disparaging dictionary sense: "Traitorous, apostate, referring to the betrayal of a trust, treacherous." But one does not become a traitor—other, perhaps, than to an institution—if he abandons Catholic tradition in favor of pure, evangelical, Bible faith. The Catholic Church claims direct origin from Christ; but the ex-Catholic finds the *living* Christ in a born-again, Spirit-filled assembly. The shadow of Christ is rejected in favor of the reality. Where is the treason?

Lest *you* deem me "renegade," let me assure you. I left the priesthood after mature deliberation and prayer. There was no scandal involved. I have remained faithful to my vow of celibacy. I have *not* requested Rome to grant me laicization (return to the layman's status). I remain on indefinite leave of absence—technically and externally able to return to the active priesthood at a moment's notice with the approval of a bishop. But in my spirit I have situated myself far beyond the possibility of such a backward step. No institution, however ancient and powerful, can claim me into its fantastic world of Christian gospel imposed upon and inextricably mixed with pagan myth, cultural philosophy, and mad theological deduction.⁽⁴⁾ With love in my heart, I affirm that such a weird admixture represents Roman Catholicism to me. I was cradled and raised in that tradition. I loved it! I dedicated my life to it. I became disillusioned with it; and God withdrew me from it. Only demonic forces could move me from an evangelical, Spirit-filled life in Christ, back to a foxy, hoary, world-encircling religious grab bag that self-consciously labels itself the One, Holy, Roman, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

In asking you to accompany me through a narrative and analysis of my spiritual journey, I face some realities. The hierarchy of that church can retaliate; history is replete with sad examples. I will lose some friends. I will grieve some relatives. I will scandalize many poor souls for whom Christ died. I may

(4) See GODFATHERS by Jack T. Chick, 1982, Chick Publications, Chino, CA. Also see cassette tape THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST AND ROMAN CATHOLIC DOCTRINE, by Alberto Rivera, AIC, P.O. Box 1076, Alta Loma, CA 91701

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become the target of slanderers. But such realities cannot deter me. Since I was once a public official, however lowly, of that religious system, it is now my obligation to publicly witness to my conversion.

I am acutely aware that the saved Christian today must stand up to at least two Roman Catholic churches: the *avant-garde*, "renewed" church; and the traditional, conservative Church of Rome.

The *avant-garde* church is on a wild ecclesiastical jamboree, rushing headlong past even the follies of the liberal Protestant churches, abandoning all papal and scriptural authority in favor of an experiential, all-tolerant, dogmaless mish-mash, feverishly desirous of gathering into its emotional embrace everything in sight, from the Catholic Charismatic movement, to situation ethics, to sexual liberation, to universalist salvation for all. Numerically this is a minority group in the Roman Catholic Church. But vocally, by reason of its intimidating stance through its curiously sensual attraction to the communications media, it represents the voice of Catholicism in much of the worldly market place.

Then, to be sure, there is the church of the overwhelming majority of Roman Catholics, the traditional Church of Rome, which has moved powerfully, sometimes violently, often shamefully, across the panorama of history. This is the church of the regal papacy, the rigid hierarchical structure, the accretions of human traditions and philosophies, the vaunting of the teaching authority of the church with the corresponding diminution of the authority of Scripture. This is the church that solidly proclaims the Trinity and the divinity of Christ, but falters in presenting the efficacy and application of the Blood Atonement, and goes hopelessly unbiblical on salvation and the value of works. It is the church that burdens its adherents with seven sacraments, with a continuous sacrifice of the Mass, the excessive adulation of Mary, the dependency on mediators and intercessors, the zeal to pile up "merit" in heaven, the idolatrous use of material objects, and the preoccupation with souls detained in a illusory purgatory. (Where, oh where, does one end this list?) This church, alas, remains formidable, extended throughout vast areas of the earth. Since most

Catholics remain in the web of this traditional ecclesiastical establishment, my concern as a saved evangelical Christian, is for those millions upon millions who remain loyal to, or to some degree affiliated with, the historical Church of Rome.

I am less than two years old as a regenerated Christian. My conversion occurred during a calm period of my life while I enjoyed a fascinating and modestly well-paying job; a period of relatively good health; a period of calm enjoyment of a pleasant and "morally good" life; a period of no physical, intellectual, emotional or psychic turmoil, surfacely marred only by vague and sporadic doubts about the meaning of the present and the unpredictability of the future. My conversion took place peaceably and gently, but with a certain emotional release, and with the intellectual processes remaining intact.

So I ask the Catholic establishment not to dismiss me as a charlatan, a freak, a traitor, nor as an unfortunate apostate destined to eternal damnation. Instead, treat me—an obscure former priest—with the same restraint you exercise toward such eminent contemporary theologians as Kung and Schillebeeckx, against whom you have not wielded your spiritual heavy artillery of excommunication and anathemas, even though those theologians have publicly taught heresies and have defied the authority of Rome.* I expect equally restrained treatment. (4a)

And you, my precious Catholic and ex-Catholic friends, my dear Catholic relatives, my non-practicing loved ones, all of you who have allied yourselves with or fallen away from the Roman Catholic creed and practice—I reach out in love to each of you. I entreat you to make a journey through these pages with me. Share my experience and judge whether it be of God.

It is recorded for us in the Gospel according to John (1:37-39) that two disciples of John the Baptist heard Christ speak, they were intrigued, and they walked after Him. Jesus turned about,

*Since this writing, Kung and Schillebeeckx have been disciplined.

(4a) See cassette tape, PENETRATION AND INFILTRATION BY PRIESTS UNDER DISPENSATION by Alberto Rivera, A.I.C.

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saw them and asked, "What do you seek?" And they said to Him, "Teacher, where are you staying?" Jesus answered them, "*Come and see.*" They came and saw, and dwelt with Jesus, and then they *followed Him* (became his disciples).

Make this journey with me. I presume to say to you, "*Come and see Jesus.*" Perhaps together we can dwell with Him and become His disciples. He will answer our prayer, "Lord, help me make it through the night."

CHAPTER TWO

DECISION

Every finite journey conceivable by man's limited mind must have a beginning; likewise each is destined to have an ending. Enroute the journey may be without incident so that the beginning or the end may be the most notable portion of the whole. Or, between start and finish there may be interposed an obstacle, a detour, a hindrance, a challenge or an impetus that may become the focal point of the entire journey, obscuring the beginning and the end.

If I undertake a trip from Detroit to Los Angeles, the entire venture may be without incident, and the takeoff from Detroit Metropolitan Airport, or the landing at Los Angeles International will remain in my memory as the highlight. On the other hand, the aircraft enroute may have encountered violent weather high above the plains of Kansas, frightening the passengers and taxing the capabilities of the crew. The storm then undoubtedly remains in my consciousness as the very essence of the flight, however beautiful may be the eventual touchdown on Los Angeles.

I have invited you to accompany me on a spiritual journey. It, too, involves a beginning and an ending and possibly one or more noteworthy, even spectacular occurrences enroute. Though not physical, **something** happened enroute, and there must be a destination. Where and when did this odyssey of a soul begin? What happened enroute? How did it all end? For the present let us consider only the beginning.

Citing again the hypothetical trip from Detroit to Los

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Angeles, did it have its beginning when I boarded the jet aircraft? Not really. That would be the **immediate** beginning. We must move the **remote** beginning back at least to the moment I decided to go to Los Angeles or circumstances dictated that I must go. All the details that followed were derived from that remote decision that set the wheels in motion.

So, in my spiritual journey there must have been a decision to move from **here** to **there**. Later there was certainly a more **immediate** decision. Theologians and so-called spiritual writers refer to such decisions as the elements of a "conversion". One takes his present situation and decides to convert it to a new situation with a spiritual goal in mind. And not only the human theologians recognize this. The Bible is replete with examples where God pleads with man to turn, repent, convert!

In Chapter One I mentioned my conversion and referred to the concept of "**born again**" as though it were an integral result of that conversion. In the widest sense I intimated that my conversion involved a journey from institutional Catholicism to evangelical Christianity. And I inferred that this would scarcely be regarded by Catholics as a conversion—more likely a "perversion"!

Conversion is **not** being born again. Our English word **conversion** comes from the Latin word meaning "a turning". Conversion involves human effort. A concerned or troubled person perceives a need to turn or change and initiates steps to effect that change. By contrast, being born again is totally God's activity. A born-again man has **received** something as a free gift from God, not in any sense dependent on human activity. But in the ordinary course of events a born-again experience is preceded by a human decision to convert or turn. If you stay with me, we will later consider in greater depth the profound meaning of the rebirth in Christ.

Catholicism boasts a rich "conversion" literature. Largely it consists of tales of Protestants turned Catholic, or less often of agnostics, atheists or infidels, who, after an intellectual or spiritual conflict, embrace the Catholic Church. Technically these refer to a turning to Christ, but only on Catholic terms,

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and specifically they demand a total embracing of the tenets of Roman Catholicism. There is no rich literature of Catholic being born again in the scriptural sense. Individual lives of saints may **hint** at such rebirth, but in the final analysis it all means accepting the entirety of Catholic doctrine.

During the year now just passed (I am writing this page in August of 1979) I have pondered in my heart: "When did my conversion begin? What was the more **immediate** decision that hastened my situation to a stage of maturity where God was ready to act positively to bestow on me the priceless gift of re-birth?"

This is a valid line of questioning for the recently regenerated Christian. It is rather a serious effort to recognize by hindsight the divine pattern in one's life. I now humbly submit that the **remote** beginning of my conversion was my decision to become a Catholic priest. The **immediate** impetus to conversion was a chance (God is in charge of "chance" too!) meeting with a young Detroit Police Officer and the decision to listen to him when he spoke to me of God's gift of eternal life. And there will be more about this young man later!

I will not for the moment burden you with my life story—that comes in exciting Chapter Three! So I will go back to that remote beginning. If the story I now present to you seems almost fictional in its presentation of detail, be assured that I recall with absolute clarity not only the external events, but also my innermost thoughts—just as I recall vividly that happy Sunday, August 6, 1978. Please bear in mind: We are going back some 22 or 23 years, I was then Catholic to the core, and I experienced a conversion of sorts, Catholic style. Come with me across the Pacific to Japan, to contemplate the beginning of God's mysterious plan for me.

The day before I returned stateside from Japan, I seemed to be falling victim to the old Air Force game of indecision, a mild form of personal disintegration labeled by several colorful names among transplanted Americans. There was no apparent reason. I was about to ship back on the General Patrick—a

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good transport they said, with top accommodations and food.

What was there for me back in the States? Well, just living again amid freeways and TV antennae was sufficient to lure some back home. I wanted a little more. I had saved my money and could pretty well call my own shots when I returned—buy a new car; a house to rattle around in by myself; even go to New York instead of my California haunts.

I wasn't leaving much in Japan other than a steady income, courtesy of Uncle Sam. I hadn't formed any attachments. I'd known Ruthie, the American Red Cross hostess on our Base. For a while I had dated her—dances at the Officers' Club and golf at Koganeo—almost got engaged, in fact. But she wasn't a Catholic, and she had the social worker's antiseptic view on most matters. I had finally let the thing die out from lack of momentum and with a sigh of relief.

I said that I had made no attachments in the Land of the Rising Sun, but that's not quite the story, because there **was** Father Maher. He was a secular priest from Brooklyn diocese. He had been in the Air Force for a few years and apparently enjoyed it. A real solid chaplain, I thought. He was rough on the troops who went overboard when turned loose on a town of bewildered Japanese. Otherwise he was everybody's friend. He and I had hit it off well. I respected him as a priest and as an officer and gentleman. Some nights, after I had locked the investigative cases at OSI and started toward my quarters, if I saw a light in his Quonset hut, I would turn in and we would trade ideas for awhile and maybe have a beer, which he said reminded him of Brooklyn.

Thinking of Father Maher on that last day in Japan, suddenly I knew I had touched something close to my at-a-loss feeling. I was packing. It was late afternoon for I remember the brassy sunlight pouring horizontally onto the National Geographic map of Japan tacked on my wall above the bookcase. I had straightened up to wipe the sweat from my forehead and, staring idly at the map, was considering how it represented this earthquake-torn land, when abruptly I knew! I shuddered and tried to black out my thoughts, but couldn't.

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For the first time in my life I was feeling the cold agony of basically doubting my Catholic Faith.

I slammed shut the lid of my footlocker and sat on the edge of the bed as I considered my thoughts in fascinated horror. How could I put away Catholicism, the companion of my days in this strange medley of paganism and American incompetence known as Occupied Japan? How accept emptiness in its stead? How flee from the Church into which I had thought to have thrown myself with such abandon, my sole respite in the unresolved daily grind? But there it was—I no longer believed! No Church, no Christ, no Mary, no hope for eternal life! I was in torment.

When finally I stood up it was in darkness. The Japanese summer night air pressed down. Crickets rasped their endless labor outside the windows. I was acutely aware of the hybrid odor of incense, dried fish, and ashes that clings about the Orient. For a moment I thought, "Why even snap on the light?" But of course I did that. The room flooded with pale yellow. I whistled dryly and resumed packing, trying not to think.

In the shower I realized that I had told the Chaplain I would be over to his quarters after dinner to bring him the keys to the jeep we had acquired for the Columban missionary fathers in Korea. That meant right away, though I had eaten no dinner nor wanted any. Well, I would go and get it over with, and try to conceal from him my turmoil.

When I left the BOQ the summer night was in full command. The sky was black, with no suggestion of relieving blue. The familiar, gaudy stars advanced and receded in their private pulsations. The cricket chorus continued, scraping and clattering the air with Shinto petitions. I scudded at the gravel on the walk as I approached Father's hut.

He was at the door as I knocked, with a , "Hi, Clark," and a beer—one of his reminders of Brooklyn. It was hotter inside. A fan purred at one end of the living room, with no more effect than a fitful agitation of the curtains. The Japanese room boy was busy with ash trays and the flowers on the coffee table. I

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sloshed the beer about in its frosted can and ambled over to the window. Though I tried, I couldn't break into our regular conversational ease. I kept twirling the can between my palms but didn't drink.

When the boy glided out of the room toward the kitchen area, I turned toward Father. He was looking at me closely, a half-smile on his lips. He wore the Air Force officer's suntans, collar open at the throat, with the Cross gleaming on one tab. He was a youngish priest, with an open Irish face and a mass of black hair. He didn't have the booming YMCA-director manner attributed to chaplains. He swept a confusion of magazines from the sofa and sat, still smiling. When he searched me with his candid eyes, I knew I had to tell him something. The crucifix on the wall above his head gave me a start and I averted my eyes.

"Don't tell me you're sad at leaving the place, Clark. What about that lay apostolate work you were so interested in back in the States?"

"Oh, Father", I answered, "You know I couldn't be sad about leaving this hole."

I tried to put on the unconcerned act. Had I really been fooling myself when I had poured out to him the plans I had formulated?

"Clark, you're holding out on me," Father said. He set his untouched beer on the coffee table. I could see the sweat dampening his forehead, and a busy mosquito droning in the yellow light between us. My heart beat wildly and I felt the same horror creeping back. I hadn't intended to do anything for the Church when I got home. I was going to keep running away, never to face myself nor the Church I now doubted!

I took a gulp from the can and rasped, "It's too late to do anything about it, Father, but I'm all in a mess about the Faith and all that. I guess you call it losing the Faith. It's fleeing from me and I can't stop it."

My voice trailed off and I stood with one arm poised in the

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arc of a crazy gesture. My words seemed to slam against the walls, the desires of a lifetime carried away in their echoes.

But Father only sat there looking at me. I wanted to dash out the door. If I stayed I would break down and tell him I couldn't stand all the trappings of this endless "being the Catholic," and maybe that was why the Faith so long accepted was being torn from me.

Father shook his head slightly and stopped smiling as he finally spoke.

"Clark, I'm going to tell you something right now, as a priest and as a friend. You've given me the opening I wanted."

"Oh, God," I thought, "he doesn't understand. Let me shake his hand and get out of here."

But Father continued as I stood speechless. "You're completely off center, Clark. Sure, you do all the externals the books say are required of a Catholic; but you do it all out of pride."

I opened my lips to protest, but he stopped me with a slight wave of his hand.

"You've built up a citadel that looks like the real thing, with God as its center. You are very close to Our Lord, you tell yourself, but it isn't Christ at the center of your edifice; it's **you**. You didn't go off the beam here because that would have upset your bookkeeping with God. You'd never go out of your way to help a Catholic buddy if he tripped on one of the temptations they throw in his face every day. You'd merely be sorry that the Catholic morality statistics were not holding too well."

I tried to thrust in a torrent of denial; but before a sound formed I saw myself vividly as I had just been portrayed, and I couldn't take it.

Father went on in a gentler tone. "I had to tell you that,

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Clark, and now let's talk about the good things. You aren't giving up the Church; you're just repelled by a lot of externals. That will pass, but that comfortable cocoon you've woven is collapsing and God has something much better for you now."

I must have begun to interrupt, for he raised his voice. "Let me finish this. In your life in the Church you've been running away for years—pursued, and you refuse to be caught. This is God's way to shake you up and tell you that He means to have you."

Father was pleading now. But he had me pegged with deadly accuracy.

"Oh, Father, you've got it all wrong," I lied. "I've been chased before, but not that way."

He stood and walked toward me; he was all priest. "Clark, come to your senses. Rip away the sham that has you entangled and turn to God. He wants you as His priest, in spite of what I've told you. I believed that the first time we talked together, and it's never occurred to you."

I drew back stunned. Of course I had never confided in him that I had ever considered such a fantastic scheme.

"Clark, I would trade my very life if it would help you to consider His plans for you."

His anguished face startled me, but unfairly grasping at his last words I retorted: "Now I've heard it all. Laying down your life! It's not yours to lay down. Aren't you exaggerating this "alter Christus" idea?"(5)

Without awaiting his reply, I made for the screened door and plunged out into the night. Shame burned my cheeks. I had insulted a priest and injured my friend. He did not follow me. There was only the sound of my kicking against the gra-

(5) In Roman Catholic theology a priest is "alter Christus", "another Christ!"

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veled walk as unseen pebbles spattered onto the turf. I passed under the row of willows that skirted the flight line. The Japanese shunned them at night, for evil spirits dwelt in their trunks. I felt a momentary fear—this was a pagan place, and there was a devil. I began to run toward the flight line, hesitating by the row of jet fighters that squatted lethally in the darkness. Sobbing, I flung myself in the grass edging up to the concrete, out of range of the sweeping beacon on Operations tower. In that simple moment, sprawled in a plot of marshy grass in the domain of the Mahatma Buddha and a thousand gods, I faced myself for the first time without holding back. I was a pious fraud!

Later—sometime that night—my mind full of good resolutions for the future, I stumbled back to my quarters. Had I been praying at all during that miserable interlude? Honestly don't know.

I overslept the next morning. The Japanese, Mori, was pounding at my door at seven and wailing, "Meester Clock, the automobile to carry you is here!"

As I wakened, everything settled into place and I wanted desperately to get word to Father Maher. I called out to Mori, "Ready in five minutes, boysan." I threw on my clothes and excitedly scribbled a note to Father:

Dear Father Maher:

I'm still one of us! That priest business is out, but I am being pursued. I'm sorry for last night's show. Pray for me, and I'll see you when you return Stateside. It's 7:10 and I'm due to board at 8:15 at Yokohama. Here's the key to the jeep.

Your friend in Christ, Clark.

I gave the note and key to Mori. "Take this to Padre Maher, it's very special." He gave me a deep bow and sped

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off. Poor, cheated, pagan kid, I thought. Three years he had been a menial for me and I had repaid him only in money. I had never mentioned to him Christ nor His Mother. Grabbing my bags and folio of orders, I dashed out to the staff car —my last bit of American carpetbagging in Japan.

Yes, the General Patrick was the good ship they had promised—eleven days of lazily plowing the Pacific, while I sorted out the building blocks for my new life. We docked at San Francisco on a Saturday afternoon, and Customs was no problem. The well remembered but oft-forgotten face of the United States made little impression. I hurried to Old St. Mary's in Chinatown and made my confession to the anonymous priest, who absolved me.

In the vestibule of the church, enjoying the usual brief after-confession feeling of peace, I picked up a copy of the diocesan weekly. Out on the steps I paused idly and held it out to glance at the front page. Immediately this news report assaulted me:

AIR FORCE CHAPLAIN DIES IN CRASH

NC, Tokyo, Japan. Authorities at 5th Airforce Hq reported names of the personnel lost in the crash of a C-47 transport enroute from Tachikawa Air Base to Korea. Among those killed was Chaplain (Capt.) William F. Maher, a secular priest of the Brooklyn diocese. Father Maher was traveling to Korea to deliver a jeep...

Often in the months after I stood dismayed on the steps of that church I had a recurring dream in which I saw Father Maher standing before me, and flinging the bitter 'alter Christus' at him, I would step off into bottomless space. I pondered what the dream might mean, because already, on the steps of that same church, I had decided to become a priest.

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So that's the remote decision. Now these many years later the sad deficiencies in my decision are apparent. But, my friends, I must attribute to Roman Catholicism those deficiencies. I was a Catholic, confronting a crisis in my life, instinctively putting into practice the elaborate formulas demanded by that system. Further, my turmoil during that confrontation shifts the burden to a fundamental error of Catholicism—its doctrine on salvation. Though I was in a mental frenzy at that time because I believed I was “losing the Faith,” still I **was** seeking salvation!

The Catholic Church teaches, biblically, that man is born in sin and that he will suffer eternal death in that state without divine intervention. Happily, that intervention did take place. God the Father sent His only-begotten Son, the Second Person of the Trinity—Himself equally God—to rescue man from his plight. The Son became a true man—the God-man Jesus Christ—born of a virgin. Jesus Christ freely accepted the Father's plan and humbled Himself in the form of a man. He underwent a series of cruel sufferings and a shameful death to purchase man's liberation from sin. And He arose from the dead to put the divine seal on His work of redemption and to assure man's own resurrection and eternal life! So far, so good.

In God's Word, the Holy Bible, the all-important question is asked: “*What must I do to be saved?*” The answer is starkly direct, simple and clear: “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.*” (You may find that happy statement in your New Testament, the Book of Acts, Chapter 16, verses 30 & 31.)

OK, the Catholic Church accepts that faith in Jesus Christ is required, but only for the **beginning** of salvation. She proposes that basic necessity and then doesn't know what to do with it! To the simple plan of salvation she has added a series of complicated conditions. As recently as the Second Vatican Council doctrine, this complication is reaffirmed:(6)

(6) *The Documents of Vatican II*, Walter M. Abbott, S.J., 1966, The Guild Press.

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“For it is through Christ’s Catholic Church alone, which is the all-embracing means of salvation, that the fulness of the means of salvation can be obtained.”

What a complication when contrasted with the simple biblical formula!

So, in my time of acute need of divine assistance, instead of kneeling helplessly at the feet of a Savior who had already accomplished everything necessary, I jumped back on the Roman Catholic treadmill. I assumed a guilt (by going to Confession and accepting a penance) that Jesus Christ had already assumed. I clutched at a program of good works (by deciding to turn over a new leaf and become a priest) which the Bible assures me will avail me nothing.

Dear God, I simply reinserted myself into the intricate web of guilt, punishments, penances, ritualism, and on-again off-again salvation, a ready victim for the powerful assaults of the devil—in whom I believed. I never lost my belief in him!

It seems that primarily I based that decision on a superstition—that God would exchange the life of Chaplain Maher for my “call” to the priesthood! Today I can wonder where did I surrender to God’s action? It was so transparently my own reaction to external events. Is the necessary first impulse of the Holy Spirit ever mentioned? No! Did I confess that I was totally lost in my sins, powerless to change myself, and in need of a salvation that could not be secured through my efforts? No! Was there an acceptance of Christ as my personal Savior? No! There was even a lie involved—I had never told Father Maher that I had sought years earlier to become a candidate for the Catholic priesthood but had been rebuffed!

Conversion it was—a human decision that resulted in a turning in my life. And there was no overt evil involved beyond my lack of full candor with Father Maher. It was the best I could do at the time relying on my own resources. But I do now accept that, despite it’s poverty of spiritual elements, God was working His remote plan for me.

DECISION

In passing, I must remark that Father Maher seems to have been an extraordinary priest who came tantalizingly close to being born again. I pray he accepted Christ as his Savior, without other mediators, before the fateful airplane crash. God is good, and so it might have been.

As we conclude this chapter we are on the threshold of contemplating the simple elements of salvation in Christ, or being born again. If our futile good works do not produce salvation, if our denominational affiliation does not produce salvation, if rituals and devotions do not avail for salvation, just where do we start?

Let me offer to you an excerpt from a provocative little booklet authored by a personal friend. Here it is in a nutshell:(7)

“A Man asked the apostle Paul some 2000 years ago:”

Q. What must I do to be saved?

A. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. (Acts 16:31)

1) Believe He was God:

“...for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.”
(John 8:24)

2) Repent of your sins:

“...except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”
(Luke 13:3)

3) Believe on His sacrifice alone; don't trust in yourself or manmade doctrine or tradition.

(7) *Life in a Nutshell*, by James D. MacKinnon, 1979. pp. 12-14. Verity Press, P.O. Box 3726, Cocoa, Florida 32922

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“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ...for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”
(Gal. 2:16)

4) Trust that you are redeemed by His sacrifice and that your sins are forgiven through His blood.

“In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins according to...his grace.” (Eph. 1:7)

5) Believe that He rose from the dead, and invite His Holy Spirit into your life. Allow Him to take over that you may experience the “abundant life” as millions of other “born-again” Christians do!

“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door (the door of your heart and life), I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.” (Rev. 3:20)

God be praised, it's all there. The above citation was given to me for my consideration shortly before the hour when God was ready to move decisively into my life. This excerpt from “Life in a Nutshell” presents to us the beginning of the Christian experience. I ask you, dear reader, to meditate on it as I did. It is attested to by the power of the Holy Spirit as shown forth in the Holy Scriptures. As you meditate, you may come to know that Christ can save you from the pit into which I fell. Don't toy with the Most High God as I did for most of my life. The risks are not to be calculated, as we shall see.

CHAPTER THREE

THE JOURNEY

My brother, my sister and I were born in the western reaches of Montana, one of the largest, least populated and most unknown of the United States. As with Nazareth in Jesus' day, one might ask, "Can anything good come out of Montana?" far from the acknowledged cultural and industrial centers of our nation. My childhood memories are of mountains, snow, long, rigorous winters, short, intense summers, and the excitement of learning to read and write even before my first school days.

We were offspring of mixed heritage—fanatical Irish, naturally Catholic on my mother's side; Irish-Scotch-English Presbyterian on my father's. By sheer force of numbers (my mother was one of 13 immigrant children) the Irish Catholic camp prevailed. Grandparents, and countless aunts, uncles and cousins cast a pervasive Irishness over my earliest years.

The images I retain are of being Irish, not Catholic. I was steeped in the lore of British oppression, Irish Emancipation, and the legendary kings and poets of Ireland. (8) Family gatherings seemed to involve much swilling of whiskey, and friendly, but oftentimes violent, confrontations between uncles of astounding physical prowess—one was a professional heavyweight boxer. These same gatherings were occasioned by the merry feasts of Christmas, Easter, St. Patrick's day, and the 4th of July, and frequently by the deaths of

(8) See cassette tape *THE IRISH CONSPIRACY*, by Alberto Rivera, AIC, P.O. Box 1076, Alta Loma, CA 91701

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various members of that extensive brood. My Dad was always present but curiously removed from those assemblies of the clan. My young mother, loud and gregarious, an accomplished piano player, was often the center, though she did not drink the "hard stuff". I myself was often but briefly propelled to the center for an exhibition of, "See, you Irish dumbheads, he can read and write already", and I reveled in the embraces and showerings of candy which resulted.

Today I can wonder, "Why all the Irishness? Why no Catholicism?" I was not imbued with stories of Mary, Holy Communion, the saints, a bloody Jesus dead on the cross, heaven or hell. I remember no rosaries, crucifixes, statues of saints, nor holy water fonts about the house. My sole indoctrination into the supernatural was with tales of "the wee folk," "the bogeyman," "the fairies," and "omens of death". Four Christmases I can remember in that feisty Irish environment but never a mention of a Bethlehem, the shepherds, the Christ Child, nor even of Mary. Memories of candle-laden, fragrant Christmas trees, buckets of candy, and good old Santa Claus abound. I was not taught a "Jesus, Mary and Joseph," bedtime prayers, the sign of the cross—nothing one would expect from a hard-core Irish immigrant milieu. I recall only once being taken to a Catholic church in Helena, and I had no idea what was going on. I never heard the names "God" or "Jesus Christ" used except as impatient or whiskey-inspired profanity. Maybe it was for the best. I think no doubt they were waiting for the competent nuns and priests to assume that aspect of my upbringing in the years ahead. But I was a merry, carefree, precocious and obnoxious little Irish pagan.

About the time I was ready to enter school, that pleasant, pointless childhood was demolished. DIVORCE raised its poisonous head. My mother and father were being divorced. No purpose would be served to detail the accusations of adultery and counterclaims of cruelty, of which I had a surprising awareness at the time. Really, to me it was merely an exciting episode until I realized my father might be going away. But the family was truly sundered, both Catholic and Presbyterian branches. Some of the clan deserted Montana in favor of Los

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Angeles, California, or Detroit, Michigan, to avoid the scandal of the **FIRST DIVORCE IN THIS IRISH FAMILY!** I leave to the psychiatrists their interpretation of the long-range implications of this early disruption. To God I leave the effects in His eternal plan.

Mother promptly remarried, to another Presbyterian; and Dad, now a railroad man, got himself transferred to the Southern Pacific Railroad in California. I missed him terribly. We accompanied Mother and our new stepfather to Michigan. He was a gentle enough man except for one razor strapping when I refused to call him "Dad". And my totally pagan upbringing continued.

It must have been a year or more later that my Dad joyfully appeared in Michigan a few days before Christmas, and my brother and I were informed by Mother that we were to pack and return to California "for your time with him". My sister was to remain with her. Still no trauma for me. It was a great adventure to leave snow-burdened Detroit, ride the train across the continent, and arrive in sun-kissed California on Christmas morning. No Christmas tree, no Santa Claus, no presents, but oh what fun!

My good father, not remarried, was looking for a house in which to bring up his sons. Meanwhile my brother and I would stay with my aunt Mary Murphy, one of my mother's elder sisters and herself a refugee from Montana. Apparently Aunt Mary had been the most scandalized in the clan over the disruptive divorce, and she had adopted my heretical father as a brother and had cast out my mother as a harlot (those two did not communicate with each other for many years). So my Brother Will and I went temporarily under Aunt Mary's protective care, and "temporary" turned out to be a year until Dad had built a house.

Aunt Mary was not only a dedicated Irishwoman, she was aggressively Catholic. She abounded in good works—witness her taking in two undisciplined nephews. Her husband and grown son treated us with affection. Aunt Mary herself had social pretensions and eventually became President of the

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Catholic Women's Club of Los Angeles, no mean attainment for an unlettered Irish immigrant.

She must have had something going for her. She was prepossessing in appearance, adroit at hiding her lack of formal education, at times stern and legalistic, but other times warm and understanding. The point is, she was **Catholic**, and she promptly subjected my brother and me to an all-embracing Roman Catholic influence which in subtle ways affects me to this day. She had not the foggiest notion of biblical Christianity, but what notions she had she put to use. Under her watchful eye we were placed in public school until the following semester. At her home we immediately began an indoctrination in the Baltimore Catechism and Bible History. We were taught the "Our Father," the "Hail Mary," the sign of the cross, and how to use holy water. My mind was a ready blank surface on which to etch the fundamentals of Catholicism—the "tabula rasa" of the philosophers.

In Aunt Mary's order of priorities I was introduced first to the Catholic Church, and **then** to Jesus and His mother—and in many ways Mary was preeminent. **Worried about whether you will save your soul? Entrust it to Mary—she'll take care of it!** I shudder, thinking of the years it took me to recognize that corruption of Christianity for what it was—a form of bondage interposed between me and Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ himself was a fascinating new character for me. I remember for the first time reading an abbreviated story of His passion and death. I **did not know** how it was going to turn out and hoped that something would save Jesus from the bad guys.

I was quickly readied for Confession and First Communion, and it was no chore. I easily fell in love with Catholicism; so I had two loves in those early years—the Catholic Church and baseball, and each complemented the other.

When the next semester approached, Will and I were enrolled in St. Agnes parochial school. I was now under the in-

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fluence of the nuns—some of them bitter introverts, more of them gentle, well-meaning workhorses for the Roman Church. Their sincere but distorted concepts of Christianity were passed on to us. They did know how to expound the rudiments of secular education—reading, writing, arithmetic, even algebra and Latin, long before high school.

Most of we former Roman Catholics readily affirm that sometime in the lower grades of grammar school we began to experience that horrendous reality that accompanies a conscientious observance of Catholic precepts. It is puzzling to outsiders, and crippling or fatal to its victims in the Church. It is the syndrome of constant, oppressive, unshakeable awareness of guilt, and it is simply and accurately labeled, "Catholic guilt." It is unique and peculiar to that system.

My guilt feelings began in those early grade-school years. I was taught that Jesus redeemed us as a general principle, — never that he had saved us, freed us from the bondage of works, and removed from us the very guilt for our sins. I began to question the integrity of my Confessions—did I confess everything I had to? and the correct number of times? Was I truly sorry? Did I receive Communion in the state of grace, or was I condemning myself to hell by unworthy Communions? Did I pay proper attention at Mass? Did I consent to "impure thoughts"? The list is endless. And the guilt accumulated and extended its venom to all my waking hours except when I was playing baseball. It remained with me in varying degrees until the day, years upon years later, that I abandoned Catholicism. Rightly did Martin Luther call the Catholic practice of obligatory confession to a priest "a butchery of consciences." (9)

Nor was the guilt trip due to my ignorance. I learned early all the escape doors to avoid serious sin in the game of casuistry that is Roman Catholic moral theology. By the time I was in high school I knew more about the nuances of Catholic moral and dogmatic theology than does your average Roman Catholic priest today.

(9) See Chiniquy, *The Priest, The Woman, and The Confessional*, Pub. by Chick Publications, Chino, Ca.

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To be sure, as a youngster and as an adult, I did not attribute the guilt madness to the Roman Catholic system, which I loved, but only to my own deficiencies. I was the average sub-teen and teen-age sinner. None of the big sins, but plenty of the smaller. So I countered the guilt by becoming a perfect Pharisee, strict in the law, miles removed from the freedom which is in Jesus Christ.

Batted back and forth between Michigan and California, public school when with Mother, Catholic schools when with dear old Presbyterian Dad, I arrived at my sophomore year of high school. Dad remarried that year to an anti-Catholic widow with two children. I was to stay with them in California for the remainder of my high-school days. After some preliminary skirmishes in this new family grouping it was settled that I was Catholic and would remain so.

In the intervening years I had received the sacrament of Confirmation, preceded by plenty of worry over how hard the bishop would give me "a blow to the cheek" and would he call on me before the congregation to answer a question on Christian doctrine. (The blow was light, and I was not called on.) On that day, intended to be a joyous one in the life of the young Catholic, I felt I was receiving Confirmation unworthily because in Confession years earlier I had said "once" to the priest instead of "twice" when enumerating some childhood sin. I was wallowing in guilt rather than rejoicing in the supposed receiving of the Holy Spirit. Catholic theology told me I was committing a mortal sin of sacrilege. But it was glossed over in all the pomp and ceremony, with the lavishly-robed bishop presiding in regal splendor. The Holy Spirit took a back seat, if indeed He was there at all.

At the start of my junior year in high school I was certain I was destined to become a Catholic priest. Being so devoted to the Church, what else? I knew priests did not get married, but that seemed of no vital consideration; and they did get to attend baseball games, so why not? Obviously I was not "called by God." I was simply enamored of the pageantry of the Church, and I wanted to be on the other side of the screen in the confessional, having Christ ratify my decisions to absolve

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or withhold sins. And I wanted to be the one up on the altar who changed that measly bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. Besides, since I had no assurance of salvation, maybe this would cinch the deal. Moreover, Aunt Mary was rooting from the sidelines for "the first priest in this family in America." Dad was noncommittal, "If that's what you want and it's not just Aunt Mary's idea."

After gathering together all the required documents for the Catholic bureaucracy and filing the necessary petitions, I was informed by the subordinate minions of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of local jurisdiction that since my parents were divorced and my Mother, the Catholic party, remarried (3 times at this late date), it would be a "scandal to the faithful" and I could not be a candidate for the diocesan priesthood. Perhaps I **could** seek an obscure religious order where my aspirations to the altar would not be public knowledge and scandal would not ensue.

Sweet Jesus, for that sort of thing you died on the cross? With all allowance for the jealous Roman Catholic guarding of the marriage bond; for all that Church's self-consciousness of its precarious but growing public image in this essentially Protestant country, was that Christian treatment of a defenseless young member seeking ordination to the priesthood? So what if my motives were imperfect, they were in good faith. God judge the organization! I don't. I merely ask a question.

But I was not bitter then. My Catholicism triumphed and I went on my happy way. I finished more schooling, World War II intervened, and upon application to the federal government I received an appointment as a civilian technician with the Armed Forces. I was immediately transported overseas and spent the following 11 or more years traveling about the globe during the postwar occupation of the defeated countries. Still utterly Catholic, still unsaved, I was yet marvelously protected by God from disaster and perdition. Eventually I was assigned to Japan, in the situation I described in Chapter Two.

After my encounter with Fr. Maher and its aftermath, I returned to Japan for yet one more tour of duty, followed by

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another in North Africa and Europe with the Air Force. My father died during my last tour in Japan; Mother died (fortified by the last rites of the Catholic Church) after my assignment in North Africa. At last I was freed of the bondage of that DIVORCE! and could begin to implement the decision I had made when I learned of Fr. Maher's death. I would become a priest. I resigned my position with the Armed Forces and elected to stay in Southern California to approach the church authorities in that jurisdiction, ready for a long siege against the ecclesiastical establishment if need be. I took a job at Aerojet-General Corporation in a suburb of Los Angeles.

But when I applied to the Archbishop it all became easy. It was agreed that the scandal no longer existed. I was examined for proficiency in Latin and was accepted into the junior-year college class of the major seminary. I quit my job with Aerojet, disposed of my new car, and I was ready for my scholastic adventure in a Catholic atmosphere actually on the way to the priesthood! My expectations were high. My motives were good, I thought. I expected the seminary interlude of 6 or 7 years would be difficult, yes, but not onerous. I believed the sweat of the rigid scholastic requirements would be accompanied by a Christian peace and joy, and that the always-present guilt would gradually dissipate. How naive I was! The Roman Catholic seminary in 1958, the year I entered, was a semi-respected accredited college; but in other respects it was alternately laughable and tragic. Believe me, Satan had a foothold there, and he roamed the place at will.

The seminary should be seen for an esoteric form of bondage within the general bondage of Catholicism. The program was regimented to a degree that would shame a Marine Corps boot camp. There was total segregation of students from the faculty—no Christian fellowship between the two groups. The priest-teachers were feared by the seminarians, and in retaliation they were ridiculed cruelly by the students in vulgar fashion. No respect for the faculty could survive.

Students were forbidden to form cliques or "particular friendships"—you could not openly have a seminary buddy. No visiting in each other's rooms under penalty of immediate

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dismissal. We were strictly confined to the seminary grounds with certain areas off limits. All activities of the day were governed by a maddening succession of bells. Prayers, and most so-called spiritual exercises were prepackaged and imposed by the authorities. Spontaneity and originality were frowned upon, even in the classroom. Recreation was minimal, and sports facilities a farce. Personal radios were forbidden; no daily newspaper (the comics and sports section were tacked on a common bulletin board). No secular magazines permitted. No outgoing telephone calls without the permission of the Dean of Discipline. Incoming mail was subject to censorship! Small wonder some young men eventually just packed their bags and silently stole away—or became victims of a nervous breakdown. All such oppression was levied supposedly to train and strengthen the character of the future priest. Hogwash! It was calculated to mold clerics totally responsive to the orders of a dictatorial church hierarchy. Such Christianity as existed in that macabre ambience was a miracle of God's grace. That such a weird community of bondage could flourish undisturbed in the 20th century United States is scarcely to be credited. (10)

Four years I spent on that seminary without rebelling or collapsing. The fifth year was spent working in my parish in Santa Monica, California. The following and last two years I was sent to the regional seminary in Denver, Colorado, where the regimen was only slightly more relaxed.

I did well scholastically. The disparity in age between me and the other students seldom posed problems. Classes offered no challenge. A good memory sufficed for any subject. The intricate maze of Roman Catholic dogmatic and moral theology was presented as infallible truth; but a few years of familiarity with those systems revealed their grotesque aridity. Scripture studies—most students' first contact with the Bible—were of value only insofar as the individual seminarian tried to chart his own path. I learned much on my own, but never did the seminary present to me the Holy Scriptures

(10) *Alberto*, p. 10.

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as the living, powerful Word of God, the two-edged sword which cleaves the soul.

The study of Church History was the grand disillusionment. Catholics at large are led to think of their church as Christ's own **organization**, sailing majestically down the centuries, persecuted by evil men, spawning thousands of canonized saints, gloriously expanding from Pentecost to the current year. They see their Popes as haloed shepherds, watchful Vicars of Christ from Peter to John Paul II, harried by the world, comforted by the faithful, miraculously sustained by the Holy Spirit. At most, only a few blemishes are allowed in the popular imagination—a couple “unworthy Popes” and some “abuses” prior to the Protestant Reformation.

But the reality shocks! To prepare the seminarian for the historical objections that will be raised by intelligent folk during his future ministry, some of the truth must be disclosed. Myself a victim of the popular conception of the Church Militant, I entered this study of history at first with shock, then puzzlement, and finally with an avid but healthy curiosity.

I learned that some Popes had been murdered and others were perpetrators of murder; some committed incest; many had illegitimate children; many led armies into bloody wars. Many lived in royal comfort furnished by the alms of the poor. I was soon able to realize that the Roman Papacy and its claims were probably a political development about three centuries after the apostolic era. There was no plain, contemporary evidence that Peter was bishop of Rome, or even that Rome had a bishop until well into the second century. (11) All the early local churches were independent units of the body of Christ, and none of them was subservient to or dependent on Rome. Such local churches as had bishops or “overseers” evangelized their areas with never a nod to an alleged Pope presiding as a visible head of the universal church in far-away Rome.

I discovered the incredible horrors of the Inquisition—hor-

(11) **Alberto**, p. 14, also **Godfathers**, p. 6.

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rors dismissed by Catholic historians as stern measures required to preserve the civil peace. (12) And anyway, the Church didn't murder anybody—she merely turned the condemned heretics over to the civilian governments for execution! Somehow it reminds me of Pontius Pilate.

Why didn't I pack my bags and leave when these astounding facts penetrated my regimented skull? Because I was under Catholic bondage, unable to initiate rational actions in the wake of newly-acquired historical knowledge. And all bondage is of the devil.

As I ascended the creaky ladder of Roman theology, history, and Scripture study, simultaneously "doubts of faith" began to assert themselves. I soon became aware that the entire spectrum of Marian beliefs had no basis in Scripture and were unknown to the apostolic church. They grew as malignant pagan aberrations from the third century, reached an abominable complexity in the late middle ages, and have become infallibly part of the Roman Catholic concept of revealed truth—somewhat muted since the Second Vatican Council, but always, and embarrassingly, integral elements of defined Catholic dogma.

Especially difficult for me in the seminary was the audacious claim that Mary is Mediatrix of All Grace and Co-Redemptrix in the economy of salvation. (13) This I could not accept. Not only was it not revealed in the Bible, it was radically opposed to the New Testament teaching that Jesus Christ is our sole and unique Mediator. Doubts of faith, if voluntary and culpable, are mortal sins for the Catholic, shutting him off from God's friendship. I was having doubts of faith so I brought them to the confessional for forgiveness. The bland confessor, however sincere, could only advise, "Don't dwell on it, and remember it does not detract from Christ's mediation." "Well, that's ridiculous. If Mary's mediatorship is actual and effective, it certainly in some degree detracts from

(12) **Alberto**, pp. 17-18, also **Sabotage** by Chick Publications, Chino, Ca., pp. 25-26.

(13) **Alberto**, p. 25.

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Jesus' work as Mediator. Four minus one equals three, it does not remain four. Therefore, accept the theological fancy of Mary's intercession, and the Mediatorship of Christ is diminished."

Similarly, I began to doubt a total of seven sacraments instituted by Christ. The Roman numbers game says there are seven, Scripture gives clear evidence of but two: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. This led to my doubting the very goal I sought—the priesthood. Was there a sacrament of Orders, segregating select Christians from the laity? The New Testament told me there was only the universal priesthood of Jesus Christ as Mediator, and the universal priesthood of worship in which all Christians, of whatever rank, shared equally.

To escape the misfortune of mortal sin, in true Catholic fashion I pushed the doubts back into the subconscious, whence they must emerge with ferocity years later.

Such are a few citations of the cruel, anti-intellectual, pseudo-Christian patterns of the Catholic seminary. There is no other means to achieve the priesthood, so one submits, bloody but unbowed. I submitted and persevered, with but one major hesitation, for the remainder of the ordeal. During this seven-year period I acquired much superficial ecclesiastical knowledge, but did I grow in wisdom? Doubtful. Did I grow in grace, move closer to God, embrace Christ as my Savior in trusting faith? God knows I must answer no. Of personal deficiencies I had my share, but my failures were augmented and compounded by the Catholic seminary system. I insist that where an un-Christian situation exists under the authority and approbation of a nominally Christian organization, there the devil is in power and the fruits of such a situation cannot be of God. I was the fruit of such! And may I add, I paid my own way through that mess, financially not dependent on the diocese.

Ordination time finally came at the end of my deacon year, the fourth year of Theology. I arrived at that climactic milestone in good shape physically despite the oppression. Emotionally I was calm but expectant. Spiritually I was in

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bondage to performance of saving “good works” and acts of devotion and piety, accumulating “merit” in heaven—all solid Catholic bondages. I was still devoted to Mary and a few major saints, although I could not accept their mediatorship and intercession. With all the wrenching experience of the seminary, I remained enamored of Roman Catholicism, ready, despite doubts, to submit to most of its teachings, eager to assume the challenge of the priesthood.

I was accepted by the Cardinal Archbishop for ordination—the ultimate Catholic sign that one has a true vocation. So much for ultimate Catholic signs! At this late hour, so close to ordination, I should have been on my knees, praying, meditating, probing my soul to verify my motivation. Instead I was engrossed on the external and worldly aspects of getting myself ordained with all the pomp and splendor of the Roman sacrament. The bishop laid hands on me on May 29, 1965, in St. Monica’s church in Santa Monica, California. God had brought me to another crossroad in my checkered life.

I began my priestly service sincerely, within the limitations already noted. I had zeal to bring outsiders to the Roman Catholic Church. It was not present to my mind that I should be helping the unsaved to find the free gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. There is an old theological maxim, “You cannot give what you do not have.”

The conscientious priest will be constantly busy with the works of the church. I was conscientious and stayed busy. I enjoyed the “work”. I maintained the minimal required study and formal prayer habits. I enjoyed celebrating Mass, hearing confessions, taking Communion to and visiting the sick and shut-ins. I did premarital counseling, taught the Catechism to youngsters, conducted inquiry classes for prospective converts—all the many labors entailed in the ministry. I tried to inject Scripture into my sermons, always aware that my listeners were woefully ignorant of the Bible. For the most part I pleased my superiors. But a basic, vital element was missing. I was trying to pursue a career of promoting the Roman Catholic Church while divorced from a real personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I was engaged in essentially

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human activities. Satan had a wedge by which to enter and buffet me, and I could not "resist him steadfast in the faith."

The Catholic priesthood is a great temptation to pride. You are treated with adulation by the Catholic community. If you are not grounded solidly in the Lord you must inevitably fall. This happened to me. Gradually my ministry became a launching pad for my ego. I enjoyed the praise bestowed on me for my labors. Whatever good resulted from my efforts I began to attribute to my talents, giving no credit to God, and never invoking the Holy Spirit to assist me in achieving my goals.

Catholics will maintain that at that point I should have paused and claimed all the helps offered by Catholicism for the soul in danger or distress: prayer, the sacraments, acts of penance, spiritual counseling, possibly a retreat. I maintain these "helps" were powerless to affect me even psychologically. For alongside my burgeoning pride, my long-suppressed doubts began to emerge full-blown.

No longer certain that the Mass was the sacrifice of Calvary renewed, the Mass could offer me no strength. No longer convinced that the sacrament of confessing sins to another priest could procure forgiveness, I abandoned the personal reception of that sacrament and sought absolution in a vague concept of, "Oh, well, God is good; I'm forgiven." Strictly speaking, I was no longer really Catholic. But I kept all this to myself and did not inject my new beliefs into my public ministry.

At the same time there was a further development. From the inside I began to see contemporary Catholicism as a vast political web, rife with feuds, ambitions and power plays. The placid exterior presented to the non-Catholic world did not reflect the shabby inner reality. Moreover, the cleavage between liberals and conservatives was growing. I was able to discern that the conservative group clung most firmly to the human traditions of the Church while retaining the fundamental doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ. The liberal faction cast out the human accretions but was also discarding Christian fundamentals.

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In stark honesty, I must now briefly allude to a further difficulty for which I can blame nobody but myself. Along with your arduous chores as a priest, you are in most cases, depending on circumstances, given much time off. Ordinarily you are allowed only one full day off each week, and that in the middle of the week. But you are also given frequent and generous vacations. My times off I spent innocently enough at the beginning. But again gradually I began to spend my free periods with fellow priests, friends from my seminary days, consequently companions much younger than myself, who had different ideas of recreation. It became the usual thing on free days and vacations to don civilian clothing and frequent the bars to down hard liquor and witness secular entertainment of questionable moral content. Often we would congregate at the priest's house of one another and bring out the poker chips, and gamble and drink bourbon or scotch, with no qualms of conscience. We didn't entirely forsake the beach or skiing, or attendance at ball games. But more frequently we did what was termed "serious drinking." I did not become an alcoholic. In my mind I separated my drinking from my ministry. Neither our superiors nor our flocks were aware of our activities. It was, of course, pitiful and I sinned. I make no excuses.

As a sad footnote, one of those drinking buddies left the priesthood a couple years before I did and became some kind of a secular humanist. Another became an alcoholic and had to "take the treatment." A third, now well-known and active in church affairs, rejects the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection! God had something different in His plans for me.

Several times I considered leaving and requested time off. I realized at last that my life had become a great deception. I was that most odious of characters, a pious fraud. All my work became a burden. Each day was now a torture. I knew I could no longer be called a believing Catholic. Whatever faulty concept I may have had of vocation and doing God's work disappeared. I was empty inside. I had abandoned my God. But this same God moved me to recognize my hypocrisy and I did at last leave, requesting an indefinite leave of absence. Seven years only was I an active priest. I served in California and Kansas,

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and a brief temporary stint in Michigan, where I was situated when I made my exit. I left in good stead with no scandal. But I was out!

At this point, let me state that I have pointed to my deficiencies and sins. The Catholic Church will argue them as the cause of my downfall. I argue that if Catholicism had the power to offer me Jesus Christ as my personal Savior, those pitfalls would have been avoided or overcome.

Out again in the secular world, shattered, surprisingly I yet accepted intellectually that Jesus is the Son of God, that He died for our sins and arose for them, and that He will come again. But such acceptance was on a cold, mental level with no power. I did not know how to appropriate it into my life. So I entered a very dangerous period for my immortal soul.

Since I had acquired no wealth, nor even any appreciable savings during my priestly interlude, the very day after I discarded the title "Father Butterfield" I applied for a job with the Detroit Police Department. Within a few days I was working full time with that organization, and I remain there to this day.

Externally I reacted well to my new self-imposed status. I did not brood nor torment myself with personal recriminations, nor succumb to a tide of guilt. The guilt horror of a lifetime vanished when I abandoned Roman Catholicism and its man-made priestly caste. I entered the Police Department a calm, pragmatic, unspiritual man. My new co-workers saw me as pleasant, competent and a hard worker—which I was. I saw myself as self-contained, self-satisfied, neither happy nor unhappy, calling myself a Christian. I was the devil's property. I was neither hot nor cold, just indifferent, in danger of God's just retribution. This God Who had pursued me all of my years could have given me up to perdition at that stage. He did not; He is a patient God, His ways inscrutable.

I blithely passed another five years, living quietly, comfortably, but always in danger of an eternal hell without God. Only early in 1978 did I begin to have qualms about my direc-

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tionless lifestyle—only vaguely disquieting qualms; and I did not know it was the gentle breath of the Holy Spirit prodding me. I was asking myself, “Is this all there is—paydays and eventual retirement? Where are you headed, Butterfield? You know there’s a hell but you have no means to avoid going there. Catholicism only increased your chances of spending eternity in that place.” Such questions I began to ponder—not that clearly in my mind, but essentially that is what I was asking. And the mighty but forbearing God who had sustained me over the years was ready to seize me and give me another opportunity to become His. The stage was set for the unspeakable miracle of personal salvation!

And strangely, at that same time, I began to suffer the recurring symptoms of a former physical ailment.

One hot evening late in July of 1978, I was working overtime at our offices in the Veterans Memorial Building in downtown Detroit as I often do. Between sessions, I stepped out for a bit of fresh air on the mall of the Hart Plaza. There I encountered a young rookie uniformed Detroit Police Officer whom I had not met before. I introduced myself to him and he told me his name was Jim MacKinnon. We conversed pleasantly for a few minutes about the weather, the Plaza construction, and my job in the Department. Then I took leave of him and reentered our building to resume work. I was thinking, “That young cop in our brief chat never once uttered an obscenity or vulgarity nor took the name of Jesus Christ in vain. Strange behavior for a policeman.” Back in our Bureau I mentioned Jim to the female sergeant with whom I was working and remarked that his speech had been free of the usual expletives we would expect. She agreed it was strange.

Providentially I again encountered Jim several times in the following days. We talked about various items of mutual interest, all of a secular nature. But I sensed something special about this young man. He dealt with me as one of his peers—no condescending overtones of the generation gap that the thoughtless young often project. I sensed about him an air of confidence and inner peace. He displayed an engaging combination: he was modestly reserved and yet was a low-keyed

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extrovert. I began to like him as a person and remarked to myself, "I wish I could have those qualities even this late in the game."

About a week later on a Wednesday evening I was again working overtime on the 7th Floor of the Veterans Building. That night a near-tornado ravaged downtown Detroit. We were working in the Interview Room on the west side of the building: one of our investigative sergeants, the police officer under investigation, the police union attorney, and myself. We were seated around a conference table by a great, plate glass window when the fury of the storm broke over next-door Cobo Hall, and the west side of our building took it full brunt. In seconds, the bright evening became night black. There was a deafening roar and the massive concrete building shuddered in the wind, and the huge central window of our room gave way. Great shards of glass and countless fragments were hurled across the office and crashed against the opposite wall. The four of us dived to the floor. I was terrified! I had heard the roar, of course. I was aware the window had shattered. When I hit the floor I was as frightened as I have ever been. But I do not recall invoking God's help. None of us was injured but the office was a shambles. Ours was the only window that gave way in the building. A short distance to the east of us Detroit's mighty Renaissance Center suffered extensive damage and a parking structure under construction collapsed. Meteorologists agreed it was a tornado that didn't quite touch down.

The following day I went home from work—no overtime that night, I believed. But shortly after I arrived at my apartment I received a phone call from one of our sergeants that I was needed downtown for an unscheduled appointment with a police officer. The sergeant picked me up and drove me downtown. As we exited his car in front of the Veteran's Building, there was Jim MacKinnon walking his beat. I excused myself from the sergeant, "I have to talk to this cop; I'll be upstairs in a couple minutes." I approached Jim and asked, "Where were you last night when the storm came?" He told me his detail had been in a scout car in Greek Town, an ethnic area in downtown Detroit. So I briefly related to him what had occurred up

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in our Bureau and how I had been scared witless. He smiled and said, "I was scared too, but I wouldn't have been afraid to die because I've been saved!"

Well, that was a tremendous moment in my journey to the Cross. I looked at him. I knew immediately what he meant, and a sword pierced my soul. I almost dropped my briefcase. In my training and background I had been taught to regard with disdain those heretics who went about claiming to have experienced salvation already here on earth. But here was this likeable young man, obviously intelligent, surely one of God's friends, making just such a claim. He had been quietly witnessing to me and exhibiting the fruits of his salvation in our few short encounters. I was intrigued. "I have to go inside, but I'm an ex-Catholic priest," I blurted out. "I want to talk to you further about this!"

Praise God, Jim was now free to overtly witness Jesus Christ to me. If, when we first met, he had aggressively collared me and laid tracts and Scripture verses on me, I would have put him down and turned away, perhaps, sadly, to eternal damnation. But God had moved him to approach me in exactly the manner required to attract my attention. I was ready to hear more.

For the next few days Jim and I met by design and he began to build on the solid foundation that I had retained—my belief in the deity of Jesus Christ. He displayed an astounding knowledge of the Bible that shamed me. He answered all my questions without hesitation. He kept repeating, "No church saves; only Jesus Christ saves." In short, he gave me a course on the fundamentals of evangelical Christianity. Above all, he was kind to me when I was thirsting for Christ-like kindness from a person with no ulterior motive—not a relative, not a long-time friend—just a concerned Christian. And I marveled to myself, "My God, this guy really believes all this. He thinks that when we are sitting together having lunch Jesus Christ is the third party at the table!" That closeness to Jesus had been sadly missing from my whole life. I began to wonder, "Could that simple biblical plan of salvation be true? Could I have that? Is it for me?" A strange inner compulsion began to build

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up in me. I found myself agreeing with everything Jim expounded. It was still largely on an intellectual plane, but God led me to a decision.

Without consulting Jim, I decided to attend a Catholic Mass, which I had not done since leaving the priesthood. This was with no intent of rejoining the Roman ranks, but as an experiment with my new-found knowledge. The following Sunday, August 6, 1978, I made my way to a 7 a.m. Mass at a sumptuous church in Grosse Point Park, Michigan.

I took a seat in the church. All the scriptural texts illuminated for me by Jim were clamoring for my attention. I was in this vast marble temple of Catholic worship, but almost completely divorced from the action of the Mass. I was about to have my first face-to-face meeting with Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit works wherever He wills, and He willed to overpower me in that eerie atmosphere of my abandoned Catholicism.

As I write this, I try to be completely honest and transparent. When the moment for Communion arrived I felt an overwhelming sense that I must act. I felt the flesh of the back of my neck prickle. My hair stood on end. I was aware of an inner voice, "Clark, I've got you!" I was impelled to stand, to walk down the aisle toward the altar, and partake of the Communion on God's terms, not on the terms of Roman Catholicism which terms are idolatrous.

At this point, Roman Catholicism will cry, "Foul and sacrilege!" I cry, "Liberation! Settle it with God!"

As I went down that aisle, I acknowledged to Jesus, "You are my Saviour. You redeemed me. Your Blood is all-sufficient. There's nothing I can add to that; salvation is totally yours and I want it. Send your Spirit upon me. I turn my life over to you."

I received Communion for the first time in peace, with no shadow of guilt. I knew at that moment I had been reborn in Jesus Christ! I left the church building an evangelical Christian. The remainder of that happy morning I have related in

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the first chapter. The Lord had been faithful to help me make it through the night.

The aftermath? God changed me about completely. I was a new creature with a new orientation. Still a struggling sinner I now had the sole remedy in the blood of Jesus Christ. No more vain groping for salvation in the dark valley of human traditions, vain works and pious practices. I was now at the mountaintop of infallible awareness of salvation **now**, free to exhibit the fruits of the Holy Spirit in my daily life. Oh, wonderful miracle of God's grace! I need no further miracles until He calls me home.

Jim MacKinnon, apparently not at all surprised that I came to the Lord, led me further. He introduced me to evangelical worship at the Lord's House in Livonia, Michigan. He witnessed my adult water baptism in the River Rouge as a public sign of my spiritual rebirth. And he launched me on my searching of the Holy Scriptures, the inspired, inerrant, infallible written Word of God. He has been a patient teacher as I venture forth on my Christian walk. He is aware of my foibles and my human lacks. Together we have undertaken various ministries which God is blessing. He has encouraged me to accept preaching and public-speaking engagements in the Christian community. He first suggested that I write this book, and encouraged me along its way. We have become friends in Christ. Like the poet, truly I can say, "All this and heaven too."

The following chapters are undertaken in a spirit of love. They are not intended as theological skirmishes with the powers of Rome. I present them as words of teaching, counsel and comfort for the souls who constitute that vast army loved by Jesus—ex-Roman Catholics, faltering Roman Catholics, and all victims of ecclesiastical bureaucracies. Christ died for you as He did for me.

God love you for accompanying me on the stages of this journey. We will now probe into some of the unbiblical Catholic fallacies which erect barriers between the potential Christian and his Saviour. God, help us make it through the night!

CHAPTER FOUR

IS MARY MY MOTHER?

“Oh Mary, my Queen and my Mother, I give myself entirely to thee; and to show my devotion to thee, I consecrate to thee this day my eyes, my ears, my mouth, my heart, my whole being without reserve. Wherefore, oh good Mother, as I am thine own, keep me and guard me as thy property and possession. Amen.”

Catholic Prayer of Consecration to Mary

How does the ex-Catholic, now reborn and embracing evangelical Christianity, approach the question of Mary, the Mother of Jesus? In Catholic days she permeated every aspect of the religious life; in the simplicity of Bible Christianity she fades into the background. The problems associated with the former cult of Mary are definitively solved when one fully accepts Jesus Christ as his personal Savior and sole Mediator. That is so in my case; I have no problems regarding Mary. The Holy Spirit has taught me her role in the historical human factors of God's plan of salvation. It is the role assigned to her in the Sacred Scriptures—no more, no less. But for other less fortunate ex-Catholics who seek salvation there are questions, and these should be clearly stated and convincingly resolved.

During childhood and adolescence the young Catholic traditionally has been subjected to an intensive grounding in the Roman doctrines regarding Mary the Mother of Christ. And

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the indoctrination has been reinforced with a fervid devotional life centering on Mary. In my early infatuation with Catholicism I learned that Mary was my mother: Christ had given her to me on the cross. I could safely entrust to her all the problems entailed in my well-nigh impossible task of saving my soul. True, I was taught that the worship and honor paid to Mary was not that which was due to God alone, but it was so exalted that it was unspeakably higher than the honor we paid to the angels and saints! Mary was addressed as "my Mother" a thousand times more frequently than Jesus was addressed as "my Savior." In the Litany of the Blessed Virgin I saluted her under these astounding titles: Mother of Divine Grace, Help of Christians, Queen of Angels, Ark of the Covenant, Morning Star, Health of the Sick, Gate of Heaven. Small wonder that the theological niceties concerning the degree of honor due to her were lost in this flood of blasphemy! (14)

Any adult former Catholic may retain some nostalgic echo of the early saturation in Marian piety. There are memories—often bittersweet—which, from time to time may invade one's consciousness with all the pangs of homesickness. There are reminiscences of the sun-sparkling days of May (which is Mary's month in the Catholic calendar) when everything revolved about the Virgin Mother. Processions were staged with the statue of Mary borne about the church and out-of-doors to the accompaniment of joyful singing, profusions of flowers, and clouds of incense. Crownings of the image of Mary with garlands of flowers as she was greeted, "Hail, Queen of the May." I once had the best of both worlds. I was enamored not only of Mary, but I also had a crush on the girl from my class who crowned the statue! We even huddled in a prayer to Mary for victory before baseball games. Much of it was crude and saccharine, of course; all of it was unwittingly idolatrous. Like all echoes of childhood it sometimes has its tug on the human heart, and its power to seduce may diminish only slowly with the passing years. In any event, whatever ghostly nostalgia remains is a captivity of the heart; and all such captivity is of the devil. Only acceptance of Jesus Christ with

(14) See cassette tape *CHRIST OR MARY?* by Alberto Rivera, AIC, Alta Loma, Ca.

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rebirth can unshackle the captive enmeshed in the cult of Mary.

So, as a youthful Catholic I was immersed in Mariology as an integral part of my religious beliefs and my hope for eternal salvation. The Catholic Church teaches that, while, strictly speaking, the worship of Mary is not absolutely necessary for salvation, rash indeed would be the Christian who neglected such an efficacious help in his struggle to save his soul, since God had provided that help.

My prayer is that I confront the Roman heresies without seeming to detract from the blessed woman who was elected to be the Mother of Jesus. What we seek is a balanced Scriptural viewpoint midway between the excesses of Roman Catholicism and a cold elimination of Mary from our Biblical perspective in retaliation, as it were, for those excesses. As we consider the question of Mary we must constantly keep in mind two facts:

First, there are many pertinent, pivotal Scripture texts that demolish the Roman position:

“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all...” (I Tim. 2:5-6)

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” (Rom. 3:23)

“And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.” (I John 3:5)

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” (I John 1:8)

“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name (than Jesus) under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

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If these texts from the Word of God are meditated upon and claimed, no Marian error can intrude.

Second, there are no scriptural texts which clearly support any Marian doctrine. The Bible is starkly silent—it says **nothing** about the myriad theological wanderings that have crystallized into Roman dogmas on Mary. The Scriptures know nothing about a woman born without original sin; of a woman who lived a totally sinless life; of a woman who was assumed body and soul into heaven at the conclusion of her earthly existence; of a woman who was crowned queen of all creation; of a woman who intercedes with God for mankind, and who functions as a Co-Redemptrix and Mediatrix. Those are the Catholic fancies; and Catholic scholars readily admit that those doctrines lack Scriptural evidence. But that does not deter them.

The Catholic cult of Mary is initially based on her sacred motherhood, but precisely there the fundamental error is made. The fourth-century title bestowed on Mary, **theotokos** (Greek for “bearer of God”) was equivalent to **Mother of God**. The Roman enthusiasts reasoned in this way: Mary is the Mother of Jesus; Jesus is God; therefore Mary is the Mother of God. To deny this title to Mary, they say, is to deny the deity of Jesus Christ! Concede that title to her, I say, and a fertile theological imagination can produce a host of blasphemous doctrines, which in fact did happen. The title “Mother of God” was essentially a borrowing from paganism.

“The veneration of the Virgin Mary was probably stimulated by parallels in pagan religion. Some scholars believe that the Worship of (the goddess) Artemis was transferred to Mary. Ephesus, a city which belonged to Artemis until the end of the pagan era, was also associated with Mary from an early date. Many people connected Mary with Isis, the Egyptian goddess whose worship had spread throughout the Empire in the Christian era...The devotees of Isis, herself called ‘the Great Virgin’ and ‘Mother of the God’, naturally tended to look to

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Mary for comfort when paganism was outlawed and their temples destroyed at the end of the 4th Century. However, the original aim of the title 'bearer of God' for Mary was to honor the divine son."(15)

We do not concede that title to Mary. The deity of Christ and His pre-existence in the eternal Godhead cannot be separated. No created being born in time (Mary) can be the mother of the timeless God. She is the mother of the Lord as man, not mother of the Lord as God. She is the mother of the man, Jesus Christ, not of God eternal. This is no mere playing with words; it is the key to Mariolatry. If she can be viewed as truly the Mother of God, just about any marvel can be fantasized in her regard. The unbiblical worship of Mary has all its venomous roots in the untenable appellation "Mother of God;" the correct evangelical recognition of Mary is anchored in the simple Biblical expression, "Mother of Jesus."

Then follows the second, gross, Roman error, manufactured from the salutation by the angel Gabriel at the Annunciation. The Catholic rendition of the angel's greeting has been traditionally: "Hail, full of Grace." The Greek word used in the New Testament is *kecharitomena*, a passive verb form correctly translated, "(woman) to whom grace has been shown." The context indicates that Mary was given the grace of election to the privilege of being the mother of Jesus. It says nothing of Mary's intrinsic fitness for that privilege, much less that she was "full of grace." She was granted a favor, albeit an exalted one.

Those two early errors opened the floodgates for the doctrinal disasters that followed. Over the ensuing centuries the Marian dogmas proliferated. If Mary is full of grace, the claim was advanced, she must have been the greatest and holiest of all created beings. Even Thomas Aquinas, preeminent philosopher and theologian of Rome. wrote: "By the

(15) *Constantine and the Roman Empire*, by Richard A. Todd. From Eerdman's Handbook to the History of Christianity. 1977, p. 132.

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grace bestowed upon her, she **merited** that measure of purity and holiness which fitted her to be the Mother of God." (This is an example of the sharpest of human intellects being held in demonic subjection.) Aquinas' words disclose a confusion of the meanings of **merit** and **grace**, so prominent in the Catholic system. Evangelical Christians do not mistake the one for the other but rather recognize that they are mutually exclusive. We merit nothing by grace. If we are objects of God's grace we claim no merit. Grace is God's gift to those who have no claim upon it. Mary was an object of God's free grace; therefore she possessed no merit.

But Rome, insisting she is Mother of God and full of grace, attributes to her many wondrous prerogatives. The first and most far-reaching is the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Let us look at it in detail. Often this doctrine is misunderstood by non-Catholics (and many rank-and-file Catholics!). It refers not to the birth of Christ, but to the birth of Mary. The Catholic Catechism says, "The Blessed Virgin Mary alone, from the first instant of her conception, through the foreseen merits of Jesus Christ, by a unique privilege granted her by God, was kept free from the stain of original sin," and further, "from the first moment of her conception (she) possessed justice and holiness, even the fullness of grace, with the infused virtues and the gifts of the Holy Ghost." Unbelievable, but there it is, defying the plain teaching of God's written Word! The doctrine was infallibly defined as part of the "revealed" deposit of Catholic faith only in 1854 by Pope Pius IX despite much opposition within the Catholic Church.

As we noted, Rome must admit that this strange doctrine rests on no Scriptural evidence. We must conclude that the dogma of Mary's Immaculate Conception, solemnly declared by the Roman Catholic Church to be part of the original deposit of God's revealed truth, is admittedly based on the traditions of the Church—which means the traditions of men. (See Mark 7:7,8 and 13.) Semi-embarrassed Roman theologians will now lamely say, "Well, God could have done it; it was fitting that He do it; therefore He did it." So I learned in the seminary. That's a dusty old Roman theological crutch. Granted, God **could have** (had He eternally willed a

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different plan for the salvation of men). He could have preserved Mary free from original sin. That it was fitting is not ours to say. Who are we to declare what is fitting for God to do and then inform Him that He did it? That he actually did it we categorically deny. Had He done it He would have expressly revealed it in the Scriptures, and then poor Paul would have had to revise some of his epistles!

We can briefly catalog more of the many Roman Catholic fantasies about Mary in the light of their total lack of Scriptural foundation:

Mary's sinlessness, that she had no inner stirrings in the direction of sin and consequently she never committed even one sin of any kind, however slight, in thought, word or deed. The Council of Trent, convoked by the Roman Church, in the wake of the Protestant Reformation, defined that Mary "by a special divine privilege" was able "throughout her lifetime to avoid all sin." By contrast, the Scripture states, allowing no exception save Jesus Christ, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." (Rom 3:23) The mighty Christian doctrine of the Atonement demands that there be no exceptions other than the Sinless One, Jesus Christ.

The Assumption of Mary. This doctrine stated that Mary, after the course of her earthly existence, was assumed body and soul into heaven. This peculiar belief had become entrenched in Romanism in the Middle Ages.

"The growth of popular devotion in the 12th Century greatly advanced the role of the Virgin Mary. She became the great intercessor with her divine son, almost his rival. The universal authority of the Virgin was heightened by the belief that she was taken up body and soul into heaven at the end of her earthly life."(16)

(16) **Popular Religion**, by Caroline T. Marshall. From Eerdman's Handbook to the History of Christianity. 1977, p. 296.

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Again, this dogma was solemnly declared to be part of the Catholic faith only in 1950 by Pope Pius XII. Likewise, Pius XII had the audacity to thus pronounce infallibly despite a resounding lack of enthusiasm in the Church and after many centuries of opposing opinions. There is not a shred of Scriptural evidence in favor of the dogma. It is fabricated from pious legends, traditions of men.

Mary as Intercessor, Co-Redemptrix, and Mediatrix. Some desperate Catholic savants will protest that these are not infallibly defined articles of faith; other more conservative expounders of Catholicism will affirm that they are so defined. In any case, they are part and parcel of what is known as the **ordinary teaching authority** of the Church. Rome says that being in that category they demand the assent of the faithful until it is proven otherwise. It follows that they are among the monstrosities that constitute Catholic Marian belief and practice.

To a degree these are self-explanatory fables. They affirm that Mary is a universal intercessor, seeking favors from God for all mankind. They boldly state that Mary was so intimately associated with our Redemption that she may be considered a co-Savior with Christ, though subordinate to Him. And they allege that Mary mediates Grace universally. Listen to this! The ordinary teaching authority of that Church, fortified by several papal encyclicals, states that it may be believed with assurance that **no Grace** comes from God to man except it pass through Mary's hands! Oh, shame of Rome! Christ, my sole Mediator, has competition!

We evangelical Christians counter with the statement that Mary, simply put, was a sinner. Only sinners need a Savior. Mary herself referred to God as her **Savior** (Luke 1:47). How can a sinner mediate for other sinners? He (or she) cannot. Only the sinless God-Man Jesus Christ can mediate for sinners.

Mary disappears from the Scriptures after Pentecost (Acts 1:14). Why didn't Paul, or Peter, or John tell their converts to

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Christ that Mary would intercede for them? Why was she not mentioned in any of the epistles? Why should all the New Testament letters and the Book of Revelation ignore her? Is it conceivable that the written Word of God should fail to proclaim the dogmas if they were God's revealed truth? How can we believe that Mary is able to influence her resurrected and glorified Son, if it is not at least hinted in the Bible? Not one verse of the Holy Bible reveals that the saved, after leaving this world, can pray for us. For Mary to be able to hear and answer the prayers of some 700 million Catholics simultaneously she would need divine attributes which she does not possess.

One of the tragic consequences of the erroneous Roman cult of Mary is that it erects a human barrier between the individual Catholic and the Trinity Itself. It warps the Catholic believer's concepts of the work and functions of each Person of the Blessed Trinity. We have seen that it robs Jesus Christ of His unique creatorship. But it goes further. For example, Roman theologians insist that Mary's role and function is to lead souls to Christ. That diminishes the role of the Father Himself! The Bible, on the other hand, simply and lucidly reveals, "*Jesus therefore answered and said unto them...No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him...*" (John 6:43-44) Moreover, the Holy Spirit empowers all movement toward salvation. The very basic miracle of the rebirth in Christ itself is attributed to the Holy Spirit, "*That which is born of the...Spirit is spirit...so is everyone that is born of the Spirit*" (John 3:6 and 8). Mary has no role to play there.

The Second Vatican Council (years 1962 to 1965) did not change any of the Catholic teaching concerning Mary, though it placed some of that teaching in a different context as part of the teaching of the Church. Some Catholic liberals, and many ecumenicists of all stripes, proclaim that Mary was "downgraded" in the documents of the Council.

Lest I be accused by liberals of beating a dead horse, in view of their claim that the doctrines about Mary have been modified and tempered by the official teachings of the Council,

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let me cite in detail from a contemporary manual of Catholic doctrine, revised and republished in 1975, ten years after the conclusion of that Council. It is **Christ Among Us; a Modern Presentation of the Catholic Faith**, by Anthony Wilhelm, the Paulist Press. The book and its priest-author are considered by many main stream Catholics to be openly liberal, in many respects relaxing Catholic teachings. For example, it questions the existence of angels and demons, and it dismisses the literalism of the Genesis account of the creation of man in justice, and the fall of man. But let's see what this "progressive" presentation of Catholicism says about Mary and then decide if anything has been changed basically:

Page 90 "God the Son became a man through Mary, his human mother, whom we call the Mother of God. We can say that God had relatives, that God has a mother."

Page 91 "The 'Hail Mary' is one of the most ancient prayers of the Church...Hail Mary, full of grace..."

Page 91 "By these privileges which God gave to Mary, we see that he always prepares people for their roles in his plan."

Page 367 "We particularly honor Mary, the mother Christ, because of her great role in God's plan of salvation. She was closer to Christ than anyone else..."

Page 368 "Mary is God's masterpiece. To honor her is to honor God who made her what she is."

Page 368 " Because of Mary's great role she was conceived without sin, remained sinless throughout her life, and was perpetually a virgin."

Page 368 "We believe in Mary's assumption,

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that she was taken into heaven body and soul at the end of her earthly life.”

Page 369 “We give special place to Mary’s intercession and sometimes consider her our ‘spiritual mother’.”

Page 370 “Mary is the model Christian, the preeminent member of the Church.”

Page 371 “Mary is particularly the model of our worship.”

Page 371 “The devotion of the rosary has had a tremendous influence in helping hundreds of millions of Christians to pray.”

At the conclusion of this panegyric to the humble and obscure mother of Jesus, ascribing to her a marvelous royal condition and a personality bordering on divinity, the author sheepishly admits (p. 371), “There have been and are exaggerations in the honor paid to Mary...particularly among the less educated.” Indeed! It appears to me, particularly among the more educated also.

I am impressed that in the Gospels, Jesus did not ever call Mary “Mother”. His form of address to her was “woman”. That was not an indication of disrespect. But the reason may well be that Jesus, having omniscience about the future, perceived the monstrous system of idolatrous Marian doctrine to be erected in later centuries of the Christian era. He refrained from using a word that would in any degree give a semblance of permission to the practice of rendering to Mary, under the title “Mother of God”, the honor rightfully due to her Son. That’s my own view, of course. But it’s a valid one and does not contradict Scripture.

How different is the Mary of the Scriptures from the regal madonna of Catholicism. The Bible initially presents her as a humble virgin of great faith. The last portrayal of her is in the Book of Acts where she is recorded as being present in the

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upper room with the 120 brethren awaiting the coming of the promised Holy Spirit—another demonstration of her faith, and a proof that she was in need of empowering by the Holy Spirit, and therefore a denial of the implications of her being immaculately conceived.

The scant mentions of Mary in the intervening 33 years disclose that she was charitable—she made a journey and visited her pregnant kinswomen Elizabeth. (Luke 1:39) She had a deep knowledge of the Old Testament (Luke 1:46-55). She gave birth to Jesus in a stable (Luke 2:7). She pondered in her heart the words of the shepherds (Luke 2:19). She heard the prophecy that a sword would pierce her soul (Luke 2:35). She witnessed the adoration of the wise men (Mt 2:11). She undertook a hasty and arduous trip to save the life of her young Child (Mt 2:13-21). She was humanly anxious and perplexed about her 12-year-old Son when He was found in the temple (Luke 2:48). Jesus Himself was obedient to her (Luke 2:51). She indirectly asked Jesus to perform His first miracle (John 2:1-5). She was concerned and lacked understanding of Jesus' ministry (Mark 3:31-35) (Mt 12:46-50) (Luke 8:19-21). She stood at the foot of the Cross, faithful to the end, and the prophesied sword of sorrow did pierce her soul (John 19:25-27).

That's it! What God chose to reveal about Mary is all there. We need know only what the sacred text tells us.

We who have been under the sway of Rome are given a most important, powerful lesson from all the foregoing. **DON'T ADD TO THE SCRIPTURES; DON'T DETRACT FROM THEM!** Don't vainly speculate about that which is not revealed in the written Word of God. Everything necessary for our salvation and for our growth in the Spirit of Christ has been recorded by that same Spirit in the Holy Bible.

My Catholic and former Catholic friends in Christ, let me testify that there is no vacuum resulting in your spiritual life when you totally abandon the cult of Mary. I must believe that God worked in me in this regard long before I reached the point of rebirth in Christ. I have shown that in the seminary I

IS MARY MY MOTHER?

began to doubt the Marian superstructure imposed upon the Roman Catholic faithful. In my active priesthood I soon formally disbelieved and finally rejected the entire web of fables concerning Mary, though I retained for a time a muted affection for her. During my cold exile after forsaking the Roman Church and the priesthood, I did not ever once look backward to the abandoned idolatry. By the time I met Jim MacKinnon, Mary had faded from even my random thoughts; so I was ready for Jesus.

God may be moving you in a different manner. But I beg of you in the powerful Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, don't look to the past—to do so is to tighten the bonds which the Evil One has forged. He will try to cast a spirit of fear upon you to make you fearful to let Mary go completely lest you find yourself with a great void in your heart. Truly, that is the Devil speaking. He would like nothing better than your continued dependence on a false Mary who usurps the attributes of Divinity Itself. The Devil well knows that you cannot accept Christ completely so long as you retain any blasphemous concepts of Mary. This may sound harsh, but in the great question of "What must we do to be saved?" only the truth will serve.

Please, please, pray to God through Jesus Christ then trust yourself entirely to Him. He will fill to overflowing any emptiness in your mind and spirit after the spurious Mary has been cast out. I know. I have been there.

Am I to be regarded as an heretical, rabid Mary-hater because of what I have written in this chapter? Most assuredly not. Mary was a lovely human being of great faith. She was blessed **among** women, but not **above** women. She is one of my heroines of the Bible. But everything she could do for me indirectly, she did in her earthly pilgrimage. Let it go at that! Let Mary occupy her rightful place in the gallery of human beings God utilized to further His redemptive plan. When we are all gathered together in heaven to share in the supper of the Lamb, Mary will be there. We millions of saints will fellowship with her on an equal basis, all of us saved solely through the Blood of that same Lamb. Oh, glory! Mary in **her** glory will not know—unless her Son chooses to tell her—

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about the long years of my dark night of the soul when I rendered to her that which is God's. Is Mary **my** mother? Certainly not. She is the human mother of Jesus Who alone is my Lord.

CHAPTER FIVE

CHRIST'S CHURCH

The preceding chapter considered the role of Mary the Mother of Jesus in our Christian life. I prayerfully consigned Mary to that chapter only because the problem of her place looms as one of the major hangups of former Catholics who are seeking Christ. If I were writing an ordered, methodical summary of evangelical theology, an entire chapter on Mary would not be warranted and any treatment of her would be minor. But I am not writing theology; I am witnessing to redemptive faith in Jesus Christ. A substantial portion of my witness must of necessity involve a critique of the cult of Mary. My conscience, which is that of a former priest, demanded that I attempt without compromise to dismantle the vast Marian edifice. I have presented my views; the results of my presentation are in God's hands. I am satisfied that on the basis of Scripture I have relocated Mary into her proper place and I can go on to matters of equal concern but of greater importance.

If, in Catholic childhood, I was saturated in Marian doctrine, I was virtually swamped and drowned in the doctrine of the Church. "Church" was that powerful, magic, total concept, compared to which every other idea in the world of religion was merely partial and subservient. Mary herself was **Mother of the Church**; God the Father had been planning the Church from all eternity; Jesus was Founder of the Church; the Holy Spirit (a vague Presence on the scene) kept **the Church** from error; the angels guarded **the Church** from harm; the saints in heaven were **the Church** Triumphant and interceded for **the Church** Militant here below; the souls in Purgatory were **the Church** Suffering who were in need of our

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prayers and alms; evil men sought to destroy **the Church**; the devil gnashed his teeth in despair at the grandeur and success of **the Church**. The very Sacraments were presented as tools by which **the Church's** purposes could be achieved. Always **Church**, with a capital C. Christ's principal work was to save men—by establishing **the Church**; the chief task of the Holy Spirit was to guide **the Church**. The total idea was: Church equals Christ; Church equals salvation. Anything that was pure, holy, strong, fertile, life-giving, was associated with the Church. Anything that was tainted, evil, weak, sterile or death-dealing, was somehow associated with the absence of the Church. And what was the identity of this Church? Why, it was the "One, Holy, Catholic, Roman and Apostolic Church," to be sure. So we come to the heart of the matter.

Behind most doctrines that divide and separate those who claim the name "Christian", stand the momentous questions, "What is the Church of Christ? What do those words mean? Did Christ found a Church? If so, what was His purpose? What is the mission of the Church? Is the Church meant to be an infallible teacher of doctrine? Is there but one, true Church of Christ? Is it necessary for salvation to belong to the Church? How does one recognize Christ's Church among many competing claims? How does one become a member of the Church?" This is but a small beginning of the near-endless listing of questions that can be and are asked concerning this crucial Christian doctrine—the Church of Christ.

I have indicated that at the start of my long, dark night of the soul I embraced the Roman Church fully and wholeheartedly. So I must have concurred with the Roman imperatives as to the meaning of "the Church". Up to my adult years I suffered only infrequent and brief doubts as to the validity of the Roman claims. Not until seminary days, when confronting the harsh realities of history, did serious, thoughtful and sustained doubts encroach upon my well-laid foundation of belief in the infallible authority of Catholicism. And those doubts I artfully deployed into the murky area of the subconscious, where they lay dormant but festering for some years. The demands of the active priesthood, and the quiet impulse of the Holy Spirit, caused them to resurface later with a vengeance.

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All my doubts about individual points of dogma had their ultimate source in my contemplation of the reliability of a Church that claimed to speak with authority in the name of Jesus Christ. It was my eroding faith in that authority that caused my final rejection of that Church's claims. I became a non-believer in Roman Catholicism, and in conscience I was obliged to depart from its priesthood. Truly I then entered a cold, spiritual void. The Roman Church's self-understanding of its nature and mission is unique, total, uncompromising, bold and self-assured. It demands of its sincere adherents—and so especially of its priests—unflinching loyalty and near-total intellectual and spiritual assent to its claims. So when I left, inevitably there was a great void, because I did not convert at once from Romanism to a biblical notion of the Church. In fact, at that time I was fully turned off to the very word "Church" and was indifferent to any consideration of an alternate meaning for the expression, "the Church of Christ." So I found myself in a vacuum of the spirit, and I have related how I further squandered the following years of exile.

Now reborn and walking in the Spirit of Christ, it is obvious that at last I did come to an alternate and satisfactory resolution of most of the questions that abound regarding the nature and mission of the Christian Church. Praise God, that is so.

Right now, I wish to state that I understand clearly and fully the place that I will soon occupy in the Roman Catholic Church's arrogant evaluation of the condition of the souls of men. I will now be a Son of Perdition! For she teaches that any baptized Christian who has accepted the fullness of the Catholic Faith, and then knowingly and voluntarily abandons that faith, cannot hope to obtain eternal salvation. Wow! That's my reward! For I have not just taken sideswipes at Mary, or at the Sacrament of Confession, or at any other constituent element of Catholicism. I have assailed the inner core—the Roman Church's mighty contention that she alone is the infallible, authoritative mouthpiece of the Lord Jesus in the world today. Sorrowfully but purposefully I will accept her anathema. Her excommunication may have caused a poor "heretic" of the middle ages to recant his errors to escape a burning at the stake; but really, it interests me less than does

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the current Pope's itinerary on his next ecumenical junket out into the world of the "separated brethren". No church can consign me to hell; only a personal rejection of Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour could bring about that eternal tragedy.

My position in regard to the Church will arouse the ire of Catholics of many persuasions. They are sincere but misguided, and I am chipping away at the "rock" on which they pin all their sincerity and their strange beliefs. So it is to be expected they will call upon their vast store of ecclesiastical postures and will point out why I am now hell-bound.

Strangely, both branches of the contemporary Roman Catholic Church will find me equally obnoxious. Traditional, conservative, official Catholicism will fume that I am just another of a long line of heretics over the centuries, under Satan's sway, and really a hater of Jesus Christ because I have a blind hatred for His Church and for His Vicar on earth, the Pope. Ho-hum!

The avant-garde liberal segment of that Church will equally deplore me. They will not especially condemn my aversions to Mariolatry and Confession, or other points of Roman doctrine. But they will discern that I find their version of Catholicism as far removed from biblical Christianity as I find the traditional stance. When I point out that they have no real faith in the infallible authority of the Bible; that they cling to some human traditions which prevent their salvation; that their idea of a personal encounter with Jesus Christ doesn't agree with the Scriptural reality; they will drop me from their list of potential allies. When I further insist that to embrace such diverse and opposing sacred cows of Catholic liberalism as the Catholic Charismatic Movement, the satan-inspired Ecumenical Movement, and liberation or Marxist theology — then they will join in a temporary and false kiss of peace with their traditional, conservative counterparts in the Roman Church and will pronounce me and all of evangelical Christianity to be headed for a hell in which they don't really believe.

What is the meaning of the word "Church"? C-h-u-r-c-h it

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comes to us in our English tongue, with connotations of a religion, a denomination, a building for purposes of worship, an organized body of believers, and many other associated ideas. Its root meaning in our language has become lost except to scholars.

It is a word used sparingly in the New Testament, as we shall see. In each of those uses it is rendered in the Greek of the sacred writers as "ekklesia", literally a "called-out group of people," called out for a special purpose. Bearing in mind this simple root meaning, the Scripture texts we cite will tend to clarify themselves, since the meaning intended by the Holy Spirit was encompassed in the use of the word **ekklesia**.

Traditional Roman Catholicism (and Orthodoxy). There is only one True Church founded by Jesus Christ, and it is visible to the world. It is the temporal extension of Christ's presence on earth. It is vivified and guided by the Holy Spirit. It is endowed with infallibility and will last to the end of time. It cannot err in matters of faith and morals. It is superior to, and the only reliable interpreter of the Sacred Scriptures. It is visible in an authoritative hierarchical structure that includes the very Vicar of Christ, the Pope (this the Orthodox do not accept), down to the ordinary layman. It is, moreover, a living organism, the mystical Body of Christ. Union with this organization in some manner or degree is necessary for salvation. In modern post-conciliar days, in studied embarrassment and as though to compensate for centuries of neglect, it has begun to refer to itself as "the People of God".

Liberal Roman Catholicism. Liberal Catholics subscribe outwardly and verbally to most of the above, but it is difficult to penetrate their interior convictions about the Church. Certainly they have bypassed belief in the absolute authority of either the Church or the Bible. They lean toward a personal, subjective religious experience, relying on multiple sources of Revelation in place of the Church's teachings or the Bible. They are more akin to liberal Protestants than to their own conservative co-religionists.

Classical or Orthodox Protestantism. The Church is a people and an organization, with Christ as its only Head. As a

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people it is a community of all who have come to Christ in faith, repented and accepted Him as Lord and Savior. All its members form a royal priesthood of believers. As an organization it is a collective of visible communities of worship. It receives its mandate from Christ as revealed in the Written Word. It is subject to and always to be judged by that Word. Its life principle is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It exhibits itself along denominational lines, but membership in a particular denomination is not necessary to salvation, nor is any denomination the Universal Church. It proclaims the Word and guards the celebration of the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. It may be organized in various governmental structures in accordance with each denomination's interpretation of the New Testament. It insists on salvation only by grace through faith, and on the divine authority of the Sacred Scriptures which are the sole rule of that faith. Much of Classical Protestantism is truly evangelical.

Liberal Protestantism. Here again, anything goes. While most liberal Protestants continue to align themselves within the historic Protestant denominations, their concept of the Church has deteriorated to the realm of political and social action. Forsaking the unique authority of the Scriptures, they view the Church as a society existing to achieve "good" social and political ends, a mere Christianized group responsive to the pressures of the secular world. And having abdicated the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ, they feel no compulsion to evangelize in the sense of "spreading the Word". Unfortunately some of the major Protestant denominations have, in the 20th Century, denied in practice their Lord and Master Jesus Christ by allowing some of the tenets of liberalism to become officially incorporated into their Confessions of Faith.

Evangelical Christianity. Ever returning to the norms of the New Testament, Evangelical Christianity sees the Church as primarily the invisible and universal community of re-born Christians. The Church's mission is to witness to Jesus Christ crucified and to His plan of salvation, and to foster life in the Holy Spirit through proclaiming the authoritative Written Word of God. It sees the Church in a secondary degree in its visible congregations as the vehicle instituted by Christ to

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preach the Word, to celebrate the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and to gather saved Christians in fellowship for mutual edification. Its life span in sacred history is from Pentecost to the Rapture. It constantly renews itself by submitting totally to the guidelines of the inerrant Scriptures and by making itself always and humbly available to the power of the Holy Spirit. It supports no intricate external hierarchical structure, but continually reforms itself in the light of the simple pastoring framework revealed in the New Testament. It relies without reservation on God's sustaining help and claims no infallible interpretive gift over the Word of God. It says the Church is a saved people, not an organization based on the weaknesses of men. It does not claim to save; it makes God's plan of salvation known and available to men at all times and in all places. It is a slave to the sovereign purposes of Jesus Christ. But it enslaves no man's conscience. There is a great overlapping of the categories of Classical Protestantism and Evangelical Christianity. Many orthodox Protestants are evangelical Christians; but not all Evangelicals consider themselves primarily Protestants. Evangelical Christians do not necessarily group themselves along denominational lines as a Church, though many of them are members of Protestant denominations. Many have formed independent non-denominational congregations. All are part of the Body of Christ, His Universal Church.

No doubt this brief outline of the several approaches to the nature of the Church is inadequate. Certainly it is not exhaustive, nor meant to be. But it can serve as a point of reference and a guide while we dissect the claims of Rome as a Church.

Back in catechism days, in answer to the question, "What is the Church?" I learned by heart this short answer: "The Church is the congregation of all the faithful, who share the same faith, believe the same doctrines, partake of the same Sacraments, and are governed by their lawful pastors under one visible head (the Pope)." The catechism then continued in detail to elaborate on the component parts of that short statement. Like most things Catholic it exhibits some sound points: the Church is a congregation, and faith is required. Then it goes hopelessly astray.

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Now we can examine the Roman claims about the nature and mission of the Church. That Church teaches without apology that Christ founded one True Church. His intention was that the Church be an extension of His own mission to the world after He ascended to His Father. Whatever He accomplished in the Redemption of mankind would be applied through His Church until His return in judgment at the end of time.

Rome says Jesus founded the one True Church with a definite hierarchical structure that would be clearly discernible to mankind. That structure consisted of one visible head to act with supreme authority in Christ's stead—the Apostle Peter. Peter's headship would pass on to future generations through his successors, the bishops of Rome, the Popes. In addition to Peter, Christ selected 11 apostles and commissioned them to carry on His work authoritatively in union with Peter, but subordinate to him. The apostles' authority likewise would be transmitted to future generations through their successors, the bishops of the Church. Christ also instituted the offices of priest and deacon, which officers would share in the authority and ministry of the future bishops, but always under their jurisdiction. The Pope, the bishops, and their underlings the priests and deacons, would govern, teach and sanctify the whole body of the Church, that is, the laymen. This in a nutshell is the Roman version of the visible, temporal structure mandated by Jesus Christ.

That Church structure was commissioned to function with certain attributes with which the Holy Spirit would empower it—the gifts or charisms of infallibility and indefectibility. The Spirit would protect this Church, through the papacy, from teaching error in matters of faith and morals, which is infallibility. The same Spirit would ensure its survival on earth until the Second Coming, which is indefectibility.

The gift of infallibility was to be concrete in the office of Peter as universal bishop of the Church, and in his successors, the Popes. So much so, that whenever a Pope in virtue of his office would define a doctrine of faith or of morals for the entire Church, that definition would be infallibly true, irrever-

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sible, and not dependent upon the approval or consent of the bishops or of the faithful of the Church at large. The bishops as a body or college would share in the gift of infallibility, but only in union with the Pope. Such shared infallibility would manifest itself in the bishops gathered in General Councils of the Church, and in the Church's ordinary teaching office in each bishop's own diocese—but always in union with and subject to the approval of the Pope, the Vicar of Christ on earth!

Rome maintains that rigid authoritative system was mandated by Christ, was exercised by Peter and apostles in New Testament times, was handed on to the immediate successors of Peter and his co-apostles, and has continued in the Church to the present. This is what is termed the "apostolic succession". Within the framework of the apostolic succession is found the One True Church of Christ. Outside of the framework is found heresy or schism, which is separation from Catholic unity. The One True Church of Christ is therefore the Roman Catholic Church, which alone enjoys the true and complete apostolic succession.

Rome further propounds that she, the One True Church of Christ, possesses four "marks" with which Jesus Christ endowed her, by which she can be identified: She is One; she is Holy; she is Catholic; and she is Apostolic.

As we go on, please remember, I am only repeating what Rome officially teaches!

The Roman Catholic Church is One because there is only one True Church; she proclaims one faith throughout the world: all her members are united under one visible head: she has a unity not only of doctrine, but of worship and discipline.

The Roman Catholic Church is Holy because her Founder, Jesus Christ was holy: because she teaches a holy doctrine: and because so many countless thousands of her followers are holy.

The Roman Catholic Church is Catholic (or Universal) because she has existed in all ages since Christ, and because she proclaims her message to all peoples, and all human beings are potential members.

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The Roman Catholic Church is Apostolic because she teaches the apostolic doctrine: because she is founded on Peter and the other apostles; and because she possesses the authority resident in Peter and his co-apostles by virtue of the apostolic succession.

In summary, Rome says that only she exhibits the four "marks" in their fullness. Therefore, to all inquiring men of good will she can readily be identified as the One True Church of Christ.

There's more! Rome traditionally has warned that "outside the Church there is no salvation." For centuries past she rigidly interpreted that warning. However, by our day it has been mitigated to mean, less strictly, that anybody who ultimately achieves salvation, does so by virtue of some connection, however remote, with the Roman Catholic Church.

By design I have emphasized the teaching of Roman Catholicism about its own hierarchical network. I must be honest and allow that Rome does teach in addition that the Church is an invisible organism, the mystical Body of Christ, animated by the Holy Spirit. Rome also uses other biblical language to describe her more spiritual existence. But laudable though that may be, in the last analysis all the Scriptural imagery is overshadowed and often nullified by the harsh hierarchical reality. It is difficult to see the Body of the humble Nazarene when one gazes at a Pope pontificating regal splendor, and difficult to hear the virile voice of Jesus Christ when one listens to a Bishop of Rome expound an effeminate doctrine on Mary that is not contained in the Scriptures!

Liberal Catholics will say that I am mouthing outmoded expressions of the faith that have been refashioned and updated by the Second Vatican Council. Not so! None of the above has been repudiated or corrected by the Church of Rome. As one example, read what the Second Vatican Council itself stated about the hierarchical structure of the Church:

"In virtue of his office...as vicar of Christ and pastor of the whole Church, the Roman Pontiff

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has full, supreme and universal power over the Church. And he is always free to exercise this power. The order of bishops, which succeeds to the College of Apostles...is also...the subject of supreme and full power over the universal Church, together with its head, the Roman Pontiff, and never without his head. This power can only be exercised with the consent of the Roman Pontiff...This college, insofar as it is composed of many, expresses the variety and universality of the people of God, but insofar as it is assembled under one head it expresses the unity of the flock of Christ.”(17)

The foregoing Catholic claims could sound logical and intelligent. If those structures had been established by Christ and had been clearly spelled out in the New Testament; if they had been manifested in the New Testament Church; if they had been in effect universally in the earliest Church years after the deaths of the apostles; if they had been universally accepted without undue opposition in the succeeding ages; then there would be no major problem. But those are big “ifs.” And history quite simply does not substantiate those claims.

An ordinarily intelligent and disinterested reader of the New Testament will easily find that no such ordered, hierarchical system is apparent. Only a very loose and tentative core structure of authority in the Church—other than submission to Christ the Head—can be detected in the pages of the Scripture. We Christians search there in vain for evidence of Peter being the “take-charge” apostle of the New Testament Church after the very beginning as recorded in Acts. The other apostles did not defer to him. When the “apostles and elders” met in Jerusalem (Acts 15:6) to decide how to handle the first major problem that confronted the Church—its relation to the Law and to covenant circumcision—it was James who was in charge! Peter spoke, but James handed down the decision. He said, “Wherefore, my sentence

(17) Second Vatican Council, **Constitution on the Church**, No. 22.

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is..."(Acts 15:19). Where is the Pope with his infallible decisions? In this incident we see the earliest collective action of the Church of Jesus Christ. The only authority structure revealed is "apostles and elders". And the decision reached came not through Peter. Further, the decision was then communicated to the entire Church not by Peter, but by "the apostles and elders, with the whole Church". (Acts 15:22).

When I meditated on Acts 15 for the first time in seminary days, something happened to me. To learn that in apostolic times, while the New Testament was in process of being written, the Church functioned in a manner radically foreign to Roman Catholic teaching, was devastating. The implications of that discovery were frightening and not to be ignored. God allowed a crack to insinuate into what had been my solid Catholic foundation. Never again did I regard the Roman claims of papal infallibility with an uncritical eye.

There is some historical evidence that Peter did eventually go to Rome and was martyred there. However, it is certain he was not the founder of the Church in that city. Contemporary documents that would assert he ever became Bishop of Rome are totally lacking. In fact, it is probable that the city of Rome had no bishop until after apostolic times.

I have asked myself, "Why delve further if the Bible itself fails to support Roman doctrines on the Church?" That is sufficient for me, but let us go a few steps further. A study of the writing of the earliest Church Fathers reveals no rigid Church organization. If the Roman system was universally or even widely prevalent in the Church of that time, those writers are strangely silent about it. During the first three centuries of the Christian era, no one, according to extant writings of the period, ever quoted Mt. 16:18 (which we will soon look at in detail) in support of later Roman claims. Only gradually did the notion of the Church as being governed, taught and sanctified by the hierarchy of Pope, bishop and priest come into the picture, and then only despite widespread opposition.

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We may profitably consider two such early Christian writers to discover when those began to intrude:

Cyprian of Carthage (died 258)

"Cyprian is important not only for his strong emphasis on tradition, but because he brought forward far-reaching claims for the episcopate, and also introduced conceptions which brought about revolutionary changes in the worship of the Church. He insisted on the unity of the Church and denounced the sin of not rendering obedience to the bishop, who had, he said, his authority from God. He made the most stupendous claims for the absolute supremacy of the bishop. In succeeding ages this claim was accepted far and wide, and as a result church government became almost completely autocratic."(19)

Leo I, Bishop of Rome (390-461)

"He was a man who bent all his strength towards gaining recognition for the Bishop of Rome as Universal Bishop. He based the claim on the primacy supposed to have been granted to Peter (Mt 16:18). He gave a new interpretation to these words...His claim was conceded in the West, with the exception of the Celtic Church, and was strongly backed up by a decree of the emperor Valentinian who made it an offence against the State to resist the dictates of the pontiff. Leo took up the extraordinary attitude that 'Peter has never quitted the guidance of the Church which he received.' The Church in the East emphatically repudiated his claims. Even the Council of Chalcedon, where he exercised much influence, refused

(19) **The Story of the Church**, by A.M. Renwick, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 9th Printing, 1976, pp. 42-43.

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his request to be recognized as Universal Bishop. His assertion of papal supremacy however, produced a profound effect on later ages.”(20)

Note that Leo I was the first Bishop of Rome who made claims for the papacy that resemble the eventual position taken by the Roman Church. And this was some 400 years after Peter was humbly evangelizing for the Lord he had denied. Leo’s claim had to be enforced by the emperor, and it gained only partial acceptance in the Church. The doctrine of papal infallibility was not infallibly defined by the Catholic Church until 1870! Need we go further?

I stated that the New Testament uses the word “church” or “ekklesia” only sparingly. We should now examine a few of the texts where it is used in order to insure that our further pondering on the nature of the Church be biblically oriented. Foremost, no doubt, will be Matthew 16:16-19:

“And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

All the grandiose assertions of Rome are bound up in the words of that awesome Scriptural text. I once stood at the high altar of St. Peter’s Church in Rome and gazed upward at the famed dome of Michelangelo. Hundreds of feet above the altar, inscribed in marble were the words in Latin: **Tu es Petrus, et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam**—Thou

(20) Ibid, pp. 59-60

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art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church. The vaunted glories of the Roman Church overwhelmed me at that moment and tears flooded my eyes! But I was ignorant then and in bondage.

Nobody for hundreds of years after they were spoken invoked those words to claim papal supremacy and infallibility. And even today only Roman Catholics do. In the biblical text two different words are used for **Peter** and **rock** in the Greek. "Peter" is **petros**, masculine, referring to a small pebble. "Rock" is **petra**, feminine, referring to a huge cliff of stone or massive rock. So Peter was called a pebble. But the Church would be built on something more solid, rock. And aside from the aberrations of Rome, that rock has always been considered the confession of faith in Christ's divinity just made by Peter. Moreover, the Greek word **kai** (and) may also be translated "but". So Christ said to Peter, "You are a **pebble**, **but** on this **rock** I will build my church." That's the way Peter seemingly understood it. Later, in his First Letter to various Churches, he wrote that Jesus was a rock, and the believers were mere stones. (1 Peter 2:5-8)

The latter portion of our text should also be translated more accurately from the Greek: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, **but** whatever you bind on earth **will have been bound** (already) in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth **will have been loosed** (already) in heaven."

I think it not irreverent to say, "It's a different ball game, isn't it?"

Matthew 18:17: This refers to disciplining a sinning brother.

*"And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the **church**: but if he neglect to hear the **church**, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."*

Jesus is speaking of His **ekklesia**, His called-out people. In a particular congregation, for decency and order, discipline

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should be imposed. Interestingly, here and in Mt. 16:18 are the only two uses by Jesus of the word "church" as recorded in the Bible. If He had envisioned the Roman structure, surely He would have used it repeatedly.

Ephesians 1:22-23:

"And (the Father) hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."

Here Paul refers to the universal Church to which every true re-born believer belongs. And Christ is its only Head. So much for the Pope of Rome!

Ephesians 5:25-27:

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

Christ didn't give Himself up for an organization, but for a people. The Church is so real that it has a relationship to Christ as of a bride to a bridegroom. That should dispel any idea that the Church is a mere abstract idea that can be dispensed with. And God requires that it be holy and without blemish. We are the Church, so we must be holy and without blemish. And we can be if we are re-born into Christ, and hence into His body, the Church!

Colossians 1:18:

*"And he is the head of the body, the **church**: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."*

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Christ is our only Head, and we in the Church are His Body. How impossible it would be to maintain that perspective if we were to concede a visible headship to any man, including the Pope of Rome.

I Timothy 3:15:

"...that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

The called-out people or re-born Christians are members of God's own household; they are the living embodiment of God's own truth revealed in Jesus Christ. One of our great privileges as members of the Church is to reflect the saving truth of Jesus Christ before a world that does not belong to that household.

There are, to be sure, more instances of the use of the word "Church" in the New Testament. The above are sufficient to give me food for prayer and meditation during the remaining days allotted to me. Why didn't I perceive their grandeur in my earlier years? I was in spiritual captivity then. I pray that I do not use that as an excuse, because spiritual bondage **may** have an element of acceptance and submissiveness by the enslaved. I did not search the Scriptures in those dark days under the guidance of the Spirit. No vain regrets for me though. I console myself with the belated realization that it was God's permissive will that I should be blinded until His timing would be complete. Now He has given me eyes to see and ears to hear in my later days. He has destroyed for me all false and idolatrous notions of what is meant by "the Church."

If I am enabled at last to grasp the biblical reality of the Church of Jesus Christ, how do I now personally envision its mission? Freed from the shackles of proceeding under the fear of offending a supposedly infallible overseer, I am emboldened to present my Scripture-based ideas, confident that I am free in Jesus Christ.

Always remembering that you and I are the Church, I see

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its primary mission as evangelizing and witnessing to Jesus Christ! The saving message of the Lord is written in the Scriptures. But our awesome responsibility and happy privilege is to present that written Word to a world in captivity. A Bible sitting on a bookshelf is not "...quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword..." Only when the Word is read and preached does it pierce "even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit..." (Hebrews 4:12) In the footsteps of our Lord and Master we must preach the Gospel to the poor, we must proclaim release to the captives, give sight to the blind, and set at liberty those who are oppressed. (Luke 4:18) We have an inescapable commission to go into the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.

In all things the Church's mission is to glorify the Father through worship in Spirit and in truth. The Church provides the means by which Christians may gather together for the Word and for the celebration of the Lord's Supper; and such gatherings for praise and prayer are an essential element of worship. But we only begin to fulfill our mission of worship when we gather in Christian assembly. In Christ's life, worship of His Father was a total commitment, a total dedication. Christ worshipped the Father in the temple and synagogue, but He glorified His Father in all things, and the very essence of His worship was His obedience to His Father, even unto death. His obedience gave perfect glory to the Father. So it must be with us. We necessarily gather in community for praise and prayer, and those gatherings must be grounded in Spirit and in truth, as we are informed in John 4:23. "In Spirit and in truth" entails being born-again, open to the power of the Spirit, and anchored in the written Word of God. But we cannot stop there. To do so would be pointless and insincere, the worship of the Pharisees of old. Community worship should build us up for our true service of worship in the world, and that is a service of obedience and sacrifice. One can sing and pray outwardly and enthusiastically in church on Sunday without ever worshipping God. Only if the Sunday demonstration leads to obedience and self-sacrifice in the following week days is God truly worshipped and glorified. Our obedience will be pure worship. The Scripture tells us that obedience is better than sacrifice. (I Sam. 15:22) Obedience to what? To the

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Truth, which is Jesus Christ. Day-by-day discipleship, presenting our spirits, souls, minds and bodies in total submission to our Lord as living sacrifices, at whatever cost, constitutes worship in Spirit and in truth. And that is pleasing and acceptable to Almighty God. When the Church's worship reaches those spiritual heights, then she is empowered to confront the world as did Jesus Christ, destroying the works of the devil.

A further mission of the Church is to foster the growth of the fruit of the Holy Spirit in the lives of her members. The fruit of the Spirit is a wholeness of the reborn life, redeemed and integrated in Christ. The several facets of this wholeness are listed in Galatians 5:22-23. "*...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance...*" These must be manifested, fostered and developed in a **community** of believers. A Christian does not exhibit the fruits in isolation, by being "privately" a Christian, in the secrecy of his prayer closet. They are only exhibited in fellowship with others. Therefore, affiliation with some manifestation of the Universal Church of Christ is absolutely necessary, not for initial salvation, but for subsequent sanctification.

And finally, the Church exists to care for its own and to do good in the world. The Word tells us in Galatians 6:7-10, "*...whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*" We in the Church can do no less than did our Head, the Lord Jesus, who, the Gospel tells us, went about doing good.

If the foregoing reflects my vision of the mission of the Church, I may ask how do the principal divisions of Christendom fare when rated according to those criteria? I reply that traditional Roman Catholicism rates a passing grade in the category of fostering some of the fruits of the Spirit in her individual members. She rates a high grade only in the aspect

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of "doing good." I must concede that in some of her manifestations, especially in her religious orders, she has engaged in prodigious works of charity. In the remaining categories she fails to qualify as the Church, the Body of Christ. All her efforts in those categories she nullifies because she proclaims the traditions of men to be God's revealed Word. When she evangelizes she preaches a sad combination of the Gospel and man-made doctrines. So whatever wealth and energy she pours into her evangelizing efforts, they remain mere human endeavors.

I give failing grades to both Liberal Protestantism and Liberal Roman Catholicism. By their humanizing of the Word of God and their espousal of relativism, they disqualify themselves from being considered as part of the Body of Christ. For them, the notion of Christ's divinity is conjectural and irrelevant. How could they be members of His Body?

Orthodox Protestantism and general Evangelical Christianity meet all the criteria I have formulated. They pass with flying colors as the saying goes. With all their human imperfections, they carry out admirably the various aspects of the mission of Christ's Church. Even more, they demonstrate credibly to the world the four marks of the Church which Rome would reserve for herself. They are indeed part of the One, True, Universal Church of Christ.

I no longer search for the Church of Jesus Christ. I am a member of it! How did I become a member? By accepting Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, trusting in His shed blood to remove my sins, and turning my life over to Him. Water baptism was not necessary for becoming a member of His Church, but I freely submitted to public water baptism as a sign of my rebirth in Christ. So I am of that company of countless souls that has existed since Pentecost, the body of all who have been reborn in Jesus Christ and have become adopted children of God, living in the Spirit and showing forth His fruits in their lives; and who acknowledge the Holy Bible to be the inspired, inerrant written Word of God, the sole and infallible rule of faith! I am a member of the invisible, one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, visible in my affiliation with a denomination or local assembly.

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I find myself equally at ease in the classical orthodox Protestant denomination, or in the non-denominational or inter-denominational evangelical groups who are in the true Protestant orbit. My home is wherever born-again Christians assemble to praise the Father in submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and in openness to the power of the Spirit, wherever the blessed written Word of God is supreme in preaching, praying, meditating and reading. I bring my once-tattered and tainted heart, and present it in its born-again reality to the Church for whatever service the Lord requires.

I have pointed out that the Roman Church's claim to a unique guidance and preservation from error by the Holy Spirit through the office of the Pope is nullified through its official teaching of un-Christian, non-biblical doctrines. Almost as an aside, and with no irreverence, I further ask, was the Holy Spirit asleep or inactive when the following occurred in the long, blemished and wrinkled history of that Church? And these are only a few glaring examples:

Leo I (Pope from 440-446) advocated the death penalty for heresy.

Leo II (682-683) pronounced one of his predecessors, Pope Honorius I, a heretic.

Stephen II (752-757) fostered the physical conquering of Italy by Pepin and received the conquered lands as papal property.

Sergius III (904-911) had a mistress and their illegitimate offspring became Pope.

John X (914-928) had multiple mistresses and was killed while in the act of adultery by the woman's husband.

Boniface VII (984-985) murdered his predecessor, John XIV.

Benedict VIII (1012-1024) bought his papacy.

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Benedict IX (1033-1045) was made Pope at age 12. He committed murders and robberies publicly and was finally driven out of Rome by the populace. In 1045 and 1046 there were three rival Popes! During the reign of Pope Alexander III (1159-1181) there were four rival Popes! (Will the real Peter please stand up?)

The horrendous Inquisition was initiated by Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) and it lasted for some 500 years. It was the Church court for the discovery and punishment of heretics. It was responsible for the torture and death of countless numbers of saints who protested the doctrines and practices of Rome. During Reformation times it was the deadly instrument for suppressing the emerging Protestants, and it is estimated to have been responsible for the deaths of some 900,000 confessing Christians during that period alone!

Oh, shame, that the Holy Spirit is claimed as the guide of an organization that perpetrated that infamy. In truth does the Book of Revelation accuse the Harlot of Babylon with being drunk with the blood of martyrs.(Rev. 17:6) I am ashamed to have been a cleric of that organization.

My joy at having been delivered from the crippling chains of the Roman Church is boundless. I am conscious at every moment that my Lord has in my case set a captive free. Former committed Catholics who now have reached a personal relationship with Jesus Christ by believing in the power of His shed blood can understand my elation! No more cringing along an obstacle-strewn course to heaven in dependence on Pope, bishop or priest. I am already enjoying a degree of heaven! The Lord has helped me through the dark night of Church idolatry.

CHAPTER SIX

WHO CAN FORGIVE SINS?

When I walked out of St. Clare's Catholic church on the morning of August 6, 1978, reborn in Jesus Christ, one of my abiding new realizations was that all the sins of my lifetime had been forgiven. Jesus had washed them in His blood; they had been annihilated; no guilt remained requiring me to perform acts of penance. I could now walk with God, my sins erased, no longer under the burden of having to confess to a human priest and beg his absolution. Truly Christ had released me from captivity according to His promise.

And thus I thought with relief that I would never again have to set foot in a Roman Catholic church building to seek forgiveness, justification, the Holy Spirit, Jesus in the Eucharist—whatever—through the Roman labyrinth of sacramental dispensation of grace. But I knew that some day it might be fitting or expedient, through courtesy or familial bonds of charity to enter a Catholic church building in consideration of the feelings of others. That is precisely what happened in a relatively short while.

Some six months after I was led to the Lord, a young Hispanic and Catholic Detroit police officer took his life in a violent manner. I did not know the young man personally; I knew of him and that he had problems. The deceased and I had a mutual friend, Steve, also a Detroit police officer, Puerto Rican, and Catholic. Steve and I are casual but good friends in the Department, often meeting for lunch "in Spanish" at a downtown Mexican restaurant. Steve is Catholic in name only, largely ignorant of the teachings of his church. But he knows I

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am a former priest, and he questions me continually about religion. And I witness Jesus Christ to him.

Upon the occasion of the other officer's suicide, Steve asked me to accompany him to the funeral, stating he didn't want to be there alone. I readily agreed to go with him as a further act of witness. The morning of the funeral was bleak and bitter cold. We were the first to arrive at St. Anne's, an old historic Catholic parish on the lower west side of Detroit. The imposing red brick structure these days finds itself in a disintegrating area of the city, its parishioners having scattered to suburbia. On the front steps of the church Steve and I stomped snow from our boots and entered through the massive doors. Inside a pleasant warmth greeted us. As we removed outer wraps my eyes began to adjust in the semi-darkness to the remembered paraphernalia of a Catholic church vestibule—the pamphlet rack, stacked collection baskets in a corner, and by the entrance to the nave the holy water fonts. The odor, compounding incense, beeswax, decaying flowers, furniture polish, assailed my nostrils. But it had no evocative power over me. I watched Steve walk up to a font, dip his fingers in the bowl of water, and make a perfunctory sign of the cross. But I refrained. Then we entered the nave of the church. The muted light danced with subdued colors from the stained-glass windows even on that dull winter morning. Scores of pious statues loomed darkly about the sanctuary and the side altars at the far end of the aisle. Red and blue vigil lights flickered in separate locations before garish images of the Lord, the Virgin and the saints.

Then I shifted my gaze to the side walls of the back of the nave. There were situated some of the confessional cubicles. In an instant the old revulsion, the fear, the hatred and despair washed over me! I experienced a moment of vertigo and was about to retch. I felt the buffeting of Satan. "Let's get out of here; it's too hot," I whispered to Steve. Good, simple Steve did not ask for an explanation. We donned our coats and stepped out the front doors into the February cold. A few cars were now pulling up in the hard-packed snow and discharging mourners at the church steps. I reminded myself, with no further turmoil, "I am saved by the blood of Christ; I am loved

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by Him. The bondage of the Roman Sacrament of Penance has no power to wound my spirit." I turned to Steve and said, "It's okay now; let's go back in." Still my friend did not question me. We re-entered the building, took seats halfway down the cavernous interior and remained for the Requiem Mass and the funeral rite. I did not indulge in vain prayers for the repose of the poor officer's soul as the paganish ceremony unfolded. I trusted that the Holy Spirit might have moved him to come to Christ in saving faith even at the moment of his final act of self-destruction. I have not since been back inside a Catholic church.

The Catholic believer is taught early in his indoctrination that Penance is one of the Seven Sacraments instituted by Christ for the salvation of men. The doctrine states unequivocally that Jesus gave to His apostles the power to forgive or retain sins. That power has abided with the Church from the beginning and perdures today. Priests still have the power to forgive or not forgive. For him to exercise that power the sinner must confess verbally to him. He then imposes a penance to be performed and grants the penitent absolution, with the understanding that the penance must be completed. Until very recently the formula of absolution spoken by the priest has been: "May Our Lord Jesus Christ absolve you, and by His authority I **absolve** you from your sins, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

The doctrine is all very neat and well-packaged as presented in the Catechism and Church History. But its historical development within the Catholic system belies that simple presentation. Even conservative Catholic historians and theologians are hard pressed to delineate the growth of the practice of auricular confession in the Roman Church. To attempt to trace accurately the story of its introduction, its spread, and its final arbitrary status as a necessity for forgiveness of sins is futile. The story involves uncertainties, historical obscurities, hierarchical scheming and theological daydreaming. The final result—mandatory confession by the Christian of his sins to a "duly authorized priest" is so remote from the simplicity of the New Testament that one is tempted to laugh at the gullibility of even educated Catholics. But one

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does not ever laugh at tragedy—the loss of uncounted millions of souls to Christ the Mediator.

The idea of men having power to forgive sins is so ludicrous that even the hypocritical Pharisees of Jesus' day were scandalized when He said to the sick man, "*Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.*" The shocked Pharisees exclaimed, "*Why doth this man speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?*" (Mark 2:5,7).

We have already observed in sorrow that unscriptural beliefs and practices, which later became inseparably part of the Roman Catholic system, began to intrude as innovations into the Church of the early centuries. In the New Testament and sub-apostolic years there was no organized universal Church with a unifying external structure. The Church as it came from the blood shed by Jesus at Calvary, and as animated by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, was simply the invisible communion of all who were saved by Christ and were empowered in the Holy Spirit, but visible, it is true, in its local assemblies. Each individual congregation was a complete "Church," dependent on no other assembly of the saved but in fellowship with all of them. The Church was universal as the spiritual Body of Christ, with no head other than the same glorified Lord Jesus, made concrete and external in each local Church.

The Church which evolved in succeeding centuries changed radically in nature and demanded a ruling class that could teach, govern, and "sanctify" with an unquestioned authority—even an authority in practical terms equal to the authority of Jesus Christ Himself. To assume Christ's authority vicariously in the Christian community it was expedient that there be a priestly caste empowered to perform the sacerdotal functions of Christ's ministry. Thus gradually was developed the idea of a New Testament priesthood, sharing in a unique manner the very priesthood of Jesus Christ, beyond the universal priesthood of worship possessed by all born-again Christians. How to create and perpetuate this exalted caste among a select group in the Church? Why a Sacrament of Orders, of course, to ordain chosen individuals into the "Christian mysteries." And thus an empowering rite of ordination was conceived.

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If we are going to have Christian priests, they must perform priestly functions. By definition a priest is a mediator between God and men. So he must be able to offer a sacrifice of mediation. There must then be an altar of sacrifice. And there must be forgiveness of sins! Which brings us to the Roman Catholic Sacrament of Penance, or Confession, now also known in the post-conciliar Roman Church as the "Rite of Reconciliation," through which a Christian's sins are claimed to be forgiven.

We must without hesitation face squarely the Scriptural text invoked by Rome as the written source of the priest's power to forgive sins. We read in the Gospel According to John, Chapter 20, Verses 21 to 23: *"Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained."* Admittedly an important but difficult text.

Gleefully the Catholic Church exclaims, "See, Christ gave His apostles power to forgive or not to forgive sins! All the powers the **apostles** had have been handed down to their successors in the Church, the bishops. Priests in turn share in the office of the bishop, who possesses the fulness of the priesthood. Therefore priests have the power to forgive sins."

But wait a minute. In the context of this Scriptural quotation, it is specifically the **disciples** who are mentioned as being present when the risen Lord Jesus spoke those words. **Apostles** are not referred to, although all biblical scholars agree that some **apostles** were there, otherwise the remainder of John 20 would not make sense. So Christ spoke to a gathering of both **disciples** and **apostles**. Now Rome claims that only the apostles were the first priests ordained by Jesus. What then of the disciples to whom the words were addressed? They were mere laymen according to Rome. Were they also given the faculty of forgiving sins? Rome can't have it both ways; either **priests and laymen** were equally given that power, or the text means something else.

The above quotation follows the King James Version. What does the original Greek say? The words translated "forgiven"

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and "retained" are in the Greek in the perfect tense, indicating an action **already performed**. So the Greek should be translated accurately, "If you forgive the sins of any, they have been forgiven (already); if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained (already)."

So Rome's interpretation reverses the order of the divine action. She says to her priests, "You can forgive sins and your decision will be ratified in heaven." The Scripture says, "Sins already have been forgiven in heaven through acceptance of your proclamation of forgiveness by the blood of Jesus." It means in effect a disciple (any believer) can assure any sinner that his sins have been forgiven because he has come to Christ in repentant faith. Likewise, the disciple can assure any non-believer that his sins have not been forgiven because he has not trusted in Christ for his salvation.

This is not a labored exegesis of the text from John. It will be safe and certain to give to it no more power than does the remainder of the New Testament. Is there a single instance in the Scriptures of an apostle forgiving sins in the manner practiced by Rome in her Sacrament of Penance? Not one hint is there of that practice. Did Peter give absolution to Cornelius? No! Did Paul give absolution to the Philippian jailer? No! They preached salvation to them and opened the way for them to receive forgiveness through Christ. In that sense the apostles "forgave" their sins. In no situation do we find the apostles calling for a personal confession to them followed by absolution. That would be totally foreign to the New Testament proclamation of forgiveness through repentance, and faith in Jesus Christ. Peter stated as much in Acts 10:43, "*To him (Jesus) give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.*" God has never given authority to any person to make a decision as forgiving or retaining another's sins. Again we must recall the only Mediator between God and men is "*the man Christ Jesus.*" (I Timothy 2:5)

Immediately after the New Testament years and in the beginning centuries of Church history, no Christian writer has left a record that the text of John 20:21-23 was used to support

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a concept of confessing sins to a clergyman and receiving absolution from him. Nor is there a record that the Church in general claimed the power to personally forgive sins through confession to a presbyter or elder. The Church did not consider its presbyters (also known as bishops or "overseers") to be priests in any sense. At that period it was the proud boast of Christians to the pagan world that they had neither altar nor sacrifice and therefore no priest.

The weird, diabolical truth is that the idea of confessing sins to a priest is of pre-Christian origin, having its source in the idolatrous Babylonian mystery cults:(22)

"Babel, or Babylon, was built by Nimrod...It was the seat of the first great apostasy. Here the 'Babylonian Cult' was invented, a system claiming to...reveal the divinest secrets. Before a member could be initiated he had to 'confess' to the priest. The priest then had him in his power. This is the secret of the power of the priests of the Roman Catholic Church today."

Before we consider how the pernicious requirement of confession was introduced into the Church, perhaps I should remind myself, and you, dear readers, that I am not attempting to write a scholarly theological and historical refutation of the errors of the Church of Rome. Neither would I dare attempt a learned treatise on the theology of evangelical Christianity. For the latter I am eminently unqualified, being a novice, born-again Christian. But my heart burns that Christ and His salvation be made known to all who have labored under the heavy yoke of Catholicism, or who have been bruised by that yoke in any degree. I want to cry out, "Fear not; that yoke can be cast off. You are Christ's, and His yoke is sweet, His burden light." So I must labor on.

Well then, we see that in no situation in the New Testament did the appointed overseers of Christ's flock presume to forgive

(22) *Revelation Illustrated and Made Plain*, by Tim LaHaye, Zondervan Publishing House, 11th Printing 1979, P. 231, quoting Dr. Clarence Larkin in *Dispensational Truth*.

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any man's sins, even in the name of Jesus. Nor in the sub-apostolic first centuries did that vicious practice creep into nascent Christianity.

We readily concede that very early a system of **public penance** became prevalent in the Christian Churches. But let us be certain that it was a matter of community (Church) discipline. It was not a forgiveness of sin by any member of the **ekklesia**. It was a public acknowledgement that a Christian had sinned publicly; he was disciplined publicly and afterward he was readmitted to fellowship in the Church but only subsequent to forgiveness by Christ. This is the element of penance that the Catholic Church is laboriously trying to reinsert into its Sacrament of Penance in our day. But as usual, Rome is trying to put new wine into old wineskins, retaining absolution by the human priest.

Remember that the early Christians were a light to their pagan neighbors. If a person accepted Christ, was reborn, and began a life in the Spirit, he was expected to be a luminous example to the world. If he unfortunately became a backslider of public notice, his fall was regarded most seriously by the Churches. His reconciliation with the Christian community was to be equally public. Therefore, with varying degrees in different geographic settings, and in response to fluctuating intensities of persecution by the pagan authorities, systems of public penance were instituted. There was no centralized Church authority, but somewhat simultaneous procedures of discipline emerged throughout the scattered Christian body. The sins in question were most commonly known adultery, murder or the violent shedding of blood, and apostasy from the faith. Such sins were visible to the pagan majority; so their expiation was to be equally visible. Public sinners who repented sought forgiveness directly from Christ. Then they were required to "confess" publicly before the Christian assembly. They must in turn perform the penance imposed by the presbyter or bishop. Only then were they reconciled to Church fellowship. Those procedures had a Scriptural warrant, as when Paul dealt with the Church at Corinth in the matter of backsliding Christians. But there was never a presumption of an elder or presbyter absolving a sinner of his

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public sins. It was unequivocally a public ratification of a forgiveness already granted by Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, as happened so frequently, those elements of public discipline were later solidified and incorporated into the Roman Catholic sacramental system. Our gracious Lord and Savior Jesus Christ never intended to impose on his flock a burden of conscience such as was to later coalesce into the Roman Catholic required practice of confession of one's sins to a priest to obtain forgiveness. In the course of all that preoccupation with public penance, the run-of-the-mill Christian sinner, remember, received his forgiveness by constantly and privately confessing his sins directly to Jesus Christ.

According to Catholic teaching, a sacrament is an "outward sign, instituted by Christ to give grace." Catholicism has had to stretch mightily to fulfill those conditions insofar as its Sacrament of Penance or "Confession" goes. We have considered the basic Scriptural text of John 20 and have seen that it does not stand. Primitive Roman Catholic doctrine came up with an astounding number of sacraments:

"The validity of baptism and the Lord's Supper was never questioned in the early Church. However, the validity of other sacraments was in question for a long time. Confirmation and ordination were practiced as sacraments in the fifth century. Ambrose, bishop of Milan, held that foot-washing was a sacrament. Matrimony, penance, and extreme unction were added later. The present seven sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church were not fully established until the twelfth century."(23)

Some Catholic scholars insist that numerous passages in the writings of Augustine (died 430) deal with confession and penance. Martin Luther depended heavily on Augustine in for-

(23) *A Short History of the Early Church*, by Harry R. Boer, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976, p. 144.

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mulating Reformation doctrines; he did not see the Roman sacrament lurking in Augustine's works. The majority of historians, both Catholic and Protestant, today admit that Augustine offers no evidence for the existence of private penance with absolution. It is the old public penance of the Churches that he refers to.

"From an early period confession of sin was essential to **church standing** after a grievous fall. At first it was made publicly in church. But since this seemed to foment scandals, it tended from the days of Leo (440-461) to become a private confession before a priest. At that time confession was permitted but not compulsory. According to Fleury, a Roman Catholic historian, 'the first time it was commanded' was in 763 by a bishop of Metz."(24)

"By the 13th Century a type of penitential discipline had come to prevail in the Western Church which was widely different from that of the Patristic Age. Instead of being public and unusual, confession had become private, frequent, and common to all."(25)

It is a strange note of history that the unscriptural practice of confession was **popularized** among Christians in continental Europe by preaching Celtic monks from Ireland and Scotland during the 6th century.

Why all the above feverish disclaimers, as Rome will insist? Because "Confession" is one of the most binding of the Roman captivities, one of Satan's strongest tools in the subjection of souls.

If Christ instituted a Sacrament of Penance, I want it to be clearly and unequivocally presented in the New Testament. I

(24) *The Story of the Church*, by A. M. Renwick, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976 printing, p. 70-71.

(25) *A History of the Care of Souls*, by John T. McNeill, Harper & Row Publishers, 1951, p. 112.

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want it to be proclaimed lucidly by the Church fathers of the first centuries. I want it to be witnessed to constantly and consistently by believing Christians of the ages. I want it to be reaffirmed by the great Reformation leaders! But the Roman rite of compulsory confession lacks any such continuity. It is a tradition of men.

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther proposed 95 theses to refute the shameful practice of the selling of indulgences by which the buyer would receive full remission of the punishment due in purgatory for his sins. Luther nailed his theses to the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg where vast crowds congregated. One of those Theses stated:

“Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, in saying, Repent ye! intended that the whole life of the believer should be penitence. This cannot be understood of sacramental penance, that is, of the confession and satisfaction which are performed under the ministry of priests.”(26)

Roman Catholicism has never been quite the same since Luther posted those Theses on the Wittenberg door, and millions of souls in Luther's wake have been freed from the bonds of sacramental confession.

The great theologian of the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition, John Calvin, had an acute sense of the horror of the Sacrament of Penance; he devoted an entire chapter of his famed **Institutes of the Christian Religion** to pointing out its infamy. He goes to such length that one scarcely can decide what to choose from his refutation. He begins by saying, “I will do this as briefly as possible,” and then proceeds with thousands upon thousands of words. Later on he writes, “The whole comes to this, they (Roman Catholics) wish to make God the author of this fictitious confession, proving their vanity. I have shown their falsehood. But while it is plain that the law was imposed by men, I say that it is both tyrannical and insult-

(26) **A Short History of Christianity**, by Martin E. Marty, William Collins Publishers, 1979, p. 211.

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ing to God, who in binding consciences to His Word would have them free from human rule. So when confession is prescribed as necessary to obtain pardon...I say that the sacrilege is altogether intolerable, because nothing belongs more peculiarly to God than the forgiveness of sins, in which our salvation consists."

I say, "Right on, John Calvin!" Would that the Christians who follow in his tradition today would see the abomination so clearly and rise up in indignation against it instead of playing ecumenical footsies with the Church that still demands it!

The gradual evolution from public discipline in the early Church to the defined, legalistic and obligatory confession to a priest reached its inevitable and disastrous fruit in the conditions which prevailed in the early 16th century. At that time Roman Catholic subjections of Christian consciences became intolerable, and in one of those rare, breathless moments of history God propelled Luther, Calvin and the other reformers onto the scene of Christian anguish. Our debt to them cannot be calculated.

As a former Roman Catholic layman who was subjected to that paralyzing practice, I say I loathed it and do to this moment. As a former Roman Catholic priest who presumed to place himself in judgment upon Christian souls and announce to them, "I absolve you," or "I refuse to absolve you," I recoil in horror at the remembrance. But my sin of blasphemy was forgiven when I was born again!

I dwell upon this matter of "Who can forgive sins?" again not because it now presents problems to me. As I have told you, I did forsake the obligation of confession some time before I left the priesthood. I knew that Jesus Christ did not hand on to His disciples His unique power as the Son of Man to forgive sins. I pursue the question because it is another of the major obstacles that Catholicism erects between the believer and his Savior. In my witness since I have been reborn into the evangelical Christian fellowship, Catholic and ex-Catholic inquirers have placed this problem high on their area of concern. A year ago a former Catholic police officer who was seek-

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ing Christ and who knew I was a former priest, asked me, "Can a priest forgive sins?" When he received my most definite negative reply he was relieved and happy. He responded, "Neither do I believe it!" The officer has since been led to the Lord by Jim MacKinnon.

So be assured, if you have been a victim of the Roman Sacrament of Penance. You may rest in the knowledge that there was no official Roman pronouncement that Christ instituted seven sacraments and that Penance was one of the seven until many centuries after the New Testament was written. If the Holy Spirit moves you to discard the practice of confession to a priest from your life, you have not denied a Christ-ordained sacrament. You are abandoning a tradition of men, manufactured by churchmen. I think instinctively you may know that. Admittedly I have deep animosity toward auricular confession. I attribute the animosity, however, to the Holy Spirit's guidance, not to any psychological quirk that prevents me from submitting my sins to the judgment of another human being. It is not necessary for me to assure former Catholics that they are happy to have given up the enforced practice of confession. They **know** their immense relief.

Voluntary confession of sin by one believer to another for purposes of counseling or edification can be very salutary and is Scriptural:

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed..."
(James 5:16)

But voluntary confession for mutual upbuilding has nothing in common with the hateful "Sacrament" we have been reviewing.

Should a Roman Catholic spiritual director chance upon these pages, he may hasten in his preconceived spiritual straitjacket to claim I was a victim of scrupulosity when I

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sought the comfort of the Sacrament of Penance in my early years. He will tell you that a scrupulous penitent sees sin where there is no sin, and serious sin when it is only venial or minor. I affirm that I was not scrupulous but conscientious. I was attempting to "save my soul." And any Catholic who tries conscientiously to live the moral and disciplinary norms of his Church will experience difficulty with the practice of required confession to a priest. And that is because, quite simply, the confessional diminishes or destroys the liberty of the sons of God which Christ gained for us.

The wondrous claims of peace, comfort and spiritual growth advanced by Rome in favor of its Sacrament of Penance are largely mirages. It is true I sometimes experienced a feeling of peace immediately after confession, but it was not an abiding peace. My experience as a priest led me to observe that Catholics, both clerical and lay, who were devoted to the practice of confession were mostly pious misfits or neurotic church-haunters. The clear-eyed, steady and sensible Catholics detested the Sacrament and wished to escape its oppressive weight. I am certain that vast numbers of Catholics have covertly come to the realization that the sacrament is not of divine origin and have secretly discontinued the burden of the rite.

Today the Sacrament of Penance in the Roman Church, and especially in the United States, appears to be in a shambles. The Second Vatican Council recommended that the rite be revised to reincorporate the aspect of public reconciliation with the community, which we have seen was the idea in the early Church. At the prodding of the liberals at the Council and of those who have been in charge of the liturgical mayhem in the Roman Church since the Council, the sacrament is now self-consciously called the Rite of Reconciliation. The basic flawed theology and the false historical assumptions remain, though the externals of the thing have been notably altered. The text of the absolution itself has been changed to read: "In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ who by his passion and resurrection reconciled the world to His Father, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, **I absolve you** from your sins and I reconcile you to the Church."

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The revised rite provides for communal penance services in addition to the conventional one-upon-one encounter in the confession box. But even in the communal service each penitent must confess his sins privately to the priest after the communal service. So, externals have been altered, the noxious core remains.

The state of shambles is to some degree the result of the loss of respect suffered by the Catholic bishops since the Council. Their priests no longer feel constrained to obey them in all things. Now that would be a fine and healthy development if the dissenting priests were solid in their basic Christian beliefs. But that is not so. The priest who tampers with Rome's revised rite is apt to be your liberal priest who does not accept the divinity of Christ, His Virgin Birth and Bodily Resurrection, nor the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures.

The bishops are powerless to control the antics of some of their new-breed priests. So, even though the rite and its rubrics are spelled out clearly by Rome, its practical implementation may vary from diocese to diocese, and even from parish to parish, depending upon what priest is in charge. Official Rome is frantic, the laity are confused or joyful as the case may be, and Satan has his day. But any chink in the massive, heretical sacramental system of Rome is a sign of hope.

We ex-Catholics don't miss the Sacrament of Penance. Its total collapse in the Roman Church is our earnest prayer. Remember, the Sacrament of Penance lacerates, but Jesus heals; the Sacrament of Penance binds consciences, but Jesus looses them; the Sacrament of Penance terrorizes, but Jesus gives comfort.

Let us uncompromisingly and forever cast away the diabolical chains of a man-made so-called sacrament. Our compassionate and forgiving Lord Jesus Christ will then take over His rightful power as the only source of release from the bonds of sin.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE HOLY COMMUNION

*"...Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."
(Matthew 4:4)*

Now we must tread reverently but boldly through that stage of my spiritual journey which I judge to be a true exodus from the servitude of idolatry. That passage brought me closer to worship in Spirit and in truth. I speak of my radical departure from Roman Catholic teaching on the significance of the ordinance established by our Lord Jesus Christ—the Holy Communion. It is also known as the Lord's Supper or the Eucharist, and in the Catholic tradition additionally as the Blessed Sacrament and the Mass. The rite of Communion is part of the New Testament and figures prominently in the long centuries of Church history. All Christians accept and observe it in some manner; only the sub-Christian cults ignore it totally.

The New Testament accounts of the institution of the Holy Communion are wonderfully simple. The historical aftermath is wondrously complicated and diverse. Perhaps no recorded words of Our Blessed Savior have been so variously interpreted as have His words of institution of this sacrament. And certainly none have been the subject of so much controversy within the Christian family.

I was, of course, a product of the involved Catholic explication of the meaning of Jesus' few terse words when, at His Last Supper, He took bread and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And took a cup of wine and said, "Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many

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for the remission of sins." "This do in remembrance of me."

In previous chapters I have reminisced about my enthrallment by Roman Catholic doctrine on Mary and the Church. But in a separate and most special, private compartment I must situate my relationship with the Catholic concept of Holy Communion. If I was in truth captive to Mariolatry and "Roman Catholic Church," I was beyond that a personal slave, with a love/fear bondage to the **Blessed Sacrament**.

You who have never been subjected to the Roman Catholic system will always be at somewhat of a loss to fully understand and empathize with the Catholic and his "Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament." You may read about it, hear about it, and study it; but its subjective reality will ultimately elude you. Conversely, you who have experienced the Catholic way will recognize immediately the reality of which I write. The reality is an enigma to all outside the Catholic tradition. It is an enigma to evangelicals because they rightfully ask, "How can an idolatrous misconstruing of the Savior's words and actions have ought of good in it? How can such folly be the very bedrock of the spiritual lives of countless millions of Roman Catholics?" But to the Catholic, and to many former Catholics, it is The Reality, the final refuge even beyond Mary and the Church itself.

Try to realize this. Among the staggering numbers of Roman Catholics there will in God's good plan be untold numbers who are searching for an immediate contact with the One Whom they imperfectly perceive to be their Redeemer. Where will they find such contact? God help us, without the intervention of the Holy Spirit it will be in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar where the prosaic bread and wine have been changed into the very Body and Blood of the Risen Lord Jesus Christ, according to Roman Catholic teaching.

One evening some months ago I preached and gave testimony at the Lord's House in Livonia, Michigan. I touched upon several points of Catholic doctrine which I no longer accepted. During the fellowship which followed I was approached by an articulate and obviously well-educated lady

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who, she informed me, had semi-abandoned Catholicism and was seeking the Lord. We chatted about some points in my sermon and she went on to say, "I agreed with everything you said, Father." She immediately recognized her verbal slip and added, "I mean, Mr. Butterfield." She smiled, and then a look of anguish appeared on her face. I thought she was going to cry. "Yes," she continued, "I go along with all that. But what about the Blessed Sacrament?"

Well, what about that Blessed Sacrament? I must repeat, I am not writing an evangelical book of theology; I am not qualified to do that. I can tell you about me and the Blessed Sacrament. My theological inadequacy does not deter me because I want to share my passage from involvement with traditions of men to acceptance of the Word.

Of all the radical readjustments to which God will subject us converted ex-Catholics, in many cases the most traumatic will be in our understanding of the Holy Communion or Lord's Supper. With a new and proper grounding in Holy Scripture we can dispense with the mediatorship of Mary and the saints; we can jettison the absurd sacrament of penance; we can view the Church in a new light under New Testament terms. But the question remains, "What about Holy Communion—the Blessed Sacrament?"

I will use the word "idolatry" frequently in the following paragraphs. I am not using the word imprecisely or figuratively. The Catholic Catechism itself well defines idolatry as "the rendering to any creature the honor and adoration that are due to God alone." I will employ it in that literal sense.

Finalized Roman Catholic doctrine says without equivocation that when Jesus Christ, the night before He died, took bread into His hands and said, "This is my body," he meant literally just that—no more bread, but in its stead His Body. When He took the cup of wine and said, "This is my blood," He meant literally that—no more wine, but in its stead His Blood. The bread and wine were changed into His Body and Blood. This is the Catholic doctrine of **Transubstantiation**—the substance of the bread and wine no longer remained. They had

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been changed into the substance of the Body and Blood of The Lord by His words.

Moreover, when Christ added the words, "Do this in remembrance of me," He ordained the apostles present as priests of the New Testament empowered to offer sacrifice, says Catholic teaching. That sacrifice was to be His sacrifice on Calvary, renewed and re-presented to His Church until He should come again. Therefore He was to be truly and actually present, Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, under the appearances of bread and wine on all Catholic altars and in all Catholic tabernacles until the end of time. His bloody death on Calvary was to be continued and renewed in the Sacrifice of the Mass on all Catholic altars until He should come again!

Did I believe that teaching? I must say, again in retrospect, I **wanted** desperately to believe it. Wanting to believe it and actually believing it in faith are separate entities. I have realized that distinction only recently. A scant few weeks ago a Presbyterian minister asked me, "Did you really believe that wasn't bread and wine, but rather the living Body and Blood of Christ? Did you really believe that the Sacrifice of Calvary was truly being renewed when you said the words of consecration over the bread and wine?" I had to hesitate a few moments, and then I replied in naked honesty, "I **wanted** to believe it, but I never really did." And thus was stripped away another sham of so many years of my life—even after being born again!

If ever, as an embryo Catholic, as an adolescent, or even as a candidate for the Catholic priesthood, I felt a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, it was in the Eucharist, and for that let us be thankful. But in these latter days I know one could never have a saving relationship with Jesus by worshipping Him under the form of a scrap of bread and a dribble of wine.

Catholic public worship and private prayer revolve about the central fact of the Eucharist—discounting of course the intrusion of Mary and the saints. When Jesus said, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." He was, in

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Roman belief, specifically speaking of His presence tangibly in the Blessed Sacrament. Small wonder then that the Roman Catholic Church, departing from the simplicity of her alleged Founder, decks out her celebration of the Eucharist with pomp and splendor, whether it be in the sumptuous cathedral of St. Peter's in Rome, or in the most lowly, tasteless local Roman Catholic house of worship.

The rich panoply of Roman Catholic worship of the Sacrament intrigued me from the start. There is within Catholicism an astounding abandonment of man's dominion over material goods to the service of Christ in the Eucharist. All created things—gold, silver, jewels, rare incense, flowers, gorgeous fabrics, candles of pure beeswax, whatever, may be gathered and offered in subservience to this Presence in the Sacrament. So I as a youngster, dazzled by the external showmanship, was lured into the idolatrous worship of the Sacrament. But what did a kid, or an adolescent, or even a young adult really know about idolatry? I knew that catechism definition, but it never penetrated my heart. Even when I questioned in my soul whether Jesus was truly there **in place of** the bread, I did not reach the realization that if the bread was still there I was committing an act of idolatry.

You dear ex-Catholics readily remember the total ambience of your early Catholic worship of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Whatever the degree of your involvement with Catholicism, you never trifled with the tremendous reality that the Blessed Sacrament **was** Jesus. However profligate may have been your daily life, when it came time to confront that Presence—usually under parental duress—you dropped all your vices until you had received Jesus in Holy Communion. “Until” was the interval between going to confession and receiving Communion, usually from Saturday afternoon until Sunday morning.

When I received my First Holy Communion, I wondered how that bland, sticky wafer of bread could be the Jesus who had shown them just who He was when He arose from the tomb on Easter morning. I did not question why couldn't I have some of the consecrated wine too. I'm certain at that early time I didn't

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really believe it was Jesus—it tasted worse than a dry cracker. But if Mary said it was so, and the Church said it was so, then I would try to believe it was Jesus.

A brief explanation of some of the “mechanics” of the Roman handling of the sacrament might here be in order. Aside from assistance at the Mass—the unbloody Sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Christ—and the reception of Holy Communion, there remained for us Catholics the fabulous public celebrations of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. As a logical fruit of the doctrine of Transubstantiation, the consecrated elements of bread and wine are to be adored, publicly as well as privately, with that highest form of worship rendered to the Godhead alone. So the Roman Church instituted feasts and devotions to allow the faithful to publicly adore the Sacrament with lavish displays. The principal feasts are Holy Thursday and Corpus Christi (Latin for ‘Body of Christ’); the principal devotions are Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, the Forty Hours Devotion, and even Perpetual Adoration of the Sacrament in some designated churches. Each feast had its own peculiarities, each devotion its particular ceremonies.

At each Mass the priest may consecrate, in addition to the bread and wine he will consume, the bread to be received by the faithful at that Mass. Each wafer of bread is called a *host*. There are small hosts for the congregation and a large host for the priest. Moreover, the priest may consecrate additional small hosts to be reserved in a chalice in the Tabernacle of the church building. Furthermore, he may consecrate an additional large host, also to be reserved in the Tabernacle and to be used for later public devotions of adoration. (Nothing Roman Catholic is ever simple!) So there is almost always, in every Catholic church, some of the consecrated bread reserved in the Tabernacle. That is why Catholics genuflect when entering and leaving their churches even when no services are in progress. That is why Catholics remain quiet in church. That is why a candle lamp burns perpetually in the sanctuary in each church building. Jesus is in the Tabernacle! The Tabernacle, usually an ornate, often precious, locked container occupying a prominent place in the sanctuary, is closed normally and the bread is not visible to the people. But they are

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encouraged to come at any hour of the day or night to make a "visit to the Blessed Sacrament"—to adore and pray to the consecrated bread in the Tabernacle. Numerous indulgences are granted to Catholics who follow this practice. (27)

I myself have made visits of adoration in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, in the great cathedrals of Europe, in numberless local parish churches, in many chapels in isolated military installations. I could not begin to calculate the prodigious total of long hours of vigil I have spent kneeling in solitary prayer and adoration before Tabernacles in Catholic churches on four continents, adoring the consecrated species of bread. If ever during my years of Catholicism I felt close to Jesus Christ, surely it was during some of those hours of silent prayer. But **feeling** close to Christ is far removed from a trusting faith in Him for salvation. And, I repeat, it is impossible to be experiencing salvation while engaged in an act of idolatry, even though that act be done in ignorance or in good faith, following one's conscience. Were all those hours spent in vain? I think not, for God searches hearts and draws ultimate good even from human folly.

In addition to our private and subdued adoration of the Sacrament of the Altar, there were the splendid public ceremonies and festivals calculated to foster enthusiastic devotion to the Eucharist. On those occasions the bread of the altar was brought out from the Tabernacle and displayed for community adoration. One of the large hosts would be placed in a glass-covered holder, set in a gorgeous vessel of precious metals and stones, and enthroned on the high altar for veneration. This vessel was called a Monstrance.

(27) A remission in whole or in part of the temporal punishment due for sins already forgiven. In practical terms it means that the Church declares, and God ratifies, that she is remitting some or all the punishment one would have to suffer in this life, or later in Purgatory, because of guilt for sins committed. This Roman teaching obviously ignores the truth that Jesus Christ took upon Himself all the guilt for our sins. It was scandals over the selling of indulgences that first inflamed Martin Luther and finally sparked the Protestant Reformation.

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PROCESSION OF MONSTRANCE

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The host was then visible—we could see Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament! The vessel was carried about the church in procession, and the people knelt in true adoration as the priest moved about the church holding the Sacrament aloft. It was very emotional and was accompanied by the singing of beautiful Latin hymns, and the inevitable incense, candles, and immoderate outlays of flowers. We Catholic children and adolescents involved ourselves with gusto in those public exhibitions. They were not the sole province of the girls, nor of the pious, nor of the sissies. Even the school toughs and rowdies vied to have an active and important role in the festivities.

Such was our relationship with the Jesus of the Eucharist. In my case it was a love/fear relationship. Love, because I was told that it was Jesus; fear, because I was terrified I might dishonor the Sacrament through any carelessness, and because I secretly loathed all the restraints placed upon my thoughts, words and deeds lest I receive the Sacrament unworthily in Communion.

Again, we born-again Christians are exhilarated at our initial liberation from that sacramental bondage. But then soon we must confront the reality of the ordinance of Holy Communion and seek, under the illumination of the Spirit, our biblical, evangelical perspective.

I easily abandoned the two most objectionable facets of the Roman Catholic teaching on the Eucharist: First, Transubstantiation—the bread and wine no longer remain, they have become the Body and Blood of Christ. Second, that the Mass, when the priest pronounces the words of consecration, constitutes a true sacrifice, Calvary is renewed, and there is a propitiation for sins.

In Roman Catholic worship the Eucharist is central and all-important. For most of my life I went along with that. But finally I came to realize that New Testament worship revolved about the preaching of the Word, specifically the Good News of free salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and His atoning Blood shed once and for always. The Eucharist was still there,

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but it was not central nor all-important. A prayerful reading of the New Testament letter to the Hebrews revealed a flat contradiction of the Roman doctrine of the continuing Sacrifice of the Mass.

Roman Catholicism justifies its teaching of Transubstantiation through a totally literal translation of the words, "*This is my body; this is my blood.*" But proceeding on that literal basis we would have to accept that Jesus gives us literally living water which will produce eternal life (John 4:14); or that Jesus is truly a door (John 10:7-9); or that Jesus is a growing vine (John 15:5); or that He is a lamb (John 1:29). It's absurd. Those are all true and meaningful, but they are cast in figurative language, just as are the terms "*my body*" and "*my blood.*" The New Testament and the early church accepted them only in a figurative sense.

In Roman theology much is made of the 6th chapter of the Gospel according to John which recounts the discourse of Jesus in which He referred to Himself as "*the living bread which came down from heaven.*" (John 6:51) Catholicism says Jesus was thereby promising Himself in the Eucharist, literally to be eaten unto eternal life. But at the end of the discourse Jesus demolished any such carnal interpretation of His words by adding, "*Doth this offend you? It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.*" (John 6:61,63) Christ was showing that as bread and water are necessary to physical life, so He is necessary to the spiritual life of the Christian. Furthermore, early in the same discourse He made His meaning clear by cautioning, "*...he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.*" (John 6:35) So how do we eat and drink of His flesh and blood? By **coming** to Him to end our hunger, and by **believing** in Him to end our thirst. Not by eating and drinking a magically transformed bread and wine!

We have seen repeatedly that Roman Catholic errors invariably were innovations that crept into the Church as the early centuries passed. The teaching on the Eucharist follows that sad pattern. In the first century the Holy Communion

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was a meal in remembrance of the death of Christ, and a symbol of the unity of Christians with one another and with Christ. In the second century it shifted toward becoming a ceremony in which Christ was present in some undefined manner. This was not yet the later Catholic doctrine of Transubstantiation, which was a development of the Middle Ages. But it was an early movement in that direction. By the third century there appeared the idea of sacrifice in which Christ's body and blood were mysteriously offered by an ordained priest for the living and the dead.

Michael A. Smith, an English ecclesiastical historian, tells it well in his essay on the worship of early Christians:

“The central service of worship on Sunday in the early church was the ‘breaking of bread’ or ‘communion.’ This was a fellowship meal, with preaching, Bible reading and prayer, which culminated in the formal acts taken over from the Last Supper. The aim was to remember Jesus’ death, and to celebrate his resurrection. Praise and thanksgiving were uppermost, and for this reason the name ‘eucharist’ (Greek for thanksgiving) was often given to the occasion. Gradually the eucharist became more formal, and the meal aspect secondary. From the third century, Old Testament ideas of priesthood were used by some to interpret the eucharist as the ‘Christian sacrifice.’ At first the sacrifice was thought to consist of praises, but gradually it came to be held that an offering was made to God to gain forgiveness of sins. By the Middle Ages this had been developed to make the eucharist a re-offering of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. There also arose magical ideas concerning the bread and wine. By the fourth century it was held that either when the words of the Last Supper were repeated...or when the Holy Spirit was invoked on the bread and wine...a change took place. It was felt right to venerate the

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bread and wine as representing Jesus visibly."(28)

An intelligent reading of the Letter to the Hebrews, even divorced from guidance by the Holy Spirit, surely ought to lead the reader at least to question the Roman doctrine of the continuing sacrifice of the Mass. We should note especially the following verses:

"For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself." (Hebrews 7:26-27)

"But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." (Hebrews 9:11, 12)

"For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." (Hebrews 9:24-26)

(28) "Worship and the Church Year," by Michael A. Smith, published in the **Handbook to the History of Christianity**, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977, p. 9.

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Those verses of Holy Scripture affirm the **once for all** sacrifice of Jesus Christ, permitting **no repetition**. The clear teaching in God's Word allows no continuing sacrifice after the manner of the Catholic Mass. The Bible teaching is sufficient for me. All sacrifices were nullified once Jesus paid the full price for sin on the cross and cried out, "It is finished."

How explain such variance from New Testament teaching? Aside from the influence of the Evil One, it was due at least in part to human dabblings into the popular eastern mystery religions of the day, to borrowings from standard Greek and Roman paganism, and to reviving Old Testament Jewish concepts, all of which prescribed repeated sacrificial offerings. It is another tragic example of what happens when man's unguided intellect strays from the written Word of God.

It is of further interest to recall that the Roman Catholic doctrine of Transubstantiation was not officially defined until the late Middle ages:

"Last, Innocent (Pope Innocent III) called the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) to settle certain doctrinal matters. It decided that annual confession to a priest was mandatory for all laymen. And it enunciated the dogma of transubstantiation, which means that the bread and wine become the actual body and blood of Christ upon pronouncement of the priest. The priest could then perform an actual sacrifice of Christ every time the mass was said. Moreover, the council gave official sanction to the seven sacraments and provided some definition of them."(29)

The great Reformers of the 16th century, Luther and Calvin, directed their mighty scriptural insights onto the Catholic doctrines of Transubstantiation and the continuing sacrifice of the mass. In the millennial interlude between the early Church and the Protestant Reformation, a few

(29) **Beginnings in Church History** by Howard F. Vos, Moody Press, 1977, p. 72.

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courageous and saintly men had arisen periodically to criticize Roman heresies and to attempt to call the Church back to apostolic purity of doctrine. Even organized movements against papal errors and suppression of conscience appeared and had limited success here and there in Christendom during those centuries. But the reward for the individuals came to be burning at the stake, and the fate of the protesting movements was that they disappeared violently, victims of bloody suppression by the sword. Many of those early reformers and movements were directed partially against the Roman idolatrous teachings and practices concerning the Eucharist.

Mainstream evangelical Christianity, in the wake of the Protestant Reformation, recaptured the New Testament simplicity of the sacrament or ordinance of Holy Communion. Shorn of the Roman traditions, the sacrament reverted to its status as a memorial of the saving death of Jesus Christ and a looking forward to His Second Coming. So what remained of "the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ?"

Evangelical Lutherans hold that the body and blood of Christ are present **along with** the elements of bread and wine, but only during the actual reception of communion. This was Martin Luther's belief. Calvin and other theologians taught that Christ's body is glorified in heaven and remains there, but that Jesus encounters His people at the Lord's Supper. That encounter does not place His bodily presence in the communion, but in the hearts of the believers who partake, through the Spirit's presence and power. Zwingli, a noted Swiss Reformer, eventually held that Christ was spiritually present in the Eucharist, reversing his earlier interpretation that the Lord's Supper was merely a symbol of the sacrifice of Christ and contributed nothing to the believer. Evangelical Christians adhere to one or another of these interpretations.

Does this indicate utter confusion outside of the Roman Catholic Church on the significance and value of Holy Communion? For me, not at all. I would never revert to a certitude that required me to adore what is obviously a piece of bread. Better by far is lack of complete certitude than rank idolatry. The faith demanded to accept a wafer of bread as the living,

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adorable Body of Christ is of a different order than the biblical faith required of the follower of Jesus Christ. Nowhere in the Scriptures are we asked to elicit a faith that denies the evidence of our God-given senses. But that is precisely what is required for belief in the Roman doctrine of Transubstantiation. Saving faith in Jesus Christ does not compel me to believe in something that my senses deny. True, faith is described as "*the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*" (Hebrews 11:1) But in the Communion I can see that bread; whatever significance it has, it remains bread to my sight, my taste, my senses of touch and smell.

Additionally, the Catholic doctrine, if believed, forces me to humiliate Christ beyond His supreme humiliation on Calvary. The glorified, risen and ascended Christ can never again be humiliated in any manner or degree. The concept of bread and wine, which He created, being marvelously transformed into His living body and blood, forces Him into a further humiliation which is unacceptable; indeed it is impossible.

And is there need for the Christian to have complete certitude about the nature and significance of Holy Communion? Obviously no, for the Bible itself offers no well-defined surety. I recall that the institution of the Eucharist is mentioned only in the 3 Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke. The Gospel of John, which devotes by far the most space to the Last Supper, does not refer to it. Furthermore, there is variation among Matthew, Mark and Luke on the actual words of institution. Again, if certitude were required, the Holy Spirit would have inspired the sacred writers to agree closely on the words and actions employed by Our Savior when He instituted the Eucharist.

My scrutiny of the New Testament reveals that the Lord's Supper was not central to the Gospel message. Clearly it was not considered **necessary for salvation**. There is no evidence that the elements were ever adored by any Christian. To be sure, the rite was commanded by the Lord. He said, "*Do this.*" But He added quite simply, "*in remembrance of me.*"

So I am content to do just that. I partake of Holy Commu-

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nion in remembrance of the Lord Jesus Christ. I recall that I am a sinner, that the same Lord died and arose for my sins, that He will surely come again, and that I am united in bonds of faith and the Spirit with my Lord and with all true Christians.

I cannot fritter away time and energy in a futile effort to learn exactly how Christ might be present in the Sacrament. The Holy Spirit did not see fit to reveal that to us.

And withall, I do not celebrate the Communion lightly nor routinely. I am ever conscious of Paul's warning to the fractious Corinthians:

"For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." (I Cor. 11:26-29)

Those are beautiful and solemn words. Paul admits there is still bread and wine (the cup) in the ordinance. And yet we must discern the body after having confessed our sins. So, in some undefined manner Christ becomes present to us in our reception of the Communion. But the bread and wine remain and are not to be made the object of our adoration; nor is the sacrifice of Calvary renewed.

Let it rest there, good Christians. Our memorial reception of the bread and wine is a wondrous spiritual experience without the intrusion of any man-conceived magic!

And now, you Roman Catholic liberals, don't tell me I am laboring over eucharistic beliefs and practices that no longer have validity in your enlightened days. Perhaps they have been mitigated in your eyes; but the official Roman Catholic teaching has not been changed. It was reiterated at the 2nd

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Vatican Council. To me, you are Pharisees. You have cast out those idolatrous practices I criticized. But you have equally cast out some of the very kernel of Christianity. Most of you do not believe in a Trinity nor in the eternal deity of the Word Who took on flesh and became the man Jesus of Nazareth. Most of you do not believe in the Virgin Birth nor in the miracles performed by Jesus. You do not believe in His atoning death on the cross. Many of you do not accept His physical Resurrection nor Ascension. You do not believe that when sinful man has sufficiently loused up this world Jesus Christ will literally come again. You do not believe in an eternal hell of punishment. You do not believe in an inspired, infallible, inerrant Bible. So, I sadly bid you go back to your social gospel, your liberation theology, your ecumenical movement, your charismatic movement, your process theology, your fornication with the world. And leave us Christians free to be separate from and opposed to you. You are not of the household of our faith!

If that sounds harsh, my love for you demands that I say it. May God in His goodness enlighten each of you and bring you back to your crucified Savior. I pray that He help you make it through the night, even as He did for me.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE HOLY BIBLE

“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

(Hebrews 4:12)

This **must** be a happy chapter! It should reflect in a measure the matchless joy that has been showered upon me since the Holy Spirit led me to the born-again experience. That promised joy—a fruit of the same Spirit (Gal. 5:22)—has been manifested in my new intimacy with God’s written Word, the Holy Bible.

I have previously quoted numerous texts from the Bible to illustrate evangelical Christian beliefs. I have cited those texts without apology or argumentation. I have felt secure in that mode of presentation because my assumption has been that most of you who will read these words will already hold the Bible in some esteem, and the majority will, along with me, regard it as God’s written Word.

Let me at the outset state clearly, without equivocation, my faith and trust. I revere the Scriptures as the Word of God. I believe the Bible is the only book that has God as its author. I believe it to be the only authoritative source of revelation from God, disclosing his purposes in His creation and telling me my origin, my nature, my sinful state, my salvation and

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deliverance, my moral code and my eternal destiny. And it is the source of my knowledge of the personal Word of God, Who became man—Jesus Christ the Lord! Such is my stand regarding the Holy Bible; it is the traditional, orthodox Christian belief, untinged with liberal colorings.

I am morally convinced that Satan has attempted to impede the preparation of this chapter of my narrative. His hindrance derives from his loathing and fear of the subject matter—the Holy Bible—and from his hatred of the biblical stance we evangelicals maintain. When it was initially suggested to me by Jim MacKinnon that I might record my conversion and rebirth experience in book form, I prayed and meditated, and traded various ideas with Jim. I came to the conviction the project was God's will for me and promptly began writing. I anticipated especially the opportunity to dwell at some stage of the story on my new relationship with the Holy Bible. I foresaw an easy, joyful, trouble-free interlude, with the words flowing, a reflection of my fresh enthusiasm for God's written Word. But it has not been so. I have prepared this chapter laboriously, and the result seems to me to be somewhat fragmentary. There were constant interruptions during the writing; a trying secular problem imposed itself on my time; a grave illness inflicted a close relative; notes I had prepared were exasperatingly lost. And, most to be regretted, I allowed myself to be distracted and have occasionally procrastinated consciously.

I am sufficiently advanced in the wisdom that only the passing years can achieve, and God has granted me a modicum of intelligence; therefore, I recognize that this is not my usual style; I simply am not accustomed to operating in a dilatory manner. I propose that Satan has thrown his mischievous tricks in my path to incur a delay here, a little obstacle there, to rattle me and discourage the project. It is not that I am about to bestow upon the world a literary and theological gem about the Bible, nor about to unveil precious new spiritual insights into God's Word. It is only that I have stated a solid, basic, biblical belief, and Satan cannot stand for that. He keenly knows that the Word always defeats him. He can do no more than delay or hinder for a time its proclamation, so he reverts

to his ages-old annoying tactics.

I presume my former cohorts in Catholicism will chuckle at this claim of satanic sabotage as an indication that I have gone daft in all things "religious". Agnostics, Roman Catholic and Protestant liberals, and those of similar persuasion will scoff that my demonic beliefs are about as progressive as my overall biblical faith. Countless others of you, who have had brushes with the powers of darkness, if only in small, vexing manifestations, need no further explanation. We know the Evil One exists and attempts to destroy. But he does not lessen our abiding joy, nor does his interference attenuate my joy in this consideration of the Holy Bible.

Why do I single out this particular portion of my story for the joyful treatment? Hasn't the entire account been permeated with a muted but steady quality of joy in salvation, despite its stressing of my former anguish and bondage? True, it has. But all I have recalled concerning my spiritual journey, and all I have written about some noted Roman deviations, must be conformed to and judged by one criterion. And that criterion is the subject of our present meditation—the written Word of God, the Holy Bible. For me it is a joy above all others to contemplate God's incomparable Word.

As a Catholic child I learned to address Mary under one of her Roman titles, "Cause of Our Joy." Well, the title remains in my consciousness, but its object happily has been displaced. In my present position as a child of God and a joint heir with Jesus Christ, I can say without undue deliberation, "The Bible is now the cause of my joy." That is not a precise theological statement; it is not especially an orthodox confession of faith. It is a personal reply—spiritual, intellectual and emotional—to my self-imposed questions, "What aspect of your new Christian status gives you the most pleasure? Is any part of your Christian walk actually any fun? Do any of its facets fill you with a tangible joy right now?" And my answers amount to a resounding, "Yes, the Holy Bible does!"

Continuing in a personal vein, I am not being facetious when I query myself as to whether my Christian walk involves

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any aspect of "fun". Jesus Christ did not promise fun to His disciples; He did promise joy. We do not ask God that His Spirit shower us with fun; we do ask for and receive a spiritual joy. From the instant of my rebirth I have experienced in varying degrees, interrupted only by my sins, that promised fruit of the Holy Spirit, which is a sense of delight in God, and happiness because I am the object of His love. But I find this joy can strike off sparks that are its by-product, and one of these is actually "fun"—simple pleasure. Beyond the abiding joy God gives me through clinging to the written Word, He allows me an additional reward—the Bible is fun! Whereas I once approached it alternately with wariness of intellectual curiosity, I now approach it as the proper object of my study (2 Tim.2:15), whereby I will spiritually feed upon God Himself. And the result is joy and fun! It is a gracious side effect of my delving into the Word. Almost daily at work I now anticipate the pleasure of my evening private Bible study.

Again I ask you to accompany me as we probe this joyful subject. I repeat that I am not an evangelical theologian, so we are not going to attempt a learned treatise on the Scriptures. Christians of mighty intellect and spiritual depth have done and are doing that for us. There is an abundance of sound, basic books about the Bible. They are easily available at reasonable cost in all evangelical Christian bookstores. I recommend that the ex-Catholic, the interested inquirer, and the newly born-again Christian avail himself of some of those books as he begins his rewarding journey in depth into the written Word—always remembering that books about the Bible are no substitute for the Book of Books itself.

I have mused to myself, "Let this chapter be not only a happy one; let it be brief, uncluttered with footnotes, a simple sharing with others whose belief in the Scriptures to some extent, or completely, coincides with mine." So I offer you my newly gained enthusiasm for and love of the Sacred Books. It will be an **experience**, a true gift from God's Holy Spirit. Initially I wish to explain to you the basic terms and expressions we will be using to communicate our Christian belief in the Bible. Human language can express adequately for human needs the mighty message of God's revelation; He has

ordained it so. Our ability to formulate and express the abstracts and the supernatural concepts underlying God's message to us, through the medium of thoughts clothed in human speech, is not the pinnacle of the alleged evolutionary process. That humanistic view is the refuge of agnostics, proud intellectuals, and liberal "Christians" who downgrade the Bible and insist that the thoughts of God—should He deign to communicate with us—cannot be expressed in finite man-made language. Therefore, they insist, the Bible could not possibly be the Word of God except in a relative, obscure, figurative sense. But we firmly deny this! Our human language is a fit medium for God's message to us because He made it so. Creating us in His own image and likeness, He gifted us with a sharing of His own intellect, and He added the marvelous gift of speech whereby we can adequately express the concepts of our intellects. Our very gift of speech is a tiny sharing in God's limitless ability to communicate.

We need have no problem over the meaning of our English word "Bible." It is simply the rendering in our tongue of the Greek word "biblia," which is a plural form meaning "books." Since the Bible is indeed a collection of separate but unified books, the name Bible is most apt.

Basically, what do we mean by "*the Word of God?*" The Word is God speaking, revealing His inner nature, His design for His creation. There is a self-revelation of God through nature—the cosmos—which is His creation. Does not the Bible itself say, "*The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handywork.*" (Ps. 19:1) There is a further revelation from God in the conscience of man, that built-in moral guide that tells us when we do right and when we do wrong. But man cannot find God through nature, even though nature witnesses to the divine existence. Man is blinded by sin and cannot read accurately the creation that tells him there exists a God. That same sin has wounded man's conscience so that it is no longer an accurate barometer of the divine moral law. So, for sinful man there is required a self-revelation from God beyond the natural creation. That revelation is God speaking, God's Word.

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The Word consists of two parts: the Word of God written, which we call the Bible; and the Word manifested in Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God now incarnate. In His unfathomable inner triune life (the Blessed Trinity) God speaks, and that speech is a Person within the Trinity, the eternal Word (the "logos" in the Greek original). To reconcile sinful man to Himself, God sent His only-begotten Son (the eternal Word), who assumed human form in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the Word of God incarnate. *"In the beginning was the Word (logos), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* (John 1:1)

The Word of God written—the Bible, and the Word of God incarnate—Jesus Christ, are forever united and cannot be separated. They stand together, or they fall. There is no Jesus other than the Jesus of the Bible. If anyone tells us anything about Jesus that does not agree with the Scriptural revelation, it is mere speculation or a lie. Any source—whether a church, a Pope, a religious fanatic, a cult leader—that proclaims a doctrine or a message about Jesus that cannot be demonstrated from the Bible, does not merit our attention. The Bible tells it all!

What do we mean by the inspired Word of God when referring to the Bible? Our English word "inspired" means "breathed". So the Bible is "God-breathed" or inspired. This is not the colloquial use of the term by which we would say that Shakespeare or Beethoven, for instance, were inspired. No, in the biblical context we mean that God used certain men to write the Bible. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit (He breathed on them), those men were so moved in their intellects and wills that they wrote exactly what God wanted written. Roman Catholic doctrine defines it very well:

"For, by supernatural power, He (the Holy Spirit) so moved and impelled them to write—He was so present to them—that the things which He ordered, and those only, they first rightly understood, then willed faithfully to write down, and finally expressed in apt words and with infallible truth. Otherwise, it could

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not be said that He was the author of the entire Scripture.”

(Encyclical Letter of
Pope Leo XIII)

The above does not imply a mechanical dictation by God in which men functioned like tape recorders (although a few small parts of the Bible were dictated—e.g. the Ten Commandments). No, the human authors retained their individual writing styles, but they were overshadowed by the power of the Spirit, even in their choice of words, so that the resultant writings, were free of errors of any kind, doctrinal, historical, geographical, scientific, or whatever. This latter is what is meant when we state that the Bible is inerrant. All of the Bible is trustworthy, even in matters not directly related to salvation.

All we have considered about inspiration and inerrancy is claimed and witnessed to in the Bible itself. It was taught by Jesus Christ and His disciples. There is remarkable agreement in these matters between official Roman Catholicism, orthodox Protestantism, and all evangelical Christianity. Within the churches, only the so-called liberal elements have tried to mitigate these beliefs. But when belief in inspiration and inerrancy are eroded by liberal concepts, the individual churches espousing those views become vitiated of the divine guidance of the Spirit and the result is coldness, indifference, mere human social busyness, with no power to proclaim salvation.

The skeptic will ask how do I know that my biblical beliefs are trustworthy. In such an important matter where do I get my intellectual certainty concerning this Book? Well, primarily it is not an intellectual certainty. Neither I nor any human being will come to acceptance of the Bible in trusting faith as God's inerrant written Word, through an intellectual approach. Only the power of the Holy Spirit, acting on a man's intellect and will can convince him that the Bible is in truth God's Word. A study of history, of languages, of archaeology—even a study of fulfilled biblical prophecies—does not cause a

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man to accept the Bible in faith. Such studies can only lay a groundwork for an intellectual climate favorable to acceptance of the Word. One can be a competent, erudite secular scholar of the Scriptures yet not accept them in Christian faith. There are many such scholars, especially in our secular universities.

However, if a well-intentioned inquirer—and he need not be a scholar—asks God to enlighten him and give him a spiritual faith and trust in the Bible, he will be given that grace of belief. This is infallibly true, according to God's promise—*"Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and ye shall find..."* (Matt 7:7) Such an inquirer may be impressed by the lofty teachings of the Bible; or intrigued by the recorded personality of Jesus Christ, or by the remarkable fulfillment of biblical prophecies; or conscious of the marvelous unity of the Bible, or by its historical accuracy and its agreement with all archaeological finds. Or he may be moved toward the Bible by the Holy Spirit in some other manner. But if he honestly asks for biblical faith it will eventually be given to him. It was so in my case.

After I left Catholicism and the priesthood I yet remained intellectually convinced of the truth of the Bible, and specifically of the deity of Jesus Christ. I was convinced of the Bible's historical accuracy and of its agreement with archaeological discoveries. I was struck by the eerie fulfillment of many biblical prophecies (though ignorant of the unfolding of prophecies regarding the End Times and the Second Coming). I was amazed at the unity and coherence of the Bible, though it had been written in its human aspects by some 40 odd writers over a period of about 1500 years. But none of this intellectual smugness produced a living faith in Jesus Christ. Only later when I was witnessed to by a born-again Christian did this background coalesce. The Holy Spirit prompted me to ask, and I did receive. I asked for guidance and the free gift of faith, and they were given to me. The result was my acceptance of Jesus Christ, the eternal Word, as my personal Savior, and conviction of the written Word as *"quick and powerful...piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit."* Praise God, I was saved!

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When I am asked how do I know this Bible to be God's Word, I respond simply that God took the prepared background and my prayers, and infused my soul with His Holy Spirit and He gave me conviction. Now I know, and this knowledge is verified in my changed life. Together with the Scriptures and with the living Jesus Christ, I walk in inseparable harmony by the power of the Spirit. My dear friends, if this marvel be not yours already, it can be yours also. Ask!

I wish never to carp unduly nor unjustly about things Catholic. I do not criticize out of pique or belated anger. Only when I see Catholic tenets as an obstacle to Christian truth do I raise my voice in opposition. For whatever is "good" in Catholicism we rejoice, realizing nonetheless that "good" cannot offer salvation. I do pray that whatever in the Roman Catholic Church is not contradictory to the Gospel be used by the Holy Spirit as a foundation for drawing souls to Christ.

So I happily salute two wide areas of agreement between Roman Catholicism and evangelical Christianity—first, the Bible is truly God's Word, His written revelation to man; second, the Bible is inspired and inerrant. Those are most important points of agreement, thank God. One should not have to witness to his instructed Catholic or former Catholic relatives and friends that the Sacred Scriptures are God's inspired, inerrant written revelation. Ignorant or liberal Catholics, and liberal Protestants, of course, are in need of witness and conviction on the nature and the importance of the Scriptures.

I emphasize that the Roman Catholic basic teaching on the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible is sound. But then that typical and fatal Roman fallacy enters the scene. Something has been added! That Church teaches, as recently as the Second Vatican Council, that there is but one revelation from God, but that it has two sources. The first is written—the Bible; the second is the "traditions" of the living Church. In practice, as we have seen so often, the result is that the traditions of the Church actually take precedence over the written Word. How else could such teachings as the Immaculate Conception of Mary and her assumption into heaven, the sacrifice

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of the Mass, or papal infallibility, become part of the officially-proclaimed beliefs of that Church? Those doctrines are not biblical; therefore Church tradition has taken precedence.

We should mention also those books and portions of books added by the Catholic Church to the canon of the Old Testament, known as the "Apocrypha". They are regarded by the Catholic Church as inspired. Evangelical and Protestant Christianity deny them that status. The Palestinian listing of books at the time of Christ did not include them. The Protestant reformers rejected them. Not even the majority of Catholic biblical scholars agreed that they were inspired portions of the Bible. A mere reading of them demonstrates that they are not on a par with the inspired Bible itself. It is well to note carefully that neither Jesus nor any of His disciples quoted texts from those disputed books. So they plainly do not bear the stamp of the Holy Spirit.

One last point in regard to the Roman Catholic Church and the Bible is in order. It is easily verifiable that historically, despite her basic teaching regarding the written Word of God, that Church has consistently through the centuries striven to keep from her members at large the Bible in the vernacular languages—except for a few selected passages. Pre-Reformation attempts by individual bold Catholics to translate and distribute widely the Bible in the common languages of the people were met with violent opposition from the Roman hierarchy. The success of the Protestant reformers in bringing the Scriptures to the people in the vernacular left the Roman authorities aghast. They tried to stem the tide at the post-Reformation Council of Trent, but it was too late.

Only in modern times has the Roman Church reluctantly and self-consciously made the Bible available to the people—and not even that in all countries where the Roman Church is in the majority. And it has not been successful. Lay Catholics, and many of their priests, remain ignorant of the Scriptures. They may know a few isolated verses that, out of context, appear to support some Catholic doctrine. Otherwise it is an unknown book. Ask a Catholic priest at random to give a sermon, for instance, on the book of Romans, and he would either

decline or frantically go in search of borrowed material.

After the Second Vatican Council there have been sporadic attempts in some locations to sponsor lay Bible-study groups. It has been my experience that those attempts have been mostly pathetic. It would be a marvelous thing if the well-intentioned teachers of the study groups were grounded in the Word. In fact, it is a dangerous development, because while shared biblical knowledge would be just great, there is scarcely any such knowledge for sharing; and shared ignorance is catastrophic—the blind leading the blind!

Sadly, there is one last caution. The Roman Catholic Church insists that she alone is the infallible interpreter of the Bible. No room is left for the marvelous operation of the Holy Spirit who illumines the believer and then empowers him to discern or interpret. True, there must be sound knowledge and study; some do have the special gift of teaching the Church—Christ ordained that. But we shall never revert to the pre-Reformation situation where the Bible was captive to the hierarchy of the institutional Church. The Protestant martyrs did not die in vain!

So, Catholics are simply not “people of the Book”. I do not recall seeing a Bible in any Catholic grade school I attended. I went to public high school. The first Bibles I was aware of were carried by Protestant kids on their way to Sunday School; therefore they were in the category of “forbidden books”. I do not remember a Bible even in my good Aunt Mary’s home. It is a fact that we were taught “Bible History”—which was Bible stories, but it was unrelated in our young minds to the Book itself, of which we were not aware. I remember one enterprising nun—God save her—who tried to get us to memorize the names of the books of the Bible; but this was not accompanied by any Scripture reading, and the effort fell by the wayside. Our prayer books and missals, to be sure, contained passages of Scripture, but nobody told us they were excerpts from the Bible. We were subjected to readings from the Epistles and Gospels at Mass. (I say **subjected** because such readings were usually done hurriedly and in slipshod fashion as though they were an intrusion on the beautiful action of the Mass!) And

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most Catholics in the congregation were not even aware they were listening—if indeed they listened while thumbing their rosary beads—to selected portions of Holy Scripture.

But somewhere in my early years the mighty God led me to be unobtrusively aware of the existence of His written Word, and I was drawn toward it. During my junior year of high school I made a trip to downtown Los Angeles specifically to buy a New Testament. My first possession of the treasure! And only after I was out of high school did I obtain a complete Bible for myself. Over succeeding years I became familiar with it. I didn't learn chapter and verse, but I did learn to find my way around in both Testaments and memorized many texts. I'm afraid they were mostly ones supportive of Catholic doctrines. By the time I entered the seminary I had a biblical background superior to that of Catholics in general. When the liturgical revival and the Second Vatican Council erupted on the Roman Catholic scene I was exceptionally prepared. In the glow of my early priesthood I tried to inject the Scriptures into my teaching, my sermons, and even in public recitation of the rosary, insofar as that is possible. Again, I fear it was mostly an intellectual exercise on my part, and an effort to upstage the Protestants. But in the long run God took my poor endeavors, with all their tainted motivation, and used them to hasten me on my road to rebirth in Jesus Christ. When I was witnessed to, I wasn't floundering around with complete surprise at the content of the Holy Bible.

We who have left the authoritarian domination by the hierarchy, who have abandoned Roman "infallible proclamations," need have no fear that we have been left rudderless. We have God's written Word and the guidance of the Spirit who brings us to all Truth.

I conclude this happy chapter fully realizing that my treatment has been inadequate. There is so much that needs to be said. Where does one start and conclude when dealing with the inexhaustible subject of the Scriptures? I have not even brushed upon the various roles of the Bible in the Christian life—it is spiritual reading without compare; it is study material without end; it moves the intellect and will; it

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illuminates the secrets of God's heart; it reproves me in my sin; it convicts me in my unbelief; it comforts me in my weaknesses and it supports me in my few strengths. It is everything that matters in today's confused world scene. It is the **only tangible thing** that is trustworthy in the mad whirl of materialism by which we are caught up. If we had not the Bible, what would we have but eventual destruction and death?

Let us cling to this Holy Bible as the divine source of our religious knowledge. If individually we abandon the written Word as the bedrock of faith, we suffer spiritual calamity and probably lose our salvation. **If, as institutional churches, we water down the Bible from its eminent position as the inspired, inerrant written Word of God, we lose our status as parts of the Body of Christ—the Church—and become instead ridiculous social agencies competing with secular governments for the favors of men and neglecting that which is most important—the proclamation of the message of salvation as revealed in the Scriptures.** Catholicism becomes even more ridiculous in its manifestations where the "experience of the Spirit" supplants the written Word; for example, the Catholic charismatics who never had a solid biblical grounding to begin with. Protestantism becomes a traitor to its glorious heritage when it dilutes its pristine acceptance of God's Word as taught by Luther and Calvin. You and I as individual Christians can help to defeat the satanic assaults of biblical liberalism by standing fast in our faith.

Let me close with this offering of some verses from the Holy Bible, about the Bible—verses that sustain me and convict me:

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Psalm 119:105)

"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." (Psalm 119:11)

"He sent his word, and healed them, and

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delivered them from their destructions.” (Psalm 107:20)

“So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:11)

“...scripture cannot be broken;” (John 10:35)

“...Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God?” (Mark 12:24)

“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.” (John 5:39)

“...they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” (Acts 17:11)

“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.” (Matthew 24:35)

“And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;” (Ephesians 6:17)

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Praise the Lord!

CHAPTER NINE

THE HOLY SPIRIT

"...I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it sees him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." (John 14: 16-17)

As I have advanced through the preceding chapters, God has moved me to clarify my thoughts and beliefs relative to many facets of evangelical Christianity. The old chaos of Roman Catholic traditions, and the frigid offerings of secular philosophy have faded and given place to cleaner and well-defined, biblically-based Christian concepts. I cannot attribute this re-orientation to simple intellectual growth, nor solely to my own self-reforming efforts. There has been a Power involved, and that Power is the subject matter of this chapter.

During this time of parallel writing and Christian growth, I have constantly asked myself, "Why are you writing this book? Who are your hoped-for readers?" I have undertaken the writing in the simple belief that it is God's present will for me, and in the hope it will give glory to Him, discounting any literary pretensions by myself. I am writing in response to Christ's mandate, "*You shall be my witnesses.*" This book constitutes my witness.

I hope my readers will be former Catholics who have not found Christ; confused nominal Catholics who are in a pilgrimage of search but have not definitively severed their bonds with Catholicism; others who find themselves

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prohibited from fully practicing their Catholicism because of the stringencies of Roman Catholic canon law in regard to marriage; former Catholics who are now genuine born-again Christians and who would like some printed help in witnessing to their relatives and friends still in the Catholic Church; Protestants who have become victims of theological liberalism in their denominations; and all who are weary and heavily burdened and have been invited by Christ to find refreshment in Him. An ambitious listing of potential readers, it is indeed. But man proposes, and God disposes. If my message reflects Christ's message, the proper readers will be found.

While this writing progresses and I interrogate myself on my motives and qualifications, there expands within me a fuller realization of what was the great void in my life prior to rebirth in Christ. That great "black hole" in my abortive attempts at Christianity was the absence of the Holy Spirit! My delayed realization of that spiritual vacuum prompts me again to remind all who read these words that I am not writing theology. As a born-again evangelical I have had to discard so much of the formal "Knowledge" acquired under Roman Catholic auspices. Theologically speaking, I would say I had to start again at the high-school level, and my re-education is in progress even as I write this book. I ask that nobody judge me as a theologian. I am trying to narrate God's action in my life—not attempting to define such actions with scholastic precision.

Long before I became sufficiently familiar with the Holy Bible to be aware of its many Trinitarian texts, I knew the majestic words which introduce God's revelation to us: *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."* These are the stark first two verses of Scripture (Gen 1:1-2), the keystone of all that follows. It is momentous that as He begins His written message to fallen man, He intimates that though He is One God, there is a plurality within His own essence: *"God created...the Spirit of God moved."* This is our first knowledge of the inner life of God in the most Holy Trinity! A bit later in the Book of Genesis (1:26), comes the

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intriguing verse: *“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...”* Many regard this as a further reference to the Trinity as the progressive revelation unfolds. Whatever the significance of those specific words, the existence of three Persons in One God is a progressive revelation—first hinted at dimly, expanded more fully in the Old Testament by references to “the Spirit of the Lord” and to the prophesied coming Messiah. In the New Testament the Trinity is more clearly revealed: Jesus unequivocally placed Himself on an equal basis with the Father and the Holy Spirit, both of whom he taught to be very God. He identified Himself with the great *“I AM”*, or Jehovah, of the Old Testament. At the end of His earthly mission Jesus gave the Great Commission in the one name of the Three Persons. (Mt 28:19-20) The night before His death, in His loving farewell to the Apostles, Jesus clarified the relationship He bore to Father and Holy Spirit. (John 14 - entire 14th Chapter) In the New Testament epistles, the Trinitarian teaching is explicit. So the truth that God is Three Persons in One Divine Essence—only One God, but Three Persons—was only slowly and gradually made known to fallen man. God’s Oneness was emphasized in the Old Testament when it was necessary continually to confront the chosen people with their monotheism as they struggled in an era of polytheistic idolatry. In the New Testament, the Trinitarian aspect of God’s nature becomes the dynamic principle when the great drama of redemption, salvation and sanctification takes place. The primitive descendants of Adam and Eve were told almost nothing about the Trinity. The people who witnessed Calvary, the empty tomb, the ascension, and the coming of the Spirit on Pentecost were told much about it; otherwise they could not have participated in those salvation events and reaped their benefits.

The Spirit has existed eternally, and from creation onward He is the sustaining power in all creation. He guided the affairs of man from the beginning, and particularly He implemented God’s designs in the history of Israel. He inspired the prophets. He came upon individuals, empowering them to carry out God’s plans. But He did not dwell in individuals nor in the collective people of Israel. During Jesus’ lifetime, He was with the apostles and disciples because they were with Jesus,

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who was filled with the Spirit. Not until Pentecost did He fill and indwell individuals, having then been sent by the Father and the Son. The very bodies of individual believers then became temples of the Holy Spirit as He literally took up His abode in them. And simultaneously the Spirit began His collective residence in the body of believers, the Church. *“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”* (1 Cor 3:16) *“What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you...?”* (1 Cor 6:19)

I have repeatedly expressed regret or wonderment at the multitudinous deficiencies in my “religious” life prior to my rebirth in Christ. Some of those lacks I blamed on institutional Catholicism and its teaching of the traditions of men; others I attribute to my own sinful ego and to sloth. Ultimately it matters not how I attribute them unless that reckoning be the result of prayerful meditation, and consultation with the Word of God, and be accompanied by repentance. It is felicitous that this writing effort has prodded me to meditate prayerfully on my former spiritual wasteland and to flee to the Bible for enlightenment.

So it is not merely off the cuff that I propose these facts and related questions. Though I was a product of a mixed Catholic/Protestant marriage and a victim of its early breakup, I did soon receive a Catholic education. I was intensively instructed in the home of a caring relative and in parochial schools. I was drilled in the Catechism, the history of the Church and the lives of the saints. I was indoctrinated into all the lore of Catholicism, including the Marian cult. I was taught to respect the visible hierarchical structure of the Church, from Pope down to the always-present parish priest. I received the sacraments—Penance, Holy Eucharist and Confirmation—in proper order and with what was regarded as adequate preparation. I was introduced into the rich panoply of Catholic devotional life. I was nearly smothered in the mantle of “Holy Mother Church”. Much later I was subjected to the peculiar discipline and the learning process of the Catholic seminary. I received the Sacrament of Orders at the hands of a bishop, and I spent some years in the active ministry of the priesthood.

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Why did I never find Christ in a trusting, saving relationship?

Why, when exposed to all the external gadgetry of Roman Catholicism, was I not able to intellectually penetrate to a spiritual core in that complicated ecclesiastical organization and encounter a personal Christ ready to offer me free salvation? Why did I not achieve a spiritual grasp of the great truths of revelation? Why did I find only a rigid intellectualism (the catechism), and a strange mixture of sentimentality (Mary) and subjective emotionalism (effete devotion to the Eucharist)? It was not simply that I had no living acquaintanceship with the Holy Bible, as related in the preceding chapter—that was but a symptom of a greater lack. The cause of all those deficiencies and errors was a void that is now frightening to contemplate—the Holy Spirit was not active in me!

Let me again hasten to affirm—the basic Catholic theology of the Holy Spirit is orthodox and sound. It is official Roman Catholic teaching that there is one eternal, omnipotent God. That God is One in essence, but He is Three in personality. There is a Father, a Son, and a Holy Spirit. They are equal, each is the one God. But they are distinct as Persons. So, the Father is God, but He is not the Son, nor is He the Holy Spirit, and so on. God is indivisibly One—there could not be three Gods. But in the mystery of His inner life He is Three Persons. This is biblical teaching, and no evangelical Christian would question it.

Further teaching—and it is still sound—is that the Three Persons in their unity partake in all divine activity—for example, creation is the activity of Father, Son and Spirit. And yet, there is an “appropriation” of activities within the Trinity (and here our limited, sin-darkened intellects strive for an adequate language.) Thus, neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit assumed human flesh and died on the Cross. Only the Son did that! Yet, when One Person acts, all Three act! This is the unfathomable mystery of the Trinity—the hallmark of Christianity. The Bible does not argue the Trinitarian existence, it reveals it and proposes it as God’s disclosure demanding our trusting faith.

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The Bible itself, the early Church fathers, the councils of the Church, the great theologians, the Protestant Reformers—all accept the mystery of the Trinity and are able to convey certain aspects of its reality in our confined human languages.

All heresies that historically have arisen to rend the unity of the Church, the Body of Christ, have in some sense or to some degree attacked or diluted Trinitarian teaching. While adherence to the basic Trinitarian theology does not always guarantee Christian orthodoxy in even some of the related and most important beliefs, departure from Trinitarian theology **always** guarantees error and a resultant perversion of Christianity. It is not my intent to cite the great anti-Trinitarian errors of past centuries; we have not the space nor the time in this short narrative. But I look around at the so-called “Christian” scene today, and I make certain observations that lead to painful conclusions. I observe a world-straddling religious body that claims it is the One True Church of Christ. It holds the historic creeds in relation to the Trinity. It has an elaborate theology on Father, Son and Holy Spirit and restricts His activity to certain channels, without scriptural warrant. The result is Roman Catholicism, that strange mixture of truth and error.

I observe mainline Protestant denominations vitiated by liberal inroads, which have denied to the Bible the Holy Spirit’s sovereign control of inspiration and total inerrancy. The result is liberal Protestant churches that do not hesitate to blunder on and question the deity of Jesus Christ. And hence they become merely well-endowed ecclesiastical bureaucracies, powerless to preach sure salvation.

I observe sects that appropriate the title “Christian”, but deny the divinity of Christ and/or the very existence of a personal Holy Spirit. The result is Mormonism, or Jehovah’s Witnesses, or the Moonies.

But my experience, of course, has been with Roman Catholicism. In the organization I learned by heart the accurate but soulless catechism Trinitarian definitions of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I mouthed the Trinitarian doxologies and

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formulas so many countless thousands of times that they became narcotic murmurings—"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

I learned that the sacrament of Confirmation was "that sacrament whereby we receive the Holy Ghost, to make us strong and perfect Christians and soldiers of Jesus Christ." I received that sacrament of Confirmation, and it made not a whit of detectable difference in my Christian life. I was told about the "gifts of the Holy Ghost" and the "fruits of the Holy Ghost", but they were submitted as objects for memorization, and "things" to be achieved by my efforts (though God **could help me** obtain them). I was never given a Bible to help me place them in their proper perspective as true "gifts" freely given, and as "fruits" flowing from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

I suppose at best the Holy Spirit meant to me that awesome wind and those tongues of fire at the first Pentecost. It was as though God the Holy Spirit put on the one first-class show of power and then he reverted to relative obscurity.

I was told that the Holy Spirit did indeed guide the Church (Roman Catholic, of course) in a special manner, by specifically keeping the Pope infallible and the Church in general from teaching error of any sort. Now that's a restraint placed by men upon the all-powerful free action of the Holy Spirit!

I learned vaguely that the Holy Spirit comes to individual Christians (Roman Catholics) through the seven sacraments, the ordinary channels of grace, defined as those "outward signs instituted by Christ, to give grace." Except for the sacrament of Confirmation, the Holy Spirit was somewhat of an adjunct in the elaborate sacramental pipeline. He was officially recognized as the power making the sacraments efficacious, but truly he remained an unknown quantity. And that was a further stifling of His almighty power.

Moreover, I was taught that before Confession I should pray to the Holy Spirit so that I could remember my sins by kind and by number, and thus I could enumerate them accurately

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in the confessional. To withhold a sin, or to conceal the number of times, when dealing with so-called mortal sins, and confessing them to the priest, was a lie to the Holy Spirit and a great sacrilege. Small wonder I did not seek out an intimacy with that frightening kind of Holy Spirit.

When in later years I considered the idea of a vocation to the priesthood, how could I have sought guidance from my concept of an ambiguous, amorphous Spirit? In truth, He did not dwell in me; therefore He did not enter with power into my vocational deliberations.

In the seminary, again the Holy Spirit was not a living, dynamic force. He was the subject of the dogmatic theology tract "On the Holy Spirit,"—a cold, legalistic approach to that Person of the Trinity Who is a fire! He was the subject of a beautiful Latin hymn "Veni Creator Spiritus" (31) —come Creator Spirit. But that hymn was usually chanted in a veritable medieval atmosphere of fear and terror as we were herded into Chapel a few minutes prior to the beginning of each semester's scholastic exams. We were cringing, in Latin, before a Creator Spirit whom we suspected would do nothing to rescue us from the tyrannies of the seminary faculty—unchristian tyrannies that were especially unleashed at semester exams. We were on our own, and we knew it. Nice having met you, Holy Spirit! How can one question why there are no Spirit-filled Catholic priests?

The climax of this tragedy of the ridiculous was certainly my ordination to the Catholic priesthood. In Roman teaching this is the sacrament whereby, through the laying-on of the bishop's hands, the candidate receives the powers of Christ's priesthood, by the invocation of the Holy Spirit. (This is a first-rate example of Catholic admixture of biblical teaching and human tradition!) Remember, the bishop is considered a successor of the apostles, so the Catholic pipeline theory of apostolic succession is involved. The idea of a continual sacrifice of the Mass is involved; the idea of the disappearance

(31) See cassette tape THE ANTICHRIST LANGUAGE:
"666" by Alberto Rivera, AIC, Alta Loma, Ca.

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of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ is involved; the idea of forgiveness of others' sins by the priest is involved. All these powers are allegedly given through the imposition of the hands of the bishop and by his prayer to the Holy Spirit. But how could the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, publicly and solemnly subscribe to these pagan errors? He could not.

I wish this not to deteriorate to the level of an anti-Catholic polemic. But my contacts were with Catholicism, and they were intimate contacts. I have entitled this chapter "The Holy Spirit". I have referred to Him as the Spirit of Truth. So, however reluctantly in human terms, I must state the truth. Otherwise I would now in fact be lying to the Holy Spirit.

Error cannot substantially invade the invisible Church of Christ—the body of all true regenerated believers. But it can, has and does invade the denominational hierarchical structures which men rightly erect to make visible their membership in the Body of Christ. The invisible Church of its nature expresses itself in visible congregations, but it cannot be substantially invaded by error because its very existence is dependent on basic Gospel truth. One cannot be reborn and become a member of the invisible Church except he embrace the irreducible truth of the Gospel message. This is what Christ meant when He said the gates of hell would not prevail against His church.

On the other hand, the visible Church, consisting as it does of myriad denominational expressions, has and does succumb to errors. The denominational groupings are man-made structures based on God's Word; but Christ made no promises to protect those groupings from falling into errors. Why don't I castigate the Protestant denominations and the Protestant-derived non-denominational groups with the same zeal with which I pursue Catholicism? Well, for some very cogent reasons. The conservative born-again congregations within the traditional Protestant denominations, the Pentecostals, the non-denominational evangelicals—all admit that error can and does assail and invade them. Satan is always busy trying to deceive, if possible, even the elect. But all those

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Christian congregations have the means for correcting their faults; they continually and humbly review their teachings and practices in the light of Holy Scripture. They do, for the most part, yield themselves as visible churches to the control of the Holy Spirit, and truth eventually prevails. Thank God it is this refining power of the Holy Spirit that will finally extirpate the liberal aberrations from the Protestant churches, should the Lord tarry in His return.

Not so with Roman Catholicism. Here error becomes entrenched and ends up as solemnly-defined dogma. The doctrine of infallibility precludes the Roman Church from correcting its official doctrines. It paints itself into a dogmatic corner from which there is no extrication. It surely is obvious that the Holy Spirit is not the dynamism behind such mischief.

I am now forced to face the frightening knowledge that most of my life was spent bereft of the sustaining activity of God's Holy Spirit. Despite my familiarity with the Roman formulas; despite my reception of 5 of their 7 sacraments; despite an indoctrinational education in the seminary; even despite a gradual familiarization with the Holy Bible, I was dead in my sins. I was ignorant of the Holy Spirit. Like the disciples of John at Ephesus, I could say of my situation then, "*... (I) have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.*" (Acts 19:2) I was a lifeless spiritual dishrag because the Holy Spirit did not dwell in me. I was incapable of achieving salvation—damned to hell, if you will!

But in the role of His ordinary protective care over His creation, the Holy Spirit was always over me. He did not dwell in me and fill me, but He was over me as Lord of Creation at all times. And doubtless He came upon me from time to time, unrecognized, to operate according to His own plans. Else how could I have ever made decisions and confronted situations that eventually brought me to rebirth in Jesus Christ? For His own inscrutable purposes He pursued me down the labyrinth of the years.

How to convey in words what happened to me? I have

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already attempted to sketch my spiritual emptiness—the futility, the near-despair of attempting to lead what I considered a religious life while I was still in my sins, unregenerated, devoid of the indwelling Spirit, laboring at a spurious Christianity, dependent on good works, penances and devotions. It is almost too painful to recall, even from my present happy situation.

And then I was born again! There was the ineffable transition so graphically portrayed in the scriptural imagery of light—I was in darkness; and the light shone upon me, and the light was Christ; I was dead in my sins, and eternal life was given to me and I became alive in Christ. I was a spiritual pauper, and I became a joint-heir with Christ to the Father's riches. I was an orphan, and I was made a son of God. I was a carnal creature, and I became a new man with a new nature equipped to worship God in Spirit and in Truth. And this was all accomplished by the action of the Holy Spirit. Assuredly the Lord had helped me make it through the night.

In my born-again musings I have figured out what I refer to as my “Holy Spirit timetable”. Let us here not search for theological niceties, and we will prescind from the creative act of the Spirit which fashioned me to begin with. The timetable goes something like this:

During grade-school years. The Spirit allowed me to be grounded in traditional, conservative Catholicism so that grounding could be used in His fashion years later.

During high-school and partial college years: The Spirit moved me to look out from my Catholic cocoon and observe that there was a world outside of Catholicism, even a world that considered itself Christian. I was gently but persistently nudged toward an intellectual knowledge of the Holy Bible.

The years with the Armed Forces: The Spirit moved me to circumstances that precipitated my decision to become a Catholic priest despite many practical difficulties. 1955 was the pivotal year in this period. That was the year of decision, and after 1955 there was some formative factor in my life that had not been there before.

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The years of the Seminary and the Catholic priesthood: The Holy Spirit led me through this period of formal indoctrination, sacramental ordination and priestly activity, to teach me at last that there is no salvation in a church or religious system as such.

The day I left the priesthood: One of the most important steps of my lifetime. The Spirit caused me to renounce and condemn all efforts to achieve salvation through creeds, sacraments, devotions, good works, whatever. All the false props of my futile religious strivings were swept from under me by the Holy Spirit, and I was unaware of what He was accomplishing in me.

The curious years: How else to label this period? I had given up all external religious practices; the Spirit led me immediately to a satisfying secular job with the Detroit Police Department. I retained an intellectual belief in the deity of Jesus Christ as Savior. But I was a candidate for eternal perdition because I was indifferent—no active faith, very few good works. I was quietly and pointlessly living out my allotted days; I was a caricature of man created in the image and likeness of God.

But wait! At that time God cast upon me a vague sense of unease; intimations of mortality; a restless, unarticulated desire for something more. The mighty Holy Spirit was brooding over me, about to disrupt my ordered but useless existence.

And during this latter curious period, the Spirit prepared another human being whose path was to converge on mine with an impact that would have eternal repercussions for me. (Throughout salvation history, in both the Old and New Testaments, God has acted thusly, grooming chosen individuals as His instruments to garner other souls for Himself.) Unbeknown to me, while I stumbled through those curious years, God prepared a young man outside the orbit of my activities. He selected this youth, a nominal cradle Christian, moved upon him and brought him to the threshold of acceptance of Jesus Christ through a university campus ministry. The

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young man made his free decision for Christ, became filled with the Holy Spirit, and was made an active, witnessing, born again, evangelical Christian. After his university graduation, the Spirit brought him to the Detroit Police Department as a rookie police officer. And one day, as I related early in this narrative, the Spirit whom I scarcely acknowledged, led me to confront the young cop. This was Jim MacKinnon, to whom I introduced you in Chapter Three. Praise God eternally for that meeting, arranged in His eternal plans. Such is my "Holy Spirit timetable".

Is the foregoing only the pleasant but fanciful mental meandering of a self-styled born-again Christian? No; it all happened, and in that sequence. The timetable is scripturally sound, mirroring as it does the divine mode of intervention in human affairs revealed to us in the Bible. And I know it is true, because the Holy Spirit witnesses to me that it is. And remember, it is the function of the Spirit to witness. He does not operate to glorify Himself; rather He functions to glorify the Father and The Son, Jesus Christ. He witnesses not to Himself but to Jesus. I have not ended up as a "Holy Spirit freak"; I have become a Christian witnessing to Jesus Christ.

If you would ask me, and legitimately so, how am I certain that the Spirit has accomplished all these wonders for me and in me, I would reply: I know, first, because I have experienced the Holy Spirit, second, I know from the witness of Scripture and the promises therein regarding the Spirit; third, I know from my personal observation of other Spirit-controlled lives.

First; I do not espouse "religion" which is primarily based on experience. Faith must be grounded in the Word of God. But certain experiences are guaranteed in that Word of God to the believer. And those promises were fulfilled in me.

Prior to the moment that I received Jesus Christ as my Savior, I had never **experienced** the Holy Spirit. "*For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body,*" (1 Cor 12:13) referring not to the rite of water baptism but to regeneration—being born again of the Spirit. It was not primarily an emotional experience. No; the Holy Spirit enlightened me to confess that

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I was a sinner and that I was helpless to remedy that condition. He moved me to turn my heart away from my sins in repentance. He led me to trust in Christ alone for salvation. I said "yes" to Christ and opened myself to the effects of His atoning blood. The Spirit moved me to turn over my life to Christ in confidence and to invite the Spirit Himself into my spirit to lead me to sanctification. All of this, and its realization, occurred in an instant. I was aware of it without intellectual striving nor emotional fireworks. I **knew**; and this knowledge has remained constant since the day of my rebirth.

I further tangibly experienced for the first time an interior spiritual and intellectual assurance of salvation—no more agonizing over a doubtful eternal destiny. And my entrenched guilt feelings vanished. I received instant peace, joy, and a happy expectation of the Last Days and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Let nobody try to convince me I didn't experience the Holy Spirit!

My **second** conviction of the reality of the Holy Spirit is my new living relationship with the Holy Bible. In a short span of little more than two weeks my view of the Bible was transformed from a respectful, intellectual acceptance to that insatiable thirst for the living water which is the hallmark of the true Christian. It is to be noted—and this is important—that in those few transitional days before I received salvation, my witnessing friend concentrated on the Scriptures and the work of the Holy Spirit, neglecting neither in favor of the other. He literally gave me a short indoctrination into the living Word of God and into what the Spirit would accomplish in me if I were to accept Christ. When the happy day speedily arrived, I was ready, armored with a fresh intimacy with the Scriptures and a readiness to become controlled by the Spirit. The Word of God was sent to me and it did not return to God void, as the Word itself promises in Isaiah 55:11, "*So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void.*"

Jim did not use clever philosophical arguments, nor intrude his private judgments. He simply presented the Gospel message, made more credible, it is true, by his own Spirit-con-

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trolled life-style. And he boldly told me it was up to me to make a decision. There I was—lifted up naked before God—and forced to make a choice. Praise God, the saving decision was swiftly accomplished. And from the day of that rebirth in Christ, the Spirit has fed me with the Holy Bible to lead me onward in the Christian life.

My third assurance of the active reality of the Holy Spirit is an even more subjective one. I am a conscious, sentient personality, created by almighty God. Everything for me, and for every other creature, must be ultimately reduced to something **subjective** if it is to become my reality. Thus, redemption through the shed blood of Christ is an **objective** reality. It was accomplished once and for all on Calvary 1900 years before I was born. But it became mine (subjective) when I appropriated it for myself by a free decision to embrace Christ. Had I rejected it, the objective reality would still exist, but it would not have become mine. Likewise, the inspired Holy Bible is an **objective** reality. It would yet exist had I never been born. But it became a **subjective** reality when the Spirit moved me to acquiesce in faith that it is indeed the inspired, inerrant Word of God, demanding my love and obedience.

So there is nothing wrong with the **subjective**. It is not, as the empirical materialists would have it, a “dirty word”. And I move on to my third and subjective assurance of the reality of the Holy Spirit. I have observed the powerful effects of the Spirit **outside of myself**. The born-again Christian does not lose his powers of observation. Indeed the Scripture assures us that in some realms our observation will become more acute. *“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.”* (I Cor. 2:12-13)

I have observed the Holy Spirit alive and powerful in a congregation of born-again Christians where I worship frequently. The Spirit’s activity is palpable in that community worship. There the Word of God is proclaimed with assurance and con-

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viction, consistently and effectively. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are not despised, and they are evident in public manifestations. The fruits of the Holy Spirit abound profusely in the worship and in the fellowship between individual members of the congregation, a true local visibility of the Body of Christ which is the Church. Always when I worship there, in decency and in order, I am refreshed by the water of the living Word, and I receive the strengthening or comfort of the Spirit enabling me to continue to walk in Christ by faith. The pastor of that church conducts a Spirit-filled ministry solidly grounded in the Scriptures. He is Spirit-controlled and communicates that control readily and personally to me. All of his encounters with me have been Christ-centered and Spirit-led. He has been to me an unfailing help in my infant Christian walk.

And again, there is Jim MacKinnon, the young man who witnessed to me and led me to the Lord. His unassuming life, completely docile to the promptings of the Spirit, has been an anchor to me and has goaded me to submit more fully to the Spirit in my own life. He acted as the Lord's primary instrument to communicate to me the dynamism of the written Word of God and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. I ask Jim's indulgence at this further invasion of his privacy and natural modesty. But it is necessary if I am to tell my story.

I recall most particularly that when Jim was witnessing to me, he emphasized that if I accepted the Lord, the Spirit would come upon me and dwell **within** me, and that I could confidently expect to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Then the Spirit would be in me fully and I need only make myself more and more open to His limitless activity. And so it has been. Now I am strong insofar as I allow myself to be controlled by the Spirit of the Lord. I am weak insofar as I impede the Spirit, grieving or quenching Him by my lack of full cooperation.

Would that we had the time and space to plumb in greater depth into the universal activity of the Spirit—how He reproves the world of its sin, and of righteousness and judge-

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ment (John 16:7-11); how He hinders the growth of lawlessness in the world (2 Thess 2:7) as He readies the cosmos for the End Times and the Second Coming of Christ; how He further acts through us Christians who must be the salt of the earth and a light to the world (Matt. 5:13-14). The Spirit empowers us to be that salt and light.

Further, how the Holy Spirit works in the Church, the Body of Christ, which He Himself brought into being: *"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many."* (I Cor. 12:13-14) And how the Spirit lives in that Church: *"In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."* (Eph. 2:21-22)

How the Holy Spirit gives real gifts to specific individuals for service in the Church: *"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith..."* (Eph. 4:11-13)

And how he illumines the minds of us individual Christians: *"...God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God."* (I Cor. 2:10-11) How he comforts us: *"...walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost..."* (Acts 9:31)

How He sanctifies us: *"that the offering...might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost."* (Rom. 15:16)

How He seals us in our salvation and is the internal witness of its reality: *"For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us..."* (Heb 10:14-15)

We must ponder these reassuring words from the First Letter of John: *"This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the*

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Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth." (1 John 5:6-7)

Good Christians, when you witness to your relatives, friends, or acquaintances who are former Roman Catholics, or who still find themselves in that system; or to your liberal Protestant friends who have abandoned the Gospel; or to any non-believers remember that you are witnessing to Jesus Christ, not primarily to the Holy Spirit. You must proclaim Jesus Christ and salvation through His blood. You do this by presenting the written Word of God. *"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."* (Rom 10:17) You point out the promises of the Holy Spirit in that Word. But always you are preaching Jesus Christ and Him crucified. All the inexhaustible powers of the Holy Spirit are literally at your disposal as you witness to the Lord. God speed you. If you do your allotted role, the Spirit will be activated in all his mighty strength to bring those souls to Christ.

And one last thought from the depths of my concern must be expressed. This may foment resentment and argument, but truth demands I barge onward. From my background, training, priestly experience, and all the varied elements that constitute my life to date, I withhold my approval from the general ecumenical movement within Christendom, and from the Catholic charismatic movement. It is my conviction that neither endeavor is basically enlivened by the Spirit. The stated goals of the ecumenical movement are too ambiguous and too fraught with dangers to pure biblical evangelicism. Good intentions in the cause of unity do not suffice. The preponderance of liberals within the ranks of the ecumenical strivers—both Roman Catholic and Protestant—suggest strongly that the movement anticipates the bogus super-church prophesied in the Book of Revelation. We cannot make common cause with Satan. Likewise, the Catholic Charismatic movement, while loaded with good intentions and embracing many devout Christ-seeking Catholics, is also tainted with liberalism and is too heavily laden with seekers of "experiences" who are ignorant of the Scriptures. And the Holy Spirit cannot be the author of a movement that still, in large measure, adheres to the traditions of men as taught by

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Catholicism. People who are filled with the Holy Spirit and recognize Christ as their total Savior, simply do not turn around and ask Mary or any other saint to help them attain salvation! I see that movement at best as a tool which the Spirit is using to eventually draw many souls from what Luther called the "Babylonian captivity of the Church." Ultimately all charismatics who wish to know salvation and be filled with the Holy Spirit will have to "come out from her", as commanded in the Book of Revelation. Perhaps the Roman authorities will even have evicted those souls from her communion before the End Days are actually upon us.

Take heart, dear charismatics, if you are alarmed and confused at my admonitions. Come out from her, and rest with me in the Spirit, the Comforter.

And you Christians who are caught up in the exhilarating pursuits of the ecumenical movement, take heed that there already exists among born-again Christians, who constitute the true Church of Christ, a marvelous unity. Already we are all one in Christ. Christ's prayer for unity has largely been fulfilled. Beware of trying to build a bogus, super-church on the flimsy foundation of a least-common denominator perversion of the Gospel. Trust in the Holy Spirit to bring about any further external unity that is necessary for the implementation of His plan. Unity, of course, is to be desired if it is a unity of Spirit and Truth. Unity is to be shunned if it is a unity of compromise. The ecumenical movement, as presently constituted, is well-labeled by my Christian friend Jim, "The devil's last lie".

CHAPTER TEN

THE END TIMES

“And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” (Matthew 24:6-14)

During the writing of the preceding portions of this personal history and testimony it has become progressively clearer to me that it would be most fitting that the concluding chapter be concerned with the End Times—the Last Days. Simultaneous with this clarification of my thoughts and of my writing plan, I became aware that I felt a certain timidity about presuming to plunge into this subject; an oppressive attitude intruded into my meditations, and a defeatist shadow crept over me. Whispering suggestions of my total inadequacy

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to expound on the majestic events of the final days invaded my spirit. But, praise God, my regeneration and my Christian walk in the Spirit have equipped me to overcome all negative insinuations!

I have asked myself a few questions: If I am a reborn Christian attempting to open myself fully to the Spirit, why should I feel any timidity? What is the source of an oppressive attitude? Whence would a defeatist shadow come to cover me, a Christian? Who would make whispering suggestions sufficiently powerful to invade my very spirit? The answer came to me quite simply; the instigator of all these is Satan, my adversary.

I make no boast that His Satanic Majesty has decided to engage me in combat because I am a monumental threat to his designs. I believe that Satan himself reserves his personal all-out assaults for those stalwart Spirit-filled disciples of the Lord who are winning souls for Christ en masse. Satan as an individual cannot be in more than one place at a time. His powerful but finite resources must certainly be marshalled where the battle against him rages most strongly on the world scene.

But, this Prince of Darkness has legions of evil spirits to do his bidding and fight his more localized skirmishes. Thus, it is not fanaticism nor delusion for me to realize that the content of this book could well be regarded in satanic circles as a minor skirmish worthy of the attentions of one of Satan's underlings. I have presented Truth; I have extolled the written Word of God; I have focused on the atoning blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ; I have related my joy in the Holy Spirit. None of this is acceptable to the Evil One. Therefore my witness, as it is recorded in these pages, is subject to satanic meddling. But the Holy Spirit within me—however imperfectly I have allowed Him to operate—is victorious. I am now not timid, nor oppressed, nor defeated, nor inhibited by whispering suggestions. Thanks be to God!

Doubtless I was vulnerable to satanic suggestions at this point because of the poverty of Roman Catholic teachings rela-

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tive to the End Times.(33) That poverty can be illustrated by an episode from my youth. After my brother Will and I were moved to Southern California we inevitably experienced the frequent minor earth shocks endemic to that region. These were not frightening phenomena, but were regarded by us as interesting and playful manifestations of nature. But there came a Friday, in March of the early 1930's, an untypical warm and humid day for that season. At 5:55 in the afternoon I had finished dinner and asked Dad to be excused to go out and play baseball before dark. I had reached the living-room front door and actually had my hand on the knob, when an indescribably loud and vicious rumbling erupted from the depths of the earth. At that instant a major destructive earthquake was unleashed upon a wide area south and east of Los Angeles!

As I opened the front door I felt a violent yanking as though the floor had been pulled out from beneath me. Then my entire physical world became chaos! The house was literally leaping from its foundations, accompanied by weird groaning sounds as every timber in the house's construction strained to break. When I stepped onto our front porch, already terrified, I saw the concrete floor cracking and jumping about. The four pillars supporting the porch roof were whipping back and forth. I made it across the porch and leapt to the sidewalk that led from the front yard. Even as I sailed off the porch I saw with horror that the sidewalk itself was dancing crazily with both horizontal and vertical snapping motions. I landed on my feet on the sidewalk but was instantly thrown off onto the front lawn, which also was twisting and writhing. The deep-earth rumble, and thousands of cracking, rending and exploding sounds continued as the earth convulsed.

I got to my hands and knees on the lawn, saw the light pole at the curb teetering at an angle as severed electrical wires waved about shooting sparks from their torn ends. I was paralyzed with fear and totally disoriented. At that moment

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an Edison substation situated diagonally across the street from our house became a tangled shambles. As the transformers shorted out, a massive globe of electrical fire formed above the substation and slowly rose upward. The ground continued to heave violently, and the deafening noises continued unabated. I found my voice and cried out in agonized fear, "Oh, Jesus; it's the end of the world!"

So, some Catholic teaching on the End Times had penetrated my young heart. But what wretched, stunted teaching it was. If I had been a Christian I ought to have been crying out with anticipation and joy, "Lord Jesus, come quickly!" But I was cringing in abject fear, and the true meaning of my cry was, "Jesus, don't come; I'm scared of you!"

Catholics by and large, Catholic clergy also, are astonishingly ignorant of those prophetic books of the Bible that emphasize the final events in the history of mankind on this planet—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Revelation, for example. Let's take the Book of Revelation as the prime example. I dare say 90% of Roman Catholics could not name it as the concluding book of the Bible. An even greater percentage have not an inkling of its contents! Yet this is God's detailed written revelation in which there unfolds the great drama to precede, accompany and follow the return of Jesus Christ to this earth! At the close of this Book of Revelation is the august warning from Almighty God, "*For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in the book.*" (Rev. 22:18-19) I suggest that because of the Roman Catholic Church's failure to include the details of the Book of Revelation in its doctrinal message, it has in effect "*taken away from the words of this book,*" and that neglect will be the object of God's judgment.(34)

(34) See cassette tape THE ROMAN CATHOLIC INSTITUTION AND HER DAUGHTERS IN PROPHECY by Alberto Rivera, AIC.

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As is usual in these matters, there are some snatches of End-Times teaching in general Catholic doctrine. There is, of course, the article of belief stated in the Apostles' Creed, "from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead." We were taught that there would be a particular judgment of each soul immediately after death, and a general judgment of all resurrected mankind at "The end of the world." Further, that one general judgment would separate the saved from the unsaved, and there would remain heaven and hell forever and ever. The day of judgment was to be a day of wrath, as the Catholic funeral hymn put it, "a day exceedingly bitter when thou shalt come to judge the world by fire."

Now there are kernels of biblical truth here; but it is all so incomplete, and it is strictly fear-centered. I am aware that the Catholic funeral rite has now been revised and is supposedly resurrection-centered; but biblically and theologically it is still shockingly inadequate. Even in my theological studies in the seminary I was robbed of the riches of the biblical doctrine and prophecies of the Last Days. We studied a tract on Eschatology, the Last Things—Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell. This should have been the splendid occasion for delving into the teaching in the Word on the End Times. Instead, we were given arid Greek philosophy on the immortality of the soul. The cataclysmic events so frequently and graphically described throughout the Bible were dismissed as "apocalyptic imagery," difficult to understand and to be interpreted figuratively. The very Book of Revelation was snubbed as having had reference solely to the persecutions of the Church under the Roman Emperors, and therefore to be already fulfilled and not prophetic of future events. God help us, this distorted and edited view of the End Times deprived me of God's true revelation until the day I became born again.

Have I now shifted from ignorant neglect to rabid obsession with the Last Days? No; God forbid that I should overcompensate for former Roman errors by embracing new follies under the cloak of being a "fired-up" evangelical. I realize there are too many enthusiastic souls who are so involved in contemplating and setting a schedule for the coming events of the Last Days that the fundamental Gospel salvation message

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receives a minor emphasis in their witness. It is such almost fanatic imbalance that gives rise in the popular imagination among unbelievers of a glassy-eyed, bearded, unkempt, self-styled prophet wandering the streets, imposing on the unwilling and the unwary his message, "Repent! The End is Near!" That caricature, I hope, has little in common with my present concern and my joyful receiving of the prophetic Word.

When a man is reborn and begins his nourishment with the written Word, it is soon revealed to Him that an impressive portion of the content of the Holy Bible deals with the matter of what we are calling here the "Last Days." The technical word encompassing this entire branch of theology is **eschatology** (from the Greek, meaning "last"). Such a profusion of biblical texts refers to eschatology that evangelical Christianity rightly gives it a most prominent but not exaggerated place in its doctrine. We may say that eschatology embraces the prophesied Second Coming of Jesus Christ to planet earth, the events and phenomena preceding, accompanying and following that Second Coming; the ultimate fate of nations, and indeed of every human being and of our entire universe; the judgments on mankind, the total triumph of good, and the total destruction of evil; the eternal torment of the unsaved, and the eternal felicity of the saved. Such, in sum, is **eschatology**. The truth of Jesus' return to earth is so much the substance of the Christian's hope that it is small wonder that the Bible is replete with prophecies, descriptions, chronological timetables, clues, warnings and joyful promises regarding the Second Coming of Jesus Christ! And foolish would be the Christian who would neglect or even scoff at the doctrines of the Last Days. It behooves all of us to study the Word of God avidly in these matters, to place ourselves in obedient openness to the Spirit for enlightenment, to intelligently read the signs of the times, to anticipate with unconcealed public joy the return of Our Lord, in fact to pray for His swift return!

I hope it is now apparent that though I adopt what might seem to some a low-profile attitude toward the Last Days, such is not the case. My views are biblical, orthodox, and anticipatory—I am looking forward to my Lord and Master's soon

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Second Coming. I cannot rest in my witness while unbelievers remain ignorant of these vital doctrines; much less can I abide that many bearing the name "Christian" actually scoff at all mention of the literal return of Jesus Christ. I think, of all the errors and perversions perpetrated in the name of a so-called "intelligent modern Christianity," this ranks as the saddest and most tragic. It is explicitly foretold in the Scriptures that scoffers there would be:

"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."
(2 Peter 3:3-4)

I became partially conscious of the riches of biblical Last-Days material while I was being witnessed to, and I realized even at that stage that I acquiesced in the notions of the latter-day urgency of our times and that I believed the consummation of human history was upon us. When I was reborn I received faith in the scriptural sense and I immediately trusted in all of God's Word regarding the imminence of the Last Days.

I cannot here share with you completely the wide range of enlightenments and insights that the Spirit has showered upon me, since rebirth, in my meditations on God's promises of the return of His Son to earth. But, as a witness, I hope to communicate to you former Catholics and to you disaffected liberal Protestants my grasp of those areas of concern that most strikingly affected me as a new Christian. The **first area** was my new knowledge that some biblical prophecies, or "signs of the times," of an historical and political nature, have been fulfilled in our very lifetime. The **second area** was my new consciousness that the appalling moral state of our world today is intimately associated in biblical prophecy with the period immediately preceding the return of Jesus Christ. The **third area** was my new faith-knowledge that, as prophesied in Scripture, there is well under way right now, a master plan for a worldwide ecumenical "religion," an attempt to force upon mankind a universal ecclesiastical organization usurping the

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Christian name but serving the antichrist.

Let us look closely at the first area of concern. Some 1400 years before Christ, God prophesied to His servant Moses the eventual dispersion of His people and the demise of Israel as a nation:

“And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; ...And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest:...And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life.”

(Deut. 28:64-66)

Christ Himself in His earthly lifetime predicted further details of the dispersion, speaking of Jerusalem and its temple:

“For the last days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side.”

(Luke 19:43)

“And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.”

(Matthew 24:1-2)

These prophecies were fulfilled with precision. In 70 A.D. Roman armies besieged the Jewish homeland, invaded all its territory, pillaged Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, leveling it beyond repair. The Jewish people were then dispersed and scattered throughout the world! For the following 1878 years, Jews were without a mother country. They wandered from country to country in permanent exile, usually suffering additional persecutions. But throughout those centuries they

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maintained their ethnic integrity as they moved under God's Providence toward fulfillment of another ancient biblical prophecy. Some 580 years before Christ, the Jewish prophet Ezekiel, while in captivity in Babylon and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote:

"...Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: And I will make them one nation in the land..." (Ezek. 37:21-22)

On May 15, 1948, Israel once again became an independent, unified nation. God's Word was vindicated! But wait, there's more. The new state of Israel did not include the Holy City of Jerusalem, which city had been rebuilt and devastated alternately many times down the centuries. It remained a political and religious pawn until 1967. When Jesus was teaching about the Last Days, He added another unassailable detail:

"...Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." (Luke 21:24)

The Gentiles, of course, are the non-Jewish peoples who subjected the site of the Holy City to numberless barbaric indignities. Well, God is not mocked! In 1967, during the famous "Six-day War," the Israelis captured and occupied Jerusalem. For the first time in 1897 years Jerusalem, the Holy City was in the possession of the Jews. Jesus' word did not pass away!

This is an astounding panorama of majestic proportions, spanning as it does nearly three-and-a-half thousand years, and encompassing mighty human armies, untold expenditures of lives and material, and depending as it does on the vast complexities of political maneuvering. There are too many variables involved for chance and coincidence to explain away the sequence of events in natural terms. This is a mind-boggling series of prophecies and fulfillments. To me personally it mag-

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nified God's Holy Bible as inspired and inerrant. It confounds the scoffer; it perplexes the unbeliever and the so-called liberal believer; but it gladdens and excites the heart of the reborn Christian. Remember, the prophecies were made in the context of the signs that would usher in the Last Days.

I have examined this phase of Last-Days prophecy in detail because it is so clear and transparent even, as I said, to the scoffer and the unbeliever. They admit the facts but have nothing to offer in explanation beyond random chance. The Scriptures abound with predictions regarding the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The world ignores them to its own eternal peril. Clergymen, whether Protestant minister or Roman Catholic pope or priest, are traitors to the Lord Jesus if they neglect this portion of the Gospel message. Christian pastors, I beg you, feed your flocks with the full Gospel—warn them of the signs of the times. And do not disdain me for presuming to instruct you. *“Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?”* (Gal. 4:16) Recall the solemn words of Our Blessed Lord: *“Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.”* (Mark 13:33 and 37) And:

“...When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?” (Matt. 16:2-3)

The **second** area of concern that urges me and all evangelical Christians to look for the soon return of the Lord Jesus is the dismal moral and spiritual decline of the contemporary world, especially as exemplified in our own United States. God has foretold in His written Word that mankind would sink to unparalleled depths of degradation and depravity before the return to earth of His Son.

You and I know that all men are sinners. We know that we live in a sinful world. We know that the history of the human race since the Fall has been to a frightening degree a history of

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sin—sinful nations, sinful institutions, sinful persons. Sin has abounded to the point of obscuring at times the existence of good. Even after Calvary, sin has possessed and enslaved the majority of the human race. In retrospect we observe that some periods seem to have been more spiritually empty and morally corrupt than others, and the overall picture is discouraging except to the Spirit-led Christian.

Now you may ask, "So what's new? We've always had sin and sinners aplenty. Where's the 'sign of the times'?"

My conviction is that our twentieth century has witnessed a state of moral and spiritual decay unmatched in any preceding era of human history. Moreover, even though evil and sin abounded in the past, organized society to a large extent recognized it and labeled it as such—sin! Not so today—secular society denies the reality of sin; and liberal Christianity removes the stigma of sin and reduces it to a sort of naughtiness or a mild anti-social sickness that can be cured by man's good will. Well, God help us; let's look at the God-Man bleeding on the cross at Calvary and then let's cry out for the world to hear, "Sin is real; sin is deadly; there is no release from its bondage except through the blood of Jesus Christ."

We regenerated Christians are not moral pessimists. The unbelievers, the secularists, the materialists, and alas, the liberal Christians who should be enjoined in the fray with us, call us just that—"pessimists." They aver that the human race through moral evolution is getting better and better. They foresee no need for a Last Days and for a literal return to earth of Jesus Christ. As this world improves, what we pessimists call "sin" will disappear.

But no; we are not pessimists. Of all men we are the optimists, and we are **realists**. We recognize and define sin; we acknowledge its deadly power; we know in faith and in experience where lies its only cure. We have been moved by the Holy Spirit to glean from the Scriptures what will be those moral signs of the times—what will be the state of mankind in relation to sin as we prepare for the Lord's return. What do the Sacred Scriptures say in this regard?

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I maintain that the abortion issue most clearly and forcefully portrays today's loss of moral and spiritual fiber. The Holy Bible proclaims the inviolability of life, even within the mother's womb, and that human procreation is a gift of the Lord.

"...thou knowest not...how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child."
(Eccl. 11:5)

"So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the Lord gave her conception,"
(Ruth 4:13)

"Thus saith the Lord, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb," (Isa. 44:24)

"These six things doth the Lord hate: ...hands that shed innocent blood." (Prov. 6:16-17)

"Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward."
(Psalm 127:3)

Abortion has been around since the Fall; within pagan cultures it has flourished limited only by the restrictions of the medical knowledge of the times. Within the Judeo-Christian tradition, until our day, it has always been regarded with the loathing rightfully inspired by the shedding of innocent, helpless blood. Now suddenly in the latter half of the twentieth century abortion has become the order of the day. Dear reader, I pray you to contemplate with horror the satanic statistic that, in the United States alone, approximately one million babies are murdered each year in their mothers' wombs. This mass killing has been transferred by the secularists and the liberals from the realm of morals to the arena of civil rights—the woman has the right to do with her body as she sees fit! It has the shameful sanction of the highest court of our government. It is not even called "abortion,"

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much less "murder." It is referred to politely as "termination of pregnancy." If lawlessness and immorality are to explode uncontrolled before the Last Days,

"Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter."
(Isa. 5:20)

"In those days...every man did that which was right in his own eyes."
(Judges 17:6)

Then the nonchalant, nearly universal acceptance of the murder-for-convenience which is abortion, cries to us that those Days are upon us, even as it cries to God for judgment and vengeance!

Abortion is primarily an issue of the sacredness of God-given human life from the moment of conception. But it has deep implications of sexual morality; and of course the situations in which it is practiced are often the result of sexual promiscuity. Easy abortion and sexual laxity are fellow-travelers. So, pondering the popular abortion mentality, we can conclude that one of the obvious signs of the approach of the Last Days will be the eruption of a universal orgy of sexual license. That mass orgy is already upon us!

Don't reject me at this point as a blue-nose prude, afraid of his shadow, a celibate ex-priest eunuch peddling his anti-erotic fears in the marketplace of religious oppression. Understand, first of all, we Gospel Christians are not anti-sex; we do not suppress one of the basic human drives and pretend that it does not exist or maintain that it is evil. No, we recognize sexuality as a basic, good, God-given component of our human personalities. We recognize it is God's powerful inbuilt mechanism intended for the insurance of the propagation of the race, and for the fostering of conjugal love in marriage. Adam and Eve were sexual creatures in their state of original righteousness. Their sexuality was in perfect harmony with their body, soul and spirit. They were masters of their sexuality, ready

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and equipped to exercise it in accordance with God's creative designs. They were destined to achieve the implementation of those designs as the male and female sources of the human race. Sex for Adam and Eve was a subordinate but important element of their love for each other and for God. All of this we contemplate with reverence and awe. Sex was given to us by God.

Then came the Fall. Among the dire consequences were the disordering of man's body, the corruption of his soul with its consequent darkening of his intellect and the near-destruction of his power of well-ordered free will and the unleashing of his emotions into anarchy. Moreover, his spirit was so wounded and made inoperative that the Spirit of God was driven from that union which had bound Adam and Eve in loving communication with their Creator. In the pitiful disorder which followed, men and women found themselves with their sexual drive divorced from love. No longer controlled by the Spirit of God, and robbed of the necessary restraints of intellect and will, sex became their master— an unbridled power, opportunely seized upon by Satan as a fiery tool to lead men to eternal destruction. Sex could now be sinful and lethal.

Consequently, in this area especially, we must be Christian realists. Sex is here to stay. We mourn the loss of its original harmony with our total personalities, but we rejoice in its awesome power to procreate and to foster love. Wary of the snares of degraded sex, we are yet confident that as reborn Christians we are indeed new creatures who have available a Power to enable us to reintegrate sexuality into the unity of our bodies, souls and spirits. From this perspective, and with the faith and hope, we view the contemporary sexual scene in the context of the coming End Times.

Biblical norms of sexual morality have quite simply been cast aside in contemporary society. In our own United States we behold a nation in the convulsions of a totally sex-oriented carnival. The education system, the entertainment field, the mass media of TV, radio and newsprint, the words of literature and politics, commerce, and the law itself, are joined in a concerted effort to present sex in an irresponsible, common, leer-

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ing, snickering, seductive or pandering manner. Uninhibited sex is portrayed as "the good life;" controlled and loving sex is portrayed as stupid and outmoded. Our senses are assailed at all hours of the day and night, in all areas of our existence, with free and easy sex as a commodity to be purchased, or an endless pleasure to be experienced universally without restraint. We cannot pursue our legitimate interests as citizens of this world without being subjected to a ceaseless barrage of pornographic garbage. We Christians know this is an insult to our human dignity and an abomination in the sight of our Holy God. His patience has a terminal point, and both biblical prophecy and common sense warn us that a massive tide of filth in the present proportion cries out that soon Jesus will come again! This is one of the crucial signs that Christ warned us to heed and act upon. As a result of sexual "liberation," the world becomes sicker and closer to death.

A most disturbing segment of the disintegrating moral fiber of the times, still in the area of sexual immorality, is the problem of homosexuality. Let us say first, as Christians we are not ignorant of the plight, of the pain, nor of the seeming futility of the lives of homosexuals. We do not engage in anti-homosexual harassments and vendettas. We have a compassion for those sad, sexually-disoriented persons who are conscious of their abnormality, who would wish to remedy it, and who are seeking salvation and, therefore, Christ.

But again we must be realists. This perversion of sexual behavior is another of the tragic consequences of the Fall. There was no homosexuality in the Garden of Eden. "*Male and female created he them.*" (Gen. 1:27) In the disorder that ensued, homosexual activity became a possibility, another opportunity for Satan, and in some corrupt civilizations its practice became rampant. But for most of human society, despite the wreckage from the Fall, the existence of homosexuality has been acknowledged but deplored. Even the majority of non-Christians through the ages has regarded it with loathing, rightfully deeming it unnatural and inimical to the basic interests of the human race. The Jews, and subsequently the Christians, affirmed this natural pagan disapproval, and

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guided by Divine Revelation, censured all homosexual activity as sinful and an abomination in the sight of God.

Again, these ancient societal strictures against a morally-degrading form of sexual perversion are being eroded. Homosexuality is now openly and stridently being huckstered as "an alternate life style," a matter of personal choice. No moral nor social taboos! The homosexual is heralded as a downtrodden minority whose civil rights are being trampled upon by the self-righteous straights of this world. "Out of the closets and into the streets!" is the cry of the deviant militants. The establishment has capitulated and we are now saturated with brainwashing for acceptance of the "gay" life as a normal manifestation of sexuality, and the "gay" crowd as a legitimate minority within the majority of heterosexuals. TV, the cinema, the legitimate theatre, the news media, and publishing houses now extol this garbage, which is foisted upon us in the name of toleration and modern healthy sensibilities. Hasn't this contemporary development in public sexual morals all the earmarks of the devil's mode of operation? What a Sign of the Times!

I dwell on this distasteful subject for an excellent reason. The screaming demands of homosexual advocacy have not stopped at invading our secular world. They are now in the sanctuary of the Church itself! A generation ago it would have been thought ludicrous to consider the homosexual aberration compatible with practicing, reborn Spirit-filled Christianity. Suddenly this vicious possibility is upon us. With mesmeric horror we hear wolves in sheep's clothing — the very theologians and pastors of the Churches — publicly considering the acceptance of the homosexual lifestyle as not opposed to the Christian way of life. Some Protestant denominations have appropriated funds for studying the question; others have gone further and proposed the ordination of known homosexuals to the ministry, and a few more have proceeded further than the demons themselves and actually performed such travesties of ordination. This is bold satanic activity in open defiance of the plain sense of Scripture, and a denial of our Christian heritage. It was foretold, even long ago in the Old Testament, that in the Day of the Lord of Hosts — the day

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of judgment — the sin of Sodom would be advocated: “...*they declare their sins as Sodom, they hide it not.*” (Isa. 3:9)

Let's be intelligent. The Holy Bible unequivocally condemns all homosexual practice. The frightening story of Sodom in the Book of Genesis is a history of a city that gave itself up to open homosexual profligacy. It is an historical narrative of attempted homosexual rape. And it is the story of God's righteous vengeance when He rained fiery destruction upon Sodom and its inhabitants. No pathetic attempts by liberals in the Churches to pinpoint Sodom's sin as “a lack of hospitality” will hold against the obvious teaching of Scripture. Nor will the liberals' further contentions seduce us. They argue that the Bible only condemns homosexual cultic prostitution, homosexual rape, and homosexual activity by heterosexually-oriented persons. I'm laughing, Satan! One could as easily label the sin of those who were responsible for the execution of Jesus Christ as a sin of lack of hospitality toward Jesus on a great feast day in Jerusalem!

Let me give you a personally-known example of the foregoing. My friend, Jim MacKinnon, was baptized and reared as a Presbyterian. After his rebirth in Christ during his university days, he became perplexed over the official activity of the denomination in which he grew up — the United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. A sum of \$50,000 had been appropriated by that Church toward a task force to study the advisability of ordaining homosexuals to the ministry. In his concern Jim went to a high-ranking member of the Presbytery of the Detroit area. He asked the official how could the Church even consider ordaining sexual deviants in view of the plain teaching of Scripture. Jim was told, “We are going to study the original language of the texts involved, the psychology of those times, and consult with psychiatrists and other authorities, and then we will make a decision.” Jim then asked, “Do I have to be a scholar and know Greek and Hebrew in order to understand what the Word of God tells me? It plainly tells me homosexual practice is displeasing to God.” The official disagreed, and stated that it was still an open idea, subject to reinterpretation in the light of modern findings. The Church's General Assembly later voted down the proposal — but not

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unanimously. This example demonstrated Jim's Spirit-sustained courage, and it indicated the fallacious stand of some liberal church bureaucrats in relation to the Word — if the Word disagrees with their secular convictions, then reinterpret the Word! A Sign of the Times.

Anybody is free to propound his religious views publicly. But for a "Christian" minister to preach unchristian, pagan doctrine and ethics in the guise of an enlightened Christianity, from a Christian pulpit, to a somewhat captive Christian congregation, is blatant hypocrisy and crass dishonesty. Such liberal false prophets should abandon their pulpits and their denominations and preach their lies in their own names, not in the name of the Church of Jesus Christ!

Concluding this dismal picture, I cite only a few of the better-known condemnatory texts from the Holy Bible. The Holy Spirit will interpret them to you without the intervention of psychiatrists and sociologists.

"If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination." (Lev. 20:13)

"For this cause God gave them up into vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also did the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, ..."
(Romans 1:26-27)

"...Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,...shall inherit the kingdom of God." (I Cor. 6:9-10)

These sexual perverts are sodomites in the original Greek.

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The Roman Catholic Church has not officially relaxed its biblically-based condemnation of homosexuality and other sexual degradations. But, like Protestantism, it has its coterie of muddled liberal clergy (and nuns!) who approve **homosexual activity when in a context of love**, cohabitation without benefit of marriage, and other travesties of God's law. In many cases they are not silenced by officials of the Church. In recent years, in the United States, a book by a priest "moral theologian," advocating these and other debased approaches to human sexuality, received wide publicity and acceptance in the liberal Catholic community.

The prophecies regarding moral decadence that will usher in the End Times are not confined to the jungle of sexual anarchy. The Word of God predicts widespread broken marriages, easy divorce, lawlessness, murder, corruption in high places, a general falling away from Christian morals, and a multiplication of wickedness (see Matt. 24:10-12), must take place before the Son of Man returns. We behold these developments unfolding in our land today, vindicating God's prophetic Word.

As my **third** and last area of concern—one which I believe should cause all Christians to ponder and to search the Scriptures for signs of the times—is the accelerated momentum of the **ecumenical movement** and related endeavors. Ecumenism is, of course, the effort by groups of Christians, and by individuals, to produce some kind of visible structural unity among all branches of the Church, ostensibly to present a united front to the non-Christian world. The intent sounds laudable in bare outline—after all, didn't Christ pray at the last supper for the unity of His followers? Wouldn't one world-wide super-Church of Christians show a strong, united witness to the rest of mankind?

Indeed, Christ did pray for the unity of His disciples:

*"(Father)...the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one."
(John 17:22)*

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But He was beseeching His Father that all His followers unite in a vast, concretized ecclesiastical structure bound together by even a minimal hierarchical government presided over by fallible human authority? I hardly think so. Jesus railed at the Pharisees of His day, who usurped too much authority in the religious field and imposed dogmatic bondage on ordinary Jews. The Scriptures indicate that Jesus prayed that His followers have a unity of heart, in faith; that they accept His Gospel message of salvation. I insist that the unity for which Christ prayed already exists. We of the universal Church, the body of all reborn believers, are already united in answer to Christ's prayer. We are united in one basic Gospel faith, in mutual love, under one Lord and Master, through one Holy Spirit, in obedience to the Father. It was for this Christ prayed, and praise God, it is accomplished in us.

But the Protestant and Catholic liberals, the Roman Catholic traditionalists, and Satan himself will not let our unity in Christ rest intact. A world-encircling ecumenical plan for amalgamation of the Christian Churches into one centralized and externalized super body has been gaining steam for decades. Now, it has reached major proportions, and fulfilling biblical prophecy it will be successful in earthly terms.

To understand the ominous implications of the ecumenical movement, I urge you to read and meditate upon the 17th Chapter of the Book of Revelation.(35) Here it is foretold that during the tribulation period (the period of calamitous events that will scourge this planet and mankind prior to the reappearing of Jesus Christ), a world-wide religious system will subjugate all peoples. In order that such a system come into being, a complicated ground-work must be laid. I propose that is precisely what the ecumenical movement is accomplishing even now.

The visible New Testament Church was not one monolithic

(35) See cassette tape THE ROMAN CATHOLIC INSTITUTION AND HER DAUGHTERS IN PROPHECY by Alberto Rivers, AIC.

organization under the rule of a centralized human hierarchy, exercising authority in Christ's name. Rather it was a collection of autonomous regional Churches, none under the authority of another. Its only recognized head was the one Lord Jesus. Its only life principle was the one Indwelling Holy Spirit.

The Roman Catholic Church has had its own ecumenical movement in progress for many years. It was, in effect, promoting unity by inviting all "heretics" and "separated brethren" to return to the papal fold, with no doctrinal compromise. However, since the Second Vatican Council subtle changes in attitude have appeared. The Roman Church is now willing to enter into dialogue with non-Catholic Christian bodies. Limited inter-faith prayer and worship are now permitted. External changes in worship and ritual, calculated to be more palatable to the non-Catholic ecumenicists, are the order of the day. Openings and overtures are even being made to Marxists, to Islam, to eastern paganism—Hinduism and Buddhism! This is deceptive and deadly. Roman Catholicism still envisions itself as the one sheepfold into which all other Church and non-Christian groups must be assimilated. Not one scrap of official Catholic dogma has been discarded; nor does Catholicism at this point officially consider any reform of dogmatic teaching.

Dear readers, we had many centuries when the Roman Church was the world-wide, one super Church! She failed miserably in that enterprise, obscuring the pure Gospel under a heap of human traditions. We cannot be seduced a second time into that situation of betrayal of Jesus Christ. Beware!

Protestant ecumenism has been afoot during most of this century. Early in the 1900's apostate liberals began to infiltrate the seminaries of the denominations with insidious underminings of faith in the Scriptures as the inspired, infallible written Word of God, and with rejection of the Virgin Birth of Christ, His deity, His bodily resurrection, His Second Coming, and man's utter sinfulness. This abandonment of basic Christianity has to some extent invaded all the major Protestant denominations. In place of Jesus Christ and Him

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crucified they have offered their adherents a social gospel often associated with coercion and intimidation, a message powerless to preach salvation. We see the frightening results in the fragmented Protestant denominations, with acrimonious debate and name-calling, secession of individual congregations, decline in numerical strength, and a general loss of the original vibrant Protestant heritage. Particular congregations and hundreds of thousands of Christians remain true to the Gospel, but the overall scene is one of dying and dead churches. It fits perfectly the biblical warning of a great apostasy to introduce the End Times.

Liberal Protestants first organized the Federal Council of Churches in the 1940's. It became heavily infiltrated with leftists and super-liberals, so that multitudes of laymen turned from it in disgust. It was abandoned and the National Council of Churches of Christ in America took its place. This Council has spearheaded the apostasy and the ecumenical movement in our country. On the international level the World Council of Churches has been the grand-daddy of ecumenism. The National Council is one of its member bodies. It is a powerful organization. It has abandoned the pure Gospel and the evangelism of the Gospel. It has largely embraced Marxist and socialist political movements, even terrorism, in the name of "liberation theology." And now, it and the Roman Catholic Church are playing a tentative ecclesiastical game of courting one another. Hundreds of thousands of evangelical Protestants and many of their particular congregations recoil in horror from these ecumenical tentacles. And, praise God, the true evangelical bodies, and the non-denominational evangelical churches, have long recognized the perfidious ecumenical overtures for what they are and have refused to have commerce with them. The Holy Spirit has not abandoned His own people! Take heart that the liberal ecumenicists love Communists and socialists and terrorists, and all manner of deviant philosophers. They loathe the Bible-believing, Spirit-filled Christians who are their only visible obstacle to world domination.

I will mention again Presbyterianism as an example because it is the only Protestant denomination with which I

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have had an intimate contact since my regeneration. I have worshipped frequently with one of its congregations, in some measure as part of my relearning process, and in some measure because of my friendship with members of Jim MacKinnon's family who are parishioners. I have been invited to speak and give my public witness to those Presbyterians, and have conducted Bible classes for them. I have met and had fellowship with a core of born-again evangelical Presbyterians who seem receptive to further formation by the Holy Spirit. I have in no degree watered down the basic Gospel message to them. Some are fully aware that their denomination (UPCUSA) has officially diluted the pristine Gospel and offered many socially-oriented substitutions. Others of them are only partially or vaguely conscious of what has happened. But all of them are eager to retain their basic Christian orthodoxy though they remain in their denomination. As of this writing that denomination is racked by dissension and secessions over questions of biblical inspiration and inerrancy, ordination of women to the ministry, forced acceptance of female elders, and even over the approval of a minister who claims the divinity of Jesus Christ! And surely the homosexual-minister problem, temporarily shelved, will soon reappear with vehemence.

My heart groans at this spectacle of a once-glorious Protestant tradition now enmeshed in apostasy and ecumenical maneuverings. I have read extensively the writings of John Calvin, the great founder of Presbyterianism and the Reformed Churches. I have read the Presbyterian Book of Confessions, which presents the historic creeds, catechisms and confessions of that denomination. I see a Spirit-inspired movement that began with a repudiation of Roman traditions and idolatries, and that moved with power onto the Christian scene, restoring the original Gospel of justification solely by faith in the atoning blood of Jesus, and affirming as the sole rule of faith the Scriptures, of which "we do affirm and avow their authority to be from God, and **not to depend on men or angels.**" (The Scots Confession, Chapter XIX)

Then I behold the Presbyterian Confession of 1967, a text using an orthodox-seeming vocabulary, but riddled with

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liberal leanings and ecumenical yearnings. I read in it, among many other deficiencies, that "The Scriptures, given under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are nevertheless the words of men, conditioned by the language, thought forms, and literary fashions of the places and times at which they were written." (Part 1, Sec. C, 2) These words appear in a context of many "nice" things stated about the Bible. But they undermine everything "nice" that the text proposes. There is nothing mentioned of inspiration or inerrancy.

This same denomination, founded as a Spirit-led reaction to the errors and arrogance of Rome, is now engaged in ecumenical joint activities with the Roman Catholic Church at various levels—a Roman Catholic Church that has not repudiated even one of the man-made doctrines that brought on the birth of Presbyterianism in the mighty Protestant Reformation. Oh, dear God, another Sign of the Times.

Precious Presbyterians, I do not single you out for abuse. I love you; some of your numbers have received me very graciously. Many of you are saved and lead Spirit-filled lives. It may be too late to reform and revitalize your denomination; but God will lead you in the path you must follow. My prayers accompany you, especially that you be not further entangled with false ecumenism and flirting with Roman Catholicism. Do nothing to further advance the onslaught of the future super-church, which is not of God.

I have cited the 17th chapter of the Book of Revelation and asked that we meditate upon its implications. Remember here that Babylon is a symbolic scriptural reference to Rome, and it represents the spurious religious system that will have its center in Rome during the period of the Great Tribulation. That she is termed a "harlot" signifies her unfaithfulness to the Lord:

"And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: With whom the kings of the earth

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have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration." (Revelation 17:1-6)

It is not difficult to figure out who is "Mystery, Babylon the Great, Mother of Harlots." She was a mystery when John was inspired to write the Book of Revelation; today she is plain to see in her unfaithfulness. My spirit quakes at remembrance of my former Roman bondage. To some extent I have fornicated with the kings of the earth; I was drunk with the wine of false religiosity and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus through my participation in blasphemy. God in His mercy delivered me, and my sin is cast from His sight by the blood of Jesus Christ.

I beseech the multitudes of Catholics who are seeking salvation in the Lord, especially you Catholic charismatics who have had a taste of the Spirit, follow the injunction of Holy Scripture and "*Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.*" (Rev. 18:4-5) (These verses of Chapter 18 refer to the **religious**, political and commercial systems combined to enslave mankind.) Former Catholics, **stay out!**(36) Liberal

(36) See cassette tape A PROPHETICAL MESSAGE FROM HEAVEN FOR FORMER ROMAN CATHOLICS by Rivera, AIC, Alta Loma, Calif.

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Protestants, don't go near her! Fellow-evangelicals, rejoice with me that we have the Spirit of Truth and that the spirit of apostasy has no dominion over us.

There are many, many signs of the End Times spelled out in the Bible. I have concentrated on those which have had the most impact on me and convicted me of the soon return of Jesus Christ. These few I have written about in detail as a witness to Catholics and former Catholics. And I am grateful that the Lord has replaced my former poverty of teaching on prophecy and End-Times theology with all the richness of biblical revelation.

We cannot here begin to dwell on the other aspects of the Last Days so lavishly portrayed in the Bible—the rapture of the Church, when we who are saved by the Blood will be snatched up to meet Christ in the air; the rewards judgment of believers; the horrors of the Great Tribulation period; the Beast, the Dragon and the antichrist; the prophetic role of Israel; the glorious return of the Lord Jesus and His millennial reign; the final climactic battle of Armageddon; the Final Judgment, and the New Heaven and New Earth. It is all glorious to anticipate from our vantage point of saving faith in Jesus Christ. It is all too fearful to envision for those who have not turned to Christ in trusting faith.

So my duties and my opportunities are clear. I am no doomsday fanatic, putting all my spiritual and intellectual energies into a Last-Days syndrome. I *"...try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world."* (I John 4:1) I walk in the Spirit and feed daily upon the Word of God. I witness to Jesus Christ, jealous that as many souls as possible come to know His saving Gospel before it is too late. I am caught up in my daily Christian walk, but everything is permeated with an anticipation of That Day when I shall be drawn to Him in the air, or alternately the day when, requiring of me individually my soul and spirit, I will go to my Father's House. If it is the latter, my death will be swallowed up in victory. I watch, and I pray, and I am ready. *"Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh."* (Matt. 24:44) My earnest cry is part of the next-

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to-last verse of the Holy Bible: "*Even so, come, Lord Jesus.*"

All praise to Almighty God, He has helped me make it through the night, and my narrative is concluded. My poor writing is offered humbly but confidently. In the feeblest echo of the words of the Apostle John, I take my stand: There is much more I could have written, but this is written in hope that the Holy Spirit will lead you to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. No church saves; only the Blood of Christ shed on Calvary can offer the free gift of God—forgiveness of sins, and eternal life. Let's you and I share that eternal life together!

EPILOGUE

I thank each of you, dear readers, for accompanying me during the narrative of my journey through the dark night of the soul to the Light which is Jesus Christ.

My present written witness is now completed in God's good time. I have no vain regrets for what once appeared to have been long, wasted years. Only insofar as it is necessary in the presentation of my testimony do I look **backward**. From the moment of my rebirth I have marveled at what God has done for me and have set my sights **forward** in anticipation of what He may yet accomplish:

"...but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Phil 3:13-14)

I have not intended offense to any individuals nor to any ecclesiastical institution. If, with my new understanding of the Gospel Truth, I have had to be highly critical especially of the Roman Catholic Church and some of its doctrines, that is the demand of Truth. No personal animus should be attributed to me. The Word of God requires that I confess openly my conversion and rebirth. Some of that confession is explicable only in view of my former Roman affiliation. Serving the Truth, I have attempted to serve equally the demands of Love! I love each of you in Christ; that love impels me to aid you in seeking salvation. Any seeming abrasiveness in my presentation is an

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honest reflection of my past anguish and bondage: any love that is apparent in my narrative is a dim mirroring of that Love which is manifested in Jesus Christ.

Should but one soul be led to Jesus through these pages, the power of the Holy Spirit is vindicated in my efforts. I pray that any reader who has not received Jesus as his personal Savior at this point will be led by the Spirit to make a decision. Remember, Christ has accomplished all that is necessary for your salvation. Your part is solely a trusting faith in God's promises. Such faith involves a decision by you—an act of your will—through which you claim salvation, and a trust that Jesus' atoning blood on Calvary is all-sufficient.

I ask God to move you to turn back to the conclusion of Chapter Two, and to meditate on the elements which will lead to your rebirth. If what I have written in these pages makes sense to you, God may have readied you for a decision **now!**

"...behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." (2 Cor 6:2)

"How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" (Heb 2:3)

God speed you!

POSTSCRIPT

On May 5, 1981, Mr. Clark Butterfield went to be with the Lord. His night journey from Rome to the Heavenly Jerusalem was completed.

In his Last Will and Testament, Clark requested that there be no attempt to impose a Roman Catholic funeral or burial of his remains. The message that permeated the service was founded on the Orthodox Protestant doctrine on the resurrection, "the hope of glory" coupled with an evangelical exhortation on the need of the spiritual rebirth solely through faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Absent from the service was the sacrifice of the mass, the rosary service, the invocation of the prayers of Mary and Joseph, the doctrine of the flames of purgatory and the **uncertainty** of whether a loved one had achieved heaven through his keeping of the traditions instituted by the self-proclaimed one true Holy Roman and Apostolic Church.

In contrast there was present the spirit of joy that can come only through the **assurance** of salvation as promised in God's Word. In the closing pages of his book, Clark sums up the positive and joyful view that all re-born believers share in their anticipation of death.

"So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory." (I Cor. 15:54)

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While Clark's death was indeed "swallowed up in victory," there are those who suspect that Rome or one of her allies may have silenced his testimony prematurely. History clearly reveals that the greatest antagonist to the true church, the bride of Christ, had been the "religious institutions" of the day. It was the religious leaders who stoned the prophets of old, instigated the arrest, trial and crucifixion of our Lord, martyred his disciples and imprisoned the apostle Paul. Foxe's Book of Martyrs contains numerous cases of how the "religious" have imprisoned and put to death Bible believing Christians who would not recant their beliefs nor compromise their faith in Christ for the traditions of men.

While I freely admit that there is no solid evidence of foul play in Clark's death, I have, however, become intrigued with the testimony of Dr. Rivera in his dealings with Rome and the ecumenical movement coupled with the rejection NIGHT JOURNEY FROM ROME received from major Protestant publishing houses. Moody Press, Zondervan, Baker House and Pathway all turned down the publishing of this book presumably because it would offend their market of readers who, they feel, prefer messages of ecumenicalism rather than exhortations on truth without compromise.

One can only wonder in amazement how close we are to an ecumenical union of Neo-Orthodox Protestants and liberal evangelicals with Rome! I am persuaded the testimony of Dr. Rivera should be taken more seriously in prayer and in the light of the scriptures than the church at large has been willing to do. It has been primarily by the efforts of Dr. Rivera that NIGHT JOURNEY FROM ROME was finally published.

I would like to close this epilogue with a quote from a man whose writings greatly inspired Clark, yet have been all but forgotten by the contemporary Protestant. No doubt, this 16th century saint of God would applaud the content and publication of NIGHT JOURNEY FROM ROME should he be alive today.

"A simple laymen armed with Scripture is to
be believed above a Pope or a Council without

POSTSCRIPT

it. Neither the Church nor the Pope can establish articles of faith. These must come from the Scriptures...I do not accept the authority of Popes and Councils, for they have contradicted each other...my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything...Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise."

Martin Luther (1520, while on trial for heresy.)

By Jim MacKinnon

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THIS IS HOW YOU, TOO, AS A ROMAN CATHOLIC, CAN COMPLETE YOUR NIGHT JOURNEY FROM ROME TO THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM:

THE BOOK OF ACTS 2:14-39

IT'S GOD'S PLAN THAT YOU BE SAVED!

Vv. 14-36: The Bible says Jesus Christ shed His precious blood on the cross so that your sins could be washed away and forgiven. To be forgiven, saved and KNOW we are going to Heaven, the Bible shows us what we must do:

v. 37: HEARING THE WORD OF GOD. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:17)

v. 37: KNOWLEDGE. "Then said Jesus to those...which believed on him, If ye continue in my word...ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31-32)

v. 37: BELIEVE. "For by grace are ye saved through FAITH; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: NOT OF WORKS, lest any man should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

v. 37: CONFESSION. "...if thou shalt CONFESS with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt BELIEVE in THINE HEART...thou shalt be saved. For with the HEART man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (Romans 10:9-10)

v. 38: REPENT. "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation...but the sorrow of the world worketh death." (II Corinthians 7:10)

Now that you are saved in Christ, you are a child of God and on your way to Heaven. The next steps in obedience are:

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v. 38: **BAPTISM.** *"HE THAT BELIEVETH (first) and is baptized SHALL BE SAVED: but he that believeth not shall be damned."* (Mark 16:16)

vv. 41-47: **MEMBERSHIP IN A BIBLE BELIEVING CHURCH:** *"I will praise the Lord with my whole heart, in THE ASSEMBLY of the upright, and in the CONGREGATION."* (Psalm 111:1)

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another." (Hebrews 10:25)

THE BOOK OF ACTS 2:38

God will never leave you nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5) because He will be in your heart. This is the promise to you who are really saved...and this is what He has given you:

v. 38: **YOU HAVE RECEIVED THE HOLY SPIRIT.** *"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?"* (I Corinthians 6:19)

v. 39: **YOU HAVE BEEN SEALED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT.** *Christ "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were SEALED with that Holy Spirit of promise."* (Ephesians 1:13)

v. 39: **YOU WILL BE LED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT IN YOUR DAILY WALK.** *"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, HE WILL GUIDE YOU into ALL TRUTH: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come."* (John 16:13)

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v. 39: YOU HAVE BEEN BAPTIZED INTO THE BODY OF CHRIST. "For by one Spirit are we ALL baptized into one body...and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." (I Corinthians 12:13)

"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may KNOW that ye have ETERNAL LIFE, and that ye may (continue to) believe on the name of the Son of God." (I John 5:13)

MY PROFESSION AND CONFESSION OF FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST

Realizing that I, as a Roman Catholic, am not a Christian according to the Bible, I am now willing to do what the Bible says to become a Christian. I now turn to the Lord Jesus Christ alone from faith in sacraments and unscriptural dogmas, rejecting the Roman Catholic Institution as the spiritual harlot as prophesied in Revelation 17. Being saved now by grace through faith according to the Word of God (Ephesians 2:8-10), I have absolute assurance of eternal life now, and forever in Heaven with Christ.

If you have received Christ as your personal Savior through reading this message, please send us your testimony. We will send you a Bible to help you get started in the Christian life, plus one year's free subscription to ALL, the A.I.C. monthly magazine. Please send your name, address, and phone number to:

Antichrist Information Center
P.O. Box 1076
Alta Loma, CA 91701

Further information can also be obtained by writing:

James D. MacKinnon
Verity Press
P. O. Box 3726
Cocoa, Florida 32922

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SUGGESTED FURTHER READING FOR ROMAN CATHOLICS

Holy Bible, King James Version.

Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, by James Strong, 1890, Abingdon Press, New York.

God's Incomparable Word, by Harold Lindsell, 1977, Victor Books, SP Publications, Inc., Wheaton, Ill.

Sabotage, by J.T.C., (Crusaders Vol. 11), 1979, Chick Publications, Chino, California.

Alberto, by J.T.C., (The Crusaders, Vol. 12), 1979, Chick Publications, Chino, California.

Double-Cross, by J.T.C., (Crusaders, Vol. 13), 1981, Chick Publications, Chino, California.

The Godfathers, by J.T.C., (Crusaders, Vol. 14), 1982, Chick Publications, Chino, California.

King of Kings, by J.T.C., 1980, Chick Publications, Chino, California.

The Big Betrayal, by J.T.C., 1981, Chick Publications, Chino, California.

Fifty Years in the "Church" of Rome, by Charles Chiniquy, 1981, Chick Publications, Chino, California.

The Priest, The Woman and The Confessional, by Charles Chiniquy, Chick Publications, Chino, California.

The Secret History of the Jesuits, by Edmond Paris, 1975 edition, Chick Publications, Chino, California.

Sovereignty of God, by Arthur W. Pink, 1930, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1979 Edition.

Antichrist, by Baron Porcelli, First American Edition, Eric C. Peters, 1521 Old Blackhorse Pike, Blackwood, New Jersey.