

## Introduction

I was raised in a Roman Catholic home. My parents migrated to Australia from Italy in 1962. I was born two years later. We were not deeply religious as a family; nevertheless we did attend church services from time to time. We followed the Catholic sacraments of baptism, confessional, confirmation and traditions like 'Lent' and 'fish only' on Good Friday.

I was a very shy introverted boy growing up. I kept most of my feelings within, even though I came from a large family. I was the eldest of seven children.

As I attended various services and functions within the Catholic Church, I noted the same feelings each time. The church seemed formal, cold and lifeless. I felt there was an absence of spiritual reality in my religion.

I did not know why nor did I have any idea how to fix the problem. I would often ask myself "if God is real, then why don't I sense this when I go to church"?

I had religion in my life but I really wanted spiritual reality. In my heart of hearts I loved God and sincerely desired to worship Him.

What about you? Do you have religion or do you have spiritual reality in your life? There is a difference between 'religion' and 'spiritual reality'.

*I would like to share with you how I found spiritual reality.*

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“No thank you. I’m a Catholic.” This is a common response by many when the subject of religion is raised with a Roman Catholic.

So, what does it mean to be a Roman Catholic? What are the foundational teachings of the Roman Catholic Church? How does Roman Catholic teaching measure up to the Word of God? If the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church and the Bible differ, which should be our final authority? The Roman Catholic Church and non-Catholics use many of the same biblical words and phrases - do they mean the same thing?

Let’s answer these questions by looking at some common attitudes and beliefs within the Roman Catholic religion. And in contrast what does the Bible teach in each of these areas?

### I. “I’m a pretty good person; I’m not that bad!”

Most Catholics sincerely believe that they are not really that bad. “Sure, we have all sinned a little; but we’re basically pretty good, aren’t we?” “I don’t steal, and I haven’t murdered anybody.” These are common responses to this issue.

Within the mind of many Catholics, there are degrees of severity to sin. There are bad sins, and there are normal, acceptable sins that don’t really matter. Because one’s performance is a core element in achieving salvation for Catholics, who would want to admit to being guilty of sin that might hinder efforts to obtain eternal life?

What does the Bible teach concerning the seriousness of sin? Many Catholics do not understand their **true spiritual condition** before God. Why is this? There are a number of reasons.

First, because of the **sacrament of baptism**. According to Roman Catholic teaching, baptism cleanses the soul of original sin, the guilt inherited from Adam. At the same time, it pours “sanctifying grace” into the soul. This grace makes the individual holy and acceptable to God. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that, through water baptism, a person is “born-again,” brought into a state of grace, made spotless and innocent before God and made a member of the Roman Catholic Church.

However, this teaching is not in the Bible. The Bible teaches that a person must repent of his sin and, by faith alone, receive Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour – see Acts 17:31, Romans 4:1-25. A person is “born again” by the Holy Spirit when he believes in and receives Jesus Christ as his Saviour – see John 3:3-18; Romans 10:9-13. The “water” referred to in John 3:3-7 is referring to physical (water) birth in contrast to spiritual (spirit) birth – as in John 3:8.

Note the reference to the mother’s womb in John 3:4. This is what Nicodemus was thinking of. Jesus Christ used the analogy of a birth to teach that we were born the first time into this world physically but, in order to go to Heaven, we need a second birth.

We need to be “born-again,” born from above in the power of the Holy Ghost. This second spiritual birth takes place when we receive Jesus Christ as our personal Saviour – note John 3:16. We are born once physically, and we need to be born once spiritually. Salvation according to the Bible is not a process; it is a “once for all” spiritual birth – read John 1:11-12.

Second, because there are **venial and mortal sins**. Catholics are taught that there is two kinds of sins a person can commit. “Mortal” sins kill the life of God in a person, removing sanctifying grace from the soul. Should a person die in this condition, he will spend eternity in Hell. To be forgiven of a mortal sin, a Catholic must confess this sin in the sacrament of confession (also called the sacrament of penance or reconciliation). The Roman Catholic Church defines these mortal sins.

In contrast, “venial” sins like immorality and drunkenness can be easily forgiven, according to the Roman Catholic Church.

The Bible teaches that all sins are mortal and punishable with physical and spiritual death – read Romans 3:9-23 and 6:23. If a person sins in one area, he is guilty of all – James 2:10. All sin is worthy of the same judgment, and Jesus Christ alone is the only One Who can provide forgiveness – see 1 John 1:7-9. The judgment for sin is separation from God in Hell-fire – see Luke 16:23.

Third, because there can be **restitution for sin**. Catholics are taught that they can be restored from their sin by performing voluntary acts of penance such as abstaining from certain foods, saying a series of prayers, or giving money to the poor. The individual can choose his own path, or the priest can assign him a path in the sacrament of confession.

The Bible teaches that there is only one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus – see 1 Timothy 2:5. He alone can restore a sinner to a right standing before God. This restoration can only be made by faith in Jesus Christ alone – read Romans 5:1-2.

Fourth, because **confession is turned into a ritual**. This takes place in various ways with the best-known way being the sacrament of confession. The priest and parishioners go through responses and prayers. The parishioner lists his sins before the priest, and then the priest assigns him a penance and asks him to say an “Act of Contrition,” a prayer expressing sorrow for sin. The priest then absolves the individual, supposedly setting the parishioner free from his sins. To absolve means ‘to set free, to release from the consequences of guilt’. The church claims that there is no sin that the church cannot forgive. This absolution is not simply a declaration that God has forgiven the sinner, but a judicial act of the Priest.

The Bible teaches that only God can forgive sins and that a person can only find forgiveness through the precious blood of Jesus Christ alone – read Luke 6:21-26 and 1 Peter 1:18-19. When King David repented of his sin of adultery, he confessed his sin directly to God. No Priest. No Ritual. No Sacrament. Therefore we confess our sins directly to God in prayer and He promises to forgive us completely – read 1 John 1:7-9; Nehemiah 1:4-12; 1 John 2:1-2.

So, how good are you really and how serious is sin? If your answer is “yes” to any of the questions below, please note what God thinks.

Have you ever idolised someone or something? You are an idolater.

Have you ever taken God's name in vain? You are a blasphemer.

Have you ever not worshipped God on a Sunday? You are disobedient.

Have you ever dishonoured or disobeyed your parents? You are rebellious.

Have you ever gotten angry with someone? You are a murderer – Matthew 5:22.

Have you ever lusted in your heart? You are an adulterer – Matthew 5:27-28.

Have you ever stolen anything? You are a thief.

Have you ever told a lie? You are a liar.

Have you ever wanted something that belongs to somebody else? You are covetous.

So, how good are you really according to God's standards in the 10 Commandments – see Exodus 20:3-17? The bible teaches, ‘there is none that doeth good, no, not one – see Romans 3:12. ‘For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God’ – see Romans 3:23

All sin leads to death, physical and spiritual separation from God in Hell. All sin is serious to God. We are all sinners, in need of God's forgiveness. All our good works are like filthy rags in the sight of a holy God as highlighted in Isaiah 64:6. We can't appease God's wrath over sin by our works – read Romans 2:1-16.

Will you humbly admit you are a sinner and receive God's gift of eternal life and forgiveness by faith in Jesus Christ alone? Read Romans 3:22-25; 5:6-8 and 6:23.

## **II. Can we earn salvation through the seven sacraments?**

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that Jesus Christ established seven sacraments: baptism, penance, the Eucharist, confirmation, holy matrimony, holy orders and anointing of the sick. Each channel is a supernatural gift from God called “grace.” This “grace,” obtained through the sacraments, is indispensable and a necessity for salvation and sanctification as a Roman Catholic. There are two kinds of grace taught, sanctifying grace and actual grace. Sanctifying grace gives a person participation in the divine life of God through the sacrament of baptism. This “grace” remains with a person so long as he doesn't commit a mortal sin.

“Actual” grace is said to be a helping hand from God to do good deeds and avoid evil. By taking part in the remainder of the six Sacraments, the Roman Catholic is given the power to do well and avoid evil, thereby remaining in a spiritual state of grace. The end result is *possibly* a home in Heaven.

In order for these sacraments to effectively channel grace, they must be carried out precisely, in what is called a “rite.” Each rite describes the words and actions of both priest and parishioner. The sacrament dispenses grace by the ritual being conducted and performed.

This is a supernatural effect occurring within the rite performed. By the way, it doesn't matter how spiritual the priest is that performs the rites, the sacramental rite still produces its intended effect. Also, innovation is strictly forbidden in carrying out the sacramental rites.

Is this the same grace of the Bible? The answer is emphatically, "No!" The "grace" of the Roman Catholic Church is related to what we can earn through participation in the sacraments. We receive "sanctifying and actual" grace by our works. In contrast, the use of the word "grace" in the Bible is completely different. The Bible definition of grace is "unmerited favour" with God. It is something that we can't earn in any way by what we do, but that which a gracious God extends to us.

How do we receive this grace into our lives according to the Bible? By faith alone, we can receive God's full grace of salvation. This is biblical grace – read Ephesians 2:8-9.

### **III. What can a ritualistic focus lead to?**

Formality is a part of the Roman Catholic Church service. Procedures and protocols are followed to the letter. There is no room for innovation or creativity. Predictability is not bad in itself but what about ritualism. What is concerning when we focus on rituals?

First, it can lead to a **mechanical style of worship**. By this we mean, going through the motions without our heart connected. This can be seen in the way Roman Catholics pray. They don't speak to God in prayer. Rather, they "say" their prayers by repetition as opposed to natural communion. Jesus Christ, in teaching His disciples how to pray, warned against vain, repetitious prayers that say the same thing the same way repeatedly, like a chant – note Matthew 6:7.

Second, **it can lead to an impersonal relationship**. By this we mean, filing in and out of church with no more affinity with one another than commuters catching a train or riding a bus. Are new friendships made with the church where the church family spirit is cultivated?

The Bible teaches that we receive God's grace by placing our faith in Jesus Christ – read Ephesians 2:8-9. God desires that we worship Him in spirit and in truth – see John 4:24. Salvation is not found in rituals but in a relationship with Jesus Christ – note Romans 5:1. We become adopted children of God according to His grace offered through faith as in Romans 5:2. We are also called sons of God, thereby implying we are brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ – see John 1:12. This access to God the Father is not through a priest but through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit – read Ephesians 2:18. When a person receives God's grace by faith, he enters into a spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ and others that have received this same salvation – see 1 John 1:3.

#### IV. “Nobody can be 100% certain of going to heaven”.

If you were to die tonight, would you be sure of going to Heaven? Roman Catholics would say, “No. Nobody can know with certainty that he has eternal life. It is presumptuous to think you can know.”

Why is this? According to the Roman Catholic Church, the path to eternal life is a process of faith plus works. Even if you participate in all the sacraments for the whole of your life and do good works, not even the priest can guarantee you that you will make it. One must simply work hard *religiously* and *hope* for the best.

The Catholic Church teaches that you can't know what your eternal destiny will be. One can hope, pray and do his very best and yet not know. Not even the Pope will say he knows without a shadow of a doubt that he is going to Heaven. To say you can know that you have eternal life is a bold statement that undermines Roman Catholic teaching of faith plus works.

For the Catholic, from the day of baptism to the day a person dies, he is on probation with God. Life is a trial during which one's faith and obedience are proven to see whether one is worthy of Heaven. “Be honest; love your neighbour; go to confession and mass; keep the Ten Commandments; give to the poor; be loyal to the church; and love God sincerely. It all helps.” You must earn it; yet how much is enough is unknown. This is Roman Catholic teaching.

“It is up to you” is the message of the Catholic Church. Christ has done His work; now you must do your part. “Actual” grace must be cultivated through the sacraments so one can do enough good works that might lead to Heaven.

**This is not biblical grace.** Grace in the Bible is defined as “undeserved favour.” God does for us what we can't do for ourselves. This is the salvation of grace that God offers all – see Titus 3:5. This salvation of grace is available to all – see Titus 2:11.

Is it possible to know whether you have eternal life before death? Yes, according to the Word of God, the Bible, we can know that we have eternal life. The Bible teaches us that God can't lie – read Titus 1:2. We are told that eternal life is promised, but to whom? This question is answered for us in 1 John 5:11-13. **Those that place their faith in Jesus Christ are assured of eternal life.**

In fact, the Bible teaches they will never perish – read John 10:28-30. Nothing will separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ – read Romans 8:32-39.

The Bible guarantees eternal life for those who place their faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour.

Have you made that decision yet? Note Hebrews 2:3.

## V. “But I can’t leave the Church! I was raised a Catholic.”

One of the greatest struggles that many people have is changing their religion and the thought that “whatever religion you were born into is your religion for life.” This is especially true among Catholics. Why?

Some Catholics consider their church to be a class by itself. It is *the* Church, *the* Catholic Church. The rest of Christendom is to be respected but to remain a step below the Roman Catholic Church. Some would even boldly say that these other churches are all breakaway churches started by Protestant rebels and heretics like Martin Luther and John Calvin.

The Roman Catholic Church claims to be the one true church. As Catholics take part in the sacrament of the mass, the following statement is made concerning their church: “It is the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic church instituted by Christ.”

Its Bishops are the successors of the Twelve Apostles. Its Pope has inherited the throne of Saint Peter to whom Christ said, “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church” in Matthew 16:18. It is taught emphatically that only within the Roman Catholic church is the fullness of divinely revealed truth and thereby the only means of salvation. There is no salvation outside the Catholic Church. You must therefore remain or become a Roman Catholic if you are to have any hope of a home in Heaven. This is why many struggle with the thought or challenge of either questioning or leaving the church.

The Catholic Church teaches that it is the dispenser of the sacraments that are necessary for salvation. The World Council of Vatican II stated that no one could be saved who, “knowing that the Catholic Church was founded by God through Christ,” would refuse to remain in it or refuse to become a part of it. Additionally, the Roman Catholic Church believes that the pope is the vicar or “God’s representative on earth.” He is also considered the pontiff, the “high priest of the people of God.” To be loyal to the Roman Catholic Church is to be loyal to God.

**The Bible teaches that salvation is in the person and work of Jesus Christ.** This is called the Gospel. Gospel means the “good news” that Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again on the third day – read 1 Corinthians 15:1-8. Biblical salvation is not in a church; it is in receiving Jesus Christ as personal Saviour by faith alone – as in Romans 10:9-13 and Revelation 22:17.

It can be seen as a betrayal of one’s family heritage to leave the Roman Catholic Church. Unfortunately, this is how many see it: “If I leave the Roman Catholic Church, I am turning my back on my family.” If one changes his religion, it should not be seen as an automatic rejection of his family’s values and cultural background. There should be a distinction between the two.

**It is simply a decision to follow the teachings of the Bible.** If one studies the Scriptures, one will clearly see that Christ did not found the Roman Catholic Church.



If the Bible is to be our sole authority in all faith and practice, then we must reject teachings such as the Pope being vicar and pontiff of the church. The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is the Head of the church, and that He appoints under-shepherds (pastors, bishops and elders) to care for His people – read Ephesians 5:22-24 and 1 Peter 5:1-4. A person needs to read Matthew 16:18 in its strict context.

First, the name *Peter* means “little stone or pebble.” Second, the reference to the *rock* refers to Peter’s confession of Jesus Christ as his Saviour in answer to our Lord’s question, “Whom do people say I am?” Third, upon Peter’s confession of Christ Jesus as the Saviour, the true church is founded upon Him (the Rock), Christ, not Peter. In other words, a New Testament church is made up of people like Peter that have confessed Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour. The New Testament church is a spiritual organism, not a physical institution like the Roman Catholic Church.

Whom will you follow? Jesus Christ or the teachings of a church? To follow Christ’s teachings in the Scriptures is not a rejection of one’s family values and culture; it is simply a choice to obey God rather than man – see Acts 5:29. Whom will you obey?

#### **VI. “Do I really need to leave the Church? Maybe I can make a difference from within.”**

Many Catholics are driven by loyalty and remain in the Church, convinced that, though she has faults, she is still Christ’s church.

It is to these we say, “Why seek you the living among the dead?” – see Luke 24:5. If Christ is not in the Eucharist, not in the main altar and not hanging on a life-size crucifix; then where is He? The Christ of the Bible indwells the body of the born-again Christian – as in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Romans 8:9-11. Bible-believing Christians have Christ living within them as their risen Lord – see Matthew 28:6. Without being unkind to anybody, to expect to find Jesus Christ in the Roman Catholic Institution is like looking for a living body in a tomb.

Some say, “I am going to stay in hope of changing the Church.” This is a worthy ambition, but it is not going to happen. Down through history, the Roman Catholic Church (from its inception in A.D. 313 by Emperor Constantine) has continued to move further away from biblical truth.

Church history is stained with the blood of martyred saints who stood for truth against the Catholic Church. The Bible is not her sole authority. She is guilty of murdering countless Christians throughout church history, those who have refused to submit to her. She is set in her ways within a mesh of idolatry and mixing of man-made traditions with some biblical truth.

In 1994, the Roman Catholic Church restated in the “Catechism of the Catholic Church” its commitment to the traditional teachings of the church. Nothing has changed. This catechism is the first official summary of the faith of the Roman Catholic Church in some 400 years. Within it, you will find no less than 100 references to the Council of Trent, in which many of the dogmas of the church were formulated and affirmed. The Roman Catholic Church is not a democracy but a hierarchical monarchy. Bishops, some 3,250 in number, lead it. She has not changed nor is about to change; she is set on the downward spiral of heresy and false

teaching. What is the end result of this? The Catholic Church gives no lasting hope to its parishioners concerning eternal life.

## **VII. Why is the mass so important?**

The mass keeps people in the Catholic Church. Why is it so powerful? Simply put, it is the focal point of Catholic liturgy around which everything revolves. The mass is the primary point by which the faith is handed down from generation to generation.

The Catholic Church mandates that all Catholics attend mass weekly. Deliberate disobedience to this sacrament is a mortal sin. To be forgiven, the individual must confess during the sacrament of penance how many times he has missed mass to a priest.

During a part of the mass called the Consecration, the Roman Catholic Church teaches that the bread and the wine turn into the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ. This is called “transubstantiation.” This supernatural act is performed through the words and actions of the priest. It is believed by Roman Catholics that the Lord Jesus comes to exist in His full deity and humanity within the appearance of the bread and wine. Therefore, to neglect participating in the mass is to reject Jesus Christ.

**Does the mass help Catholics get to Heaven?** According to the Roman Catholic Church, the mass is a sacrifice for sin. The mass is a real sacrifice, the continuation of Christ’s sacrifice upon the cross. Catholics are taught from childhood that only through the mass can they experience the material presence of Jesus Christ and thereby worship Him within the bread and wine.

Also, in the mass, the parishioner receives “actual” grace that is necessary for salvation and also can speed up the release of loved ones in purgatory. This is why the mass is regarded with such importance in the Roman Catholic faith. It is regarded as essential for one’s own salvation and the salvation of loved ones.

**Does the Eucharist (the wafer) become the literal body of Jesus Christ?** This is what the Roman Catholic Church teaches. This teaching is based on John 6:51-55 and their church tradition.

What is John 6:51-55 teaching in its context? The chapter begins with the feeding of the 5,000 – read 6:1-15. Then, a reference is made to manna from Heaven in the time of Moses – read 6:30-35. In the same manner, God has provided His son Jesus Christ as the Eternal Manna from Heaven. All those that receive Him by faith shall never hunger, for He is the eternal Bread of Life – read 6:47-51. The passage is not about sacraments; it is simply teaching that Jesus Christ must be received by faith for salvation – read John 6:29, 40 & 47. In like manner, the Lord Jesus referred to himself as the Bread of Life, Living Water and the Door – see John 4:13-14; 6:35 & 51. These are all analogies illustrating the fact that we must receive Christ into our lives by faith. There is nothing within this whole chapter referring to a sacrament.

Throughout the Book of John, Jesus Christ is offered to all for salvation for those that by faith receive Him as their personal Saviour – see John 1:12; 3:16.

**What about the Lord's Supper?** The Lord Jesus Christ instituted only two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper. Both of these ordinances were followed by those already within God's family by faith in Jesus Christ alone – read Acts 2:41-42. Baptism is a public declaration that one is a Christian; it is not a means of becoming a Christian – read Acts 8:35-38. Then, our Lord instituted the Lord's Table as a time of remembrance of what Christ has done in order to provide salvation. The bread represents His body that was broken. The fruit of the vine represents His blood that was shed to pay for our sins. This was a memorial ordinance for those who were already Christians – read 1 Corinthians 11:23-25. Nowhere in the Bible do we see the Lord's Supper as a means of salvation as the Roman Catholic Church teaches.

**How often does Christ have to be sacrificed for sin?** Within the Roman Catholic Church, each time mass is held, the Eucharist becomes the body and blood of Christ. It is a re-enactment of the one event according to the Roman Catholic Church.

But the Bible teaches, Jesus Christ paid for sin once for all on the cross some 2,000 years ago. And when He cried out, "It is finished," He meant that **all** sin was paid for **in full** at that one time. Therefore, the benefits of the death of Christ are still with us today. For those of us that have placed our faith in Christ as Saviour, we are eternally saved – read 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 John 5:11-13. It can be received by faith alone in Jesus Christ, Who has paid for sins once and for all – read Hebrews 9:6-7, 12 & 24-28. Only one presentation of His body and blood was necessary, for God accepted it as the perfect and complete restitution for our sins – see John 1:29. The high priest of the Old Testament went into the Holy of Holies once a year to offer blood upon the altar. This was a picture of the Lord Jesus, Who was sacrificed once and for all as our Sin Bearer. There is no more need for continual presentation of sacrifices because God the Son shed His blood for our sins once and for all – see 1 John 2:1-2. We are to **remember** His body that was broken and His blood that was shed for our sins. We aren't commanded to **repeat** the sacrificial presentation of His body and blood – see 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

**Idolatry.** The sincerity of Catholics in following their church's instruction to worship the Eucharist is acknowledged, but the practice is idolatrous. The Ten Commandments forbids the worship of any objects, even those supposedly representative of God – see Exodus 20:4-5. God is Spirit, and those that worship Him must do so in spirit and in truth – John 4:24. God, the Holy Ghost, indwells those that have placed their faith in Jesus Christ – read Romans 8:9-11. According to the truth of the Word of God, we can worship God in spirit.

A sacrament is a means of obtaining "actual" grace, according to the Roman Catholic Church. In contrast, an ordinance is an illustration or memorial of what has been accomplished. Both baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances which picture our salvation in Jesus Christ – read Romans 6:3-5; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. This is what the Bible teaches.

The choice is yours. Will you follow the teachings of the Catholic Church, or will you submit yourself to the authority of the Word of God? If you submit to the Word of God, the truth will set you free – see John 8:32.

### **VIII. Scripture versus Church Tradition**

Who is really the authority of truth? The Bible or the Roman Catholic Church with her official traditions and interpretations? One of the criticisms that Bible-believing Christians often face when conversing with a Roman Catholic is this issue of “sola scriptura.” They say, “You have the Bible alone as your authority. We as Catholics have the Bible plus the traditions and interpretations of the church as our authority for truth.”

Can they both be right? What do we do when or if there is conflict? Which one do we believe? On what authority do we make this decision?

The most fundamental issue in Catholicism is the question of authority. Who or what determines how the faith received from Jesus Christ is to be understood and practiced?

According to the Roman Catholic Church, faith received from Christ is to be found in the Scriptures, PLUS the traditions of the Church as interpreted by the Pope and Bishops. Scripture and tradition together are the supreme standard or rule of religious truth.

How did this authority structure come about? The Roman Catholic Church claims that God has appointed the bishops of the church as successors of Christ’s Twelve Apostles. It is from these Apostles that the bishops have inherited three exclusive rights:

**Sanctifying power:** The bishops have the power to make the faithful holy. This is primarily done through their authority to ordain priests and oversee the sacraments through which Roman Catholics receive “actual” grace from God. This grace enables the individual to perform good works and abstain from evil, which could amount to a home in Heaven.

**Ruling power:** The right to govern and to shepherd. They have oversight of particular churches assigned to them, and collectively they have oversight of the worldwide church under the leadership of the current pope.

**Teaching power:** This enables the bishops to interpret revelation and to declare it with authority. They are the “heralds of faith” and the “authentic teachers” of truth passed down from the Apostles.

The Bishops exercise these powers in communion with the Pope and under his guidance. He is the visible head of the Roman Catholic Church, the high priest, the supreme ruler and the primary teacher of the faith.

The Pope with the Bishops worldwide forms the “Magisterium.” This is the authoritative teaching body of the church. The Magisterium’s mission is to safeguard the doctrines of the church. They are also responsible to teach them to the people and keep people from going

astray. It is within this setting that the Roman Catholic Church claims the exclusive right to interpret God's Word and decide on its true meaning.

To fulfil this awesome responsibility, the church teaches that these bishops have been gifted with infallibility. This means that, in matters of faith and morals, the bishops acting together are incapable of error. Also, the Pope is considered infallible in working with the bishops and is considered incapable of making errors in judging truth as well.

Therefore, to be a loyal and true Roman Catholic is to submit to the verdicts of the Magisterium. From here, the official teachings of the Roman Catholic Church are constructed and affirmed. But...

- Is this biblical?
- Is this logical?
- Is this acceptable?
- Is this understandable?
- Is this really workable and practical?
- Does this lead to true spirituality?
- Does this lead to eternal salvation?

In answering these questions, what should be our final authority before God? Where should we look for spiritual guidance?

To answer these questions, the following related questions require examination.

**First, what does the Bible claim to be?** The Bible claims to be **perfect** (all sufficient and without error) – read Psalm 19:6-9. The Bible claims to be the **inspired Word of God** that leads to salvation and is **profitable** for spiritual maturity and equipping for Christian service – read 2 Tim 3:15-17. The Bible claims to be **complete**; it is God's final revelation to man – read 2 Peter 1:19-21. The Bible claims to be **eternal**, and by it a person is born again into the family of God – read 1 Peter 1:23-25. The Bible claims to be **all sufficient**, complete, perfect, powerful and eternal. It claims to be our **sole authority** for faith and practice – read once again 2 Timothy 3:15-17.

**Didn't the Roman Catholic Church give us the Bible?** No, all Scripture is given by "inspiration of God" – see 2 Timothy 3:15-17. God the Holy Spirit is the author of the Word of God and, down through history, the Jews (Old Testament) and Bible-believing Christians (New Testament) have been the custodians of the Word of God. Councils down through history have formally recognised the individual books as inspired long before the Roman Catholic Church existed. God has promised to preserve His Word, and this has certainly been true to the present in and through the nation of Israel and Bible-believing Christians – read 1 Peter 1:22-25; Psalm 119:89.

**Second, what is Roman Catholic Tradition?** The Roman Catholic Church refers to the body of beliefs and practices entrusted to its Pope and Bishops as the "sacred deposit of faith." It teaches that the Twelve Apostles have passed on this "deposit of faith" in two distinct ways. The **first** was through unwritten means, that is, their preaching and teaching, conduct, prayers

and worship. This is referred to as revelation passed down from Christ to the Apostles through unwritten means, as traditions. The **second** form was written revelation from Christ to the Apostles. The Holy Ghost moved men to record “a portion of the deposit of faith” as inspired Scriptures. These are the writings of the New Testament. Therefore, the Roman Catholic Church teaches that tradition and Scripture together form the Word of God. Collectively, they preserve the entire sacred “deposit of faith” and serve the Roman Catholic Church as the supreme rule of her faith. To some, this might sound reasonable, especially when the Roman Catholic Church describes tradition as nothing more than the Apostles’ preaching and example.

**Third, how is the word ‘tradition’ used in the Bible?** The Bible, in 2 Thessalonians 2:15, talks about standing firm in the traditions you have been taught, whether by word or by mouth or by letter. Was the Apostle Paul referring to the same Word of God of which people were taught under His ministry? Was Paul referring to the Word of God plus other tradition that needs to be passed on? The answers lie with the context of its usage.

You will find the word *tradition* some 13 times in the whole Bible. The Apostle Paul is addressing individuals whom he has personally taught – note again 2 Thessalonians 2:15. He is encouraging them to continue in these teachings whether he is present or not.

The word *tradition* in the Bible means “something that is passed down, a legacy” – 2 Timothy 2:2. The Apostle uses this word to stress that the truths he had taught them were not original with him. He simply passed on the truth that he received from the Lord (see 1 Corinthians 11:2; 2 Thessalonians 3:6). He was **not referring** to teaching that was apart from the Word of God; he was referring to the sufficient and complete Word of God. The usage of the word in the Bible refers to something we should do, which is to pass on the Word of God already in our possession to others – read Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 20:24-32.

**Finally, can we reconcile the two usages of the word *tradition* by the Roman Catholic Church and the Bible?** A mixture of oral law and written law was not uncommon. In fact, the Jewish nation has these two variations of teachings. The Roman Catholic Church is no different from the nation of Israel that incorporated “extra” oral laws into their religious lives.

Therefore, if the Word of God is our authority, then the answer can only be “NO.” There is no way to reconcile the two usages of the word *tradition* as used by the Roman Catholic Church and the Bible.

There are two concluding reasons for this:

- a. Compared to the Bible, the Roman Catholic Church uses a different definition of the word *tradition*. The Catholic Church teaches that its traditions are part of its unwritten teachings (**not in the Bible**). The biblical usage of the Word *tradition* is in reference to the “written” teachings **already in the Bible** that need to be passed on.
- b. If there is a place for extra teachings, “traditions,” within the Roman Catholic Church, then how do we address the completeness of the Word of God and obvious

contradictions between the official “traditional” teachings of the Catholic Church and the Word of God? They both can’t be right when they diametrically oppose one another. Which one will we believe?

“The interpretation of the church is what we should believe.” This is what some would say. Is this really what we should do? Are we to assume that the Roman Catholic Church has correctly defined truth even though its definition is contrary to the Word of God?

Down through Roman Catholic history, the parishioner **has not been encouraged** to read the Bible on his or her own. One main reason given by the Roman Catholic Church for this is the possibility of incorrectly interpreting the Scriptures. Yes, this is possible; but should people be discouraged from reading the Scriptures on their own? What does the Bible itself say about this?

“Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God” – see Romans 10:17. If a person does not read the Scriptures, he will not have faith to believe. Is this what God wants? The answer is emphatically “No”.

We are encouraged to study the Scriptures – see 2 Timothy 2:15. Through diligent study of the Bible, a person will correctly interpret its contents and be equipped for effective service.

We need to search the Scriptures as the Christians did at Berea – see Acts 17:11. We need to measure what we are taught by the Word of God. This is what the people of Berea did, and they were well respected for this.

The truth of God’s Word will set us free and cleanse our hearts – see John 8:36; John 15:3. How can this take place unless we are exposed to the Word of God?

The Word of God provides guidance and is a weapon of spiritual warfare – see Psalm 119:105; Ephesians 6:12-18. How can someone combat evil and know God’s will if he doesn’t read and use the Word of God?

The Holy Spirit promised to lead us into all truth. The Holy Spirit indwells the life of a born-again Christian. As we submit to Him, we will interpret the Bible correctly – see John 14 and 16.

## **IX. Was Peter the first Pope?**

There is no biblical or historical proof for this. Peter was certainly one of the Apostles of Jesus Christ and was used by God like the rest of them. It can’t be historically proven that Peter ever went to Rome. The Book of Romans makes no mention of him travelling there. We know Peter was married because Jesus Christ healed his mother-in-law. Peter had his shortcomings. He was faithless at times; he was rebuked by the Lord Jesus saying, “*Get thee behind me Satan*”; and he denied the Lord three times. For the first Pope of the Roman Catholic Church, Paul the Apostle would have been a better choice if we were to consider a man’s character. Peter had his highs and lows spiritually – study Matthew 8:14; 16:21-23; and 26:69-75.

In 1953 a number of 'bone boxes' were discovered in Jerusalem, at the bottom of the Mount of Olives with inscriptions identifying the remains of the deceased. One of those bone boxes was named Simon Peter. Peter died and was buried in Jerusalem is a historical fact confirmed by archaeology discoveries – see <http://www.aloha.net/~mikesch/peters-jerusalem-tomb.htm>.

In A.D. 1870, 533 Roman Catholic bishops proclaimed **the Pope as infallible, immune to error in his official teaching**. This placed the words of a man at the same level as the Scriptures. When there is disagreement, "tradition" is elevated under the guise that only the Priests and Bishops can understand and interpret correctly spiritual truth. What about the Holy Scriptures? Don't they carry any ultimate authority? – see 2 Timothy 3:15-17.

**What about the "keys" of the kingdom as in Matthew 16:19?** Were they not given to Peter? Keys refer to authority that was passed on to Peter and all of God's people to proclaim the teaching of Jesus Christ – see Matthew 28:18-20. For all that have confessed Jesus Christ as Saviour like Simon Peter are given the authority to preach the Gospel in all the world – read Luke 24:47-49; Acts 1:8. This reference to keys has nothing to do with apostolic succession; it has everything to do with our charge as born-again Christians to preach the Gospel to the entire world. Bible scholars are still unaware of any actual literal "keys" passed down through church history.

#### **X. Was Mary without sin and our co-redeemer?**

In 1854, the Vatican formally declared the doctrine of **Mary's immaculate conception** and in 1950, her assumption to Heaven without dying. At an Easter service at a public school in Sydney, the Priest said to a group of students, "Whatever you do, please remember one thing this Easter, Mary the mother of Jesus." No. Easter is all about the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, not Mary - read 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 and 1 Timothy 2:5.

**Mary has an exalted position**, according to Roman Catholic tradition. She is considered the mother of God, sinless, co-redeemer with Jesus Christ on the cross and a mediator; and Roman Catholic tradition teaches she ascended up to heaven without dying (the Assumption).

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that Catholics should greatly respect Mary. One way they can do this is by saying the 'Rosary'. This ritual is considered an 'epitome or summary of the whole gospel', it is a series of prayers counted on a string of beads. These are arranged in groups of **ten small beads** separated by **one large bead**. Therefore there are five sets of these beads. On each of the large beads, the 'Lord's Prayer' is said. On each of the small beads the 'Hail Mary' prayer is said. Is this what prayer is really all about? Biblically, prayer is personal communion with God, it is not a systematized and repetitive ritual – see Nehemiah 1:4-11. We are not bound by a specific routine or words, the Holy Spirit helps us to pray according to the will of God – see Romans 8:26-27.



**The Bible makes no mention of praying to Mary.** The Bible does teach that there is only one Mediator between men and God, **the man Christ Jesus** – see 1 Timothy 2:5. We are to pray directly to God the Father in the name of Jesus Christ – read Luke 11:1-4. Furthermore, there is no biblical proof or historical documentation that Mary ascended to Heaven without dying. This is a chosen belief incorporated into the Traditions of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Bible teaches that Mary was a chosen vessel by which Jesus Christ came into the world. She was a sinner because she rejoiced in God “my Saviour” (If she were without sin, then what need would there have been for God’s salvation?) – see Luke 1:46-48. Though she was a virgin when she gave birth to the Son of God, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, Mary had other children with her husband Joseph – read Matthew 13:55-56. Why did she tell the servants to obey Jesus Christ at the marriage of Cana if she had as much authority as Christ as the mother of God? – see John 2:1-11. The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ said to John the Apostle to take care of Mary in his dying moments on the cross. Jesus Christ died alone on the cross for our sins – read John 19:25-27; 1 Peter 2:24; 1 Peter 3:18.

## **XI. Images or idolatry?**

Idolatry is evident within the Roman Catholic Church’s system of rituals. I recall wearing a crucifix around my neck when I was challenged with this statement: “Jesus Christ is no longer on the cross. He is risen.” I realised I was idolising a figure that was not true of my Lord. The Bible teaches the following – read Exodus 20:1-4.

“Is it wrong to have an image as a reminder of someone you love or respect? I don’t worship the image or statue. We all have pictures that remind us of past events and people that we love. So what is wrong with our Catholic statues and images?” This is often the argument given when the issue of idolatry is charged against Roman Catholics.

The second of the Ten Commandments is in reference to images of God, whether you adore them or not. It is obvious to all that the bowing to and kissing and adoration of Catholic relics are a real part of Roman Catholicism. This is idolatry; this is what the Bible condemns – read Exodus 20:1-4.

**Why has this second commandment been removed from the Catholic Bible?** The answer is obvious; it contradicts the worship of images, THEREFORE IT HAS BEEN REMOVED AND THE TENTH COMMANDMENT HAS BEEN MADE INTO TWO COMMANDMENTS. That is why you will still find Ten Commandments in any Catholic version of the bible. Is this honest to God?

By the way, demonic activity is closely related to idolatry – see 1 Corinthians 10:16-22

## **XII. Confessional booths: Penance**

In preparation for my ‘Holy Communion’ at the age of ten, my school scripture-teaching nun told me that I needed to go to Confessional. I reluctantly did so. As I was confessing my

horrible sins (that I had made up) to the Priest, I had some serious doubts as to his power to absolve my sins. Was it just a matter of repeating so many 'Hail Marys'? Can this man, who is also a sinner authorise my forgiveness, I wondered?

Can a man who is a sinner forgive sins? The Bible teaches that 'all have sinned and come short of the glory of God' – Romans 3:23. What does the Bible teach? No. Only Jesus Christ has the power to forgive sin because He is God and sinless – read 2 Corinthians 5:21; Luke 6:17-26.

What about John 20:22-23? According to the Roman Catholic Church, Jesus Christ gave authority to forgive sin through the priesthood. This authority has been passed down through Christ to the Apostles to the Roman Catholic Church. Is this what the Bible teaches?

First, when we compare Scripture with Scripture, we see that God alone forgives sin and that this forgiveness takes place in the lives of people when they believe the Gospel and receive Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour – read Luke 5:20-24; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.

Second, how can sinful man forgive sinful man? Jesus Christ alone can forgive sin because He was not only God in the flesh; He is also without sin – see 2 Corinthians 5:21.

Third, the Apostles were unique to the time of Jesus Christ. There are no Apostles today. Their purpose was fulfilled in the establishment of the church – see Ephesians 2:20. It is an assumption to believe that this authority to forgive was passed on to the Roman Catholic Church.

Finally, we cannot prove that a person's sins are really forgiven through the Catholic Priest, and one cannot prove that there is an unbroken succession of this power within the Catholic Church to forgive sin. This is unwritten tradition that is found wanting logically and scripturally.

According to the Bible, a person can go straight to God the Father in the name of Jesus Christ and receive forgiveness of sin – read 1 Timothy 2:5; 1 John 1:7-9.

### **XIII. Purgatory; is there such a place?**

What is purgatory according to the Roman Catholic Church? It is for those who can possibly be redeemed from going to Hell. This is described as a middle place of temporal punishment for those sins that were not paid for while on earth. The paying of indulgences by family members to the Roman Catholic Church can do this. Indulgences are special credits a person can earn through acts of piety like praying the rosary. These can be credited to your own account or the account of a departed loved one.

Is this in the Bible? No! Nowhere in the bible is purgatory mentioned or even implied. But the Bible teaches there are only two eternal destinies, Heaven or Hell – read Luke 16:19-31; Revelation 20:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:6-8. The Bible teaches that we will all give an account of our own selves before God – see Romans 14:10. Everybody will be judged for his or her own personal sin – Revelation 20:11-15.

#### **XIV. What is a Saint?**

Sainthood is the belief that some people can rise to the point where they are declared Saints by the church, like Mary MacKillop, and become patrons of the Roman Catholic Church. These Saints become mediators for varying specific needs. These Saints were once living individuals that were crowned saints after their death. The Roman Catholic Church makes this decision and many of these saints are “patron” Saints that Roman Catholics pray to and ask for assistance in specific areas.

**In contrast, the Bible teaches that every Christian is called a ‘saint’ – see 1 Corinthians 1:2.** These saints mentioned in the Bible were **living people** because men like the Apostle Paul wrote to them to instruct them in godliness. The saints mentioned in the Bible were still in need of maturity. God gives Pastors and Teachers to the church in order to instruct the living Saints in the Word of God – see Ephesians 4:11-12.

#### **XV. Sacramentals; what are they for?**

These are religious relics or symbols within the Roman Catholic Church. They are meant to bring a spiritual dimension to the events of everyday life. Some examples of these are crucifixes, the Rosary, pictures of Saints and the sign of the cross. Is this acceptable? Does this harmonise with the Bible?

The Bible teaches that we are to live by faith. We receive God’s salvation by faith alone, and we are called to live the Christian life by faith – read Romans 1:17; Hebrews 11:1-6. God is Spirit, and we are to worship the invisible God by faith alone – see John 4:24. Therefore to have religious relics and rituals in my life that I look to for spiritual help and strength is contrary to the Bible, which teaches us to live our lives by faith.

#### **XVI. Priests, brothers and nuns**

The Roman Catholic Priest is ordained to carry out the rites of the church. He is responsible to lead in worship through such sacraments as the mass. Nuns and brothers are **un-ordained servants to the church** and minister in many ways among Catholic people. They serve predominantly in charity work, health care, welfare, education and missionary work. They are also forbidden to marry – read 1 Timothy 4:1-3.

The Bible teaches that every Christian is a Priest. He has access to God the Father directly through Jesus Christ – read 1 Peter 5:9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6; and Hebrews 13:15. The Bible also teaches that he that is greatest among you is a servant of all. This is the charge for every born-again Christian to exemplify servant-hood toward all in need. Though some have the gift of serving, we are all to serve others as exemplified by our Lord Jesus – read Philippians 2:1-11; John 13:5-20.

Brothers and nuns are not found in the Bible. But there are Pastors and Deacons mentioned in the Bible. These positions exist to meet spiritual needs within the church. Among the qualifications, they are to be married men – read 1Timothy 3.

## **XVII. Is the Church changing?**

Let's ask the question again: "Can the Roman Catholic Church be changed?" No, people down through history have tried to no avail; many lost their lives in the process. Church history from the time of Jesus Christ is paved with the blood of martyred saints.

The Roman Emperor Constantine founded the Roman Catholic Church in A.D. 313. After seeing a vision, he ceased all persecution of Christians. With the momentary end of persecution, there was the establishment of the state church that down through history grew and ruled with an iron fist. **Anybody that opposed her leadership and teachings was considered a heretic and was punished for it.** The Roman Catholic Church is responsible for the deaths of countless Bible-believing Christians, Muslims and Jews down through church history. For example, it is estimated that the Catholic Inquisition from A.D. 1000-1700 claimed the lives of some fifty million Bible-believing Christians. These people were cruelly tortured and killed because they would not submit to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. IS THIS THE CHURCH THAT JESUS CHRIST STARTED? DOESN'T THE BIBLE TEACH, "THOU SHALT NOT KILL"?

Having studied the evidence thoroughly, what are you to do? The answer is very clear in 2 Corinthians 6:14-17. Come out from among them and be separate from that which is contrary to God and the Word of God.

Will you separate from error? In the power of the Holy Ghost, you can obey biblical truth. Leaving the Church makes the clearest and strongest statement to family and friends. If we separate from false religion, the difference between truth and error becomes clear and distinct. Then in time, God will provide the greater opportunity to reach family and friends with the true Gospel of Jesus Christ – read Romans 1:14-16

## **XVIII. What is the final authority?**

What is the real issue? The answer is authority. Will your authority be the Roman Catholic Church, or will it be the Word of God? You can't have both because there are major contradictions. "Choose you this day whom you will serve" – see Joshua 24:15.

The Roman Catholic Church claims to be the one and only true church; therefore, she claims to be the custodian of biblical truth. She only can correctly interpret the Bible, and laymen were forbidden to read the scriptures on their own – A.D. 1229. This teaching that only the church can correctly interpret truth was passed down in succession from Christ to the Apostles, then to Peter and so on to the present.

In contrast, the Bible claims to be the complete revelation from God from Genesis to Revelation. To accept any other teachings or traditions is to add to God's Word. By doing so, we are saying that the Bible is incomplete. The Bible claims to be complete – Psalm 19:1-6. Also, God promises to punish harshly those that “take away” or “add to” the Word of God – Revelation 22:18-19. This is what the Roman Catholic Church is doing through her traditions, she is adding to the Bible.

From its inception, the Roman Catholic Church has evolved in its teachings. You can mark dates when the Pope and Bishops made varying teachings and practices official. Let me mention some examples: indulgences (A.D. 600's), celibacy for Priests (A.D. 1079), Saints and images (A.D. 787) were made a part of the Roman Catholic Church at different times.

The Word of God must be our final authority because it is unchanging, perfect and settled once and for all as divinely “inspired of God” – see 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Jude 3.

**Who were the ‘Church Fathers’ and what contribution did they make to the formation of the Roman Catholic Church?** The Roman Catholic Church recognizes some eighty-eight men as ‘Fathers’ of the Church. All lived within the first eight centuries and most were made ‘Saints’ within the Roman Catholic Church. The Church highly values their writings but does not consider their teachings as infallible. It is admitted by the Church that sometimes the ‘Fathers’ disagreed with one another and some taught error. Pope Leo XIII wrote, “ the ‘Fathers’ expressed ideas of their times and thus made statements which in these days have been abandoned as incorrect”.

Of what value then are the writings of the ‘Fathers’ to the Church? Catholic scholar William A. Jurgens said, “ **The Value of the ‘Fathers and Writers’ is this: that in the aggregate they demonstrate what the Church did and does yet believe and teach. In the aggregate they provide a witness to the content of ‘Tradition’, that ‘Tradition’ which itself is a vehicle of revelation**”.

Therefore we have an admission by the Church and its authorities that even though the ‘Fathers’ varied in their teachings, the Roman Catholic Church claimed some of their teachings as their own. Much of the ‘Traditions’ of the Church were dug out of the wells of the ‘Church Fathers’.

We will note some of the beliefs of the earlier ‘Church Fathers’ and in doing so we will confirm the influence on what are today, ‘bedrock’ beliefs and practises within the Roman Catholic Church.

**Ignatius of Antioch (50-110AD):** He taught that all churches should be part of one universal (Catholic) church and there should be Bishops governing groups of churches. This is contrary to the Scriptures that gives Bishops (Pastor, Elder) per one church – see Titus 1:5-7.

**Justin Martyr (100-165AD):** He interpreted the Bible allegorically, not literally. He helped to develop a 'middle state' after death that evolved into the doctrine of 'Purgatory'. This is so contrary to God's Word, which teaches either heaven or hell after death – read 2 Corinthians 5:6-8; Psalm 9:17.

**Irenaeus of Lyons (125-202AD):** He supported the idea of authority of the Bishop as a ruler over a group of churches. He believed in the 'real presence' of the body of Christ in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. The Scriptures teaches contrary to this, the **elements are reminders** of the body of Jesus Christ – see 1 Corinthians 11:23-27.

**Tertullian (155-255AD):** He taught that the Church's authority comes through apostolic succession, all the way back to Peter. He taught the principle of celibacy to an extreme that lead to the monastic system of unmarried Clergy within the Roman Catholic Church. This is so contrary to the Bible, which teaches that those in spiritual leadership are qualified to minister by being married – see 1 Timothy 3:1-7. One would wonder whether the Roman Catholic Church would be in a better position morally today if the clergy was permitted to marry – see 1 Timothy 4:1-3. With the denial of fulfilling natural physical appetites through the sanctity of married, this has led an epidemic of evil within the moral fibre of the Roman Catholic Church. Yes, moral failure is found in all churches and people groups throughout the world and down through history. Yet, within the Roman Catholic Church it is at an embarrassing level. The fault must lie at the feet of the dogma of celibacy within the Church of Rome. The Scripture teaches some were made 'Eunuchs' for the kingdom of God but for the majority of us, God has ordained marriage – see Genesis 2:24-25; 1 Corinthians 7:1-40. He also taught that Baptism cleanses away sin. But, the Bible teaches that only the Blood of Jesus Christ can wash away our sin – read 1 John 1:7-9. This is applied to our lives by receiving Jesus Christ as our personal saviour – see Romans 5:1.

Last but not least, Tertullian taught that Mary was the second Eve. This belief led eventually to the exaltation of Mary within the Roman Catholic Church. Biblically, Mary was the human instrument through which God the Son came into the world. Jesus Christ become her saviour and she was obedient to His teachings – see John 2:5; Luke 1:47.

**Cyprian (? - 258AD):** Cyprian was more concerned about external conforming to religious rituals as apposed to having the evidence of spiritual life. He supported the idea of 'infant baptism'. It was acceptable to baptise babies into the Church without their ability to understand what is being done to them. The Bible teaches that a person is baptised by immersion upon their confession of Jesus Christ as saviour – see Acts 8:36-38. I was baptised as baby at St.Michaels Catholic Church Lane Cove. My family to this day remind me that I screamed all the way through the event. In contrast, I was born-again at the age of fourteen and then baptised by immersion at the age of nineteen. I enjoyed and remember clearly the later baptism. I knew what I was doing. Surely this affirms its correctness.

**Origen of Alexandria (185 – 258AD):** Though he endured persecution for his faith at the hand of the Roman Empire, he was a bearer of many teachings that were contrary to the Bible. Some of these are; he denied the inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures. He rejected the

creation account in the Book of Genesis. He rejected the doctrine of the Trinity, and Jesus Christ was just a created being. He also propagated the allegorical method in interpreting the Scriptures. He denied hell as a literal place. He also taught that baptism and good works could only achieve salvation. This teaching became the heart and soul of the Roman Catholic Church. The Bible opposes these teachings of Origen – see Jude v.3. The Bible teaches we received God's salvation as a free gift by faith alone – see Ephesians 2:8-9.

**Eusebius of Caesarea (270-340AD):** This man promoted the teachings of Origen unashamedly. The Roman Emperor Constantine as he joined the church and state within his empire, hired Eusebius to produce Greek New Testaments. It is within this time frame that questionable manuscripts were present and propagated. It is accepted that he was guilty of providing a corrupt copy of God's Word to people. He like the 'Father of Liars', the Devil has been undermining the Word of God since the Garden of Eden – see Genesis 3:1-7.

**Jerome (340-420AD):** He produced a standard Latin Bible, which was completed between AD 383 – 405. This became the official Roman Catholic Bible. It became known as the 'Latin Vulgate'. The textual basis was the same as Eusebius works therefore there were many corruptions therein.

He demanded that church leaders remain unmarried. He believed in the worship of holy relics and the bones of dead Christians. He believed that the 'Saints' in heaven could hear prayers from the earth so therefore they can intercede on their behalf. He believed in the perpetual virginity of Mary therefore she qualifies as a co-redeemer. He believed in the 'blessing of holy water', which also became a main ritual within the Roman Catholic Church. Jerome was a very contentious angry man that not only justified the death penalty for those that opposed the teachings of the Church (called 'heretics') but was personally involved in persecuting bible believing Christians that would not accept all the teachings within the Roman Catholic Church. So we can see that Jerome's teachings and attitudes became a part of the Roman Catholic Church in the past and present history.

**Ambrose of Milan (339-397):** He believed in devotion to Mary and believed in prayers to the 'Saints'. He believed that the church has the power to forgive sins. He believed that the 'Lord's Supper' is a sacrifice of Christ as opposed to a point of remembrance of what Christ has already done for us. He also promoted celibacy and offering prayers for the dead. Ambrose continued to provide momentum for the teachings of earlier 'Church Fathers' that confirmed their inclusion in the dogmas of the Church.

**Augustine of Hippo (354 -430):** Augustine is known as one of the 'doctors of the church' for he helped to lay the foundation for the formation of the Roman Catholic Church. He was actively involved in persecuting bible-believing Christians. He is known as one of the fathers of a-millennialism that teaches that Church is the new Israel and the kingdom of God. He taught sovereign 'Election' which means that God chooses some to salvation and others for hell. He taught salvation could be achieved through the ordinance of baptism and the Communion Table. He taught that infants should be baptised and this would take away their sin. He called those that rejected this teaching 'infidels' and he cursed them. He promoted the sinlessness of

Mary, Purgatory, Celibacy, apostolic succession of the Roman Catholic Church from Peter, and the exaltation of Church 'Traditions' over the bible were also believed and promoted through his influential life. Last but not least, Augustine declared that all true interpretation of Scripture is confirmed by the 'Church Councils', the assembly of Bishops.

**John Chrysostom (347-407AD):** He believed in the 'real presence' of Jesus Christ in the Mass. He also promoted that Church Tradition is of equal importance and authority as the Bible.

**Cyril of Alexandria (376-444AD):** He promoted the adoring and reverencing of Mary and called her the 'bearer of God'. In 412AD he ordered the persecution of bible believing Christians known as the Donatist.

The Lord Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul warned against the rise of false teachings. Even though each of the 'Church Fathers' had some marks of spirituality and advanced Christian values, they all had their faults. Even though some of these men were contemporary and disciples of the apostles, they held to serious doctrinal error. It is obvious that the 'Roman Catholic Church' as it is known today, has its roots in the 'Church Fathers'. If the Bible is our sole authority in belief and practise then we must reject the teachings of the 'Church Fathers' that are contrary to the Word of God – see Jude v.3; 1 Timothy 4:1-6; 2 Timothy 3:1-13. Therefore we must reject the teachings within the Roman Catholic Church that have their basis in the 'Church Fathers'.

### **XIX. "I was born a Catholic; I'm going to die a Catholic."**

Have you ever objectively examined your faith? I remember doing so as a child in a service. As I listened to the priest scold the audience for looking like "bumps on a log," I said to myself, "You are not helping." The formalism and the deadness of a Catholic service placed some question marks in my mind.

Most people don't join the church; they are born into it. Therefore, they remain in it because it is all they know and are comfortable with. They see no reason to change. In fact, for many Roman Catholics, they see the vastness of the church and therefore conclude that it must be the true church of God. We all have a need to belong somewhere and the Roman Catholic Church answers this need for some.

Some remain in the church because they like the moral framework that is promoted therein. It is a place where you are encouraged to love God and your neighbour. Is this not the whole duty of man?

Others see no reason to leave the church when you consider the services she provides such as charities, retirement villages and educational institutions such as schools, colleges and universities for their children.



A Roman Catholic is encouraged to uphold the basic distinctive of the church yet there is acceptability within the church no matter your spiritual temperature. The key issue in remaining a Roman Catholic is not to leave the church for another religion.

My point is this - Doctrine doesn't seem to be important to most Catholics. They didn't join because of it, and they don't stay because of it. This is why many Roman Catholics are unaffected when their teachings are challenged or criticised. So what is the real issue, and why is it so hard for some to leave the Roman Catholic Church upon looking at her practices and teachings objectively?

**The issue is change.** Most of us don't like change. Also, change is often seen in a negative light. But is it? We all understand there can be good change and yes, there can be negative change. How will this change affect my relationships and me with friends and family? Many fear rejection from family members if they leave the Roman Catholic Church. Would this be you?

When a person accepts the Bible as his final authority and by faith receives Jesus Christ as his Saviour, he is made a new creature (changed) – see 2 Corinthians 5:17. God changes us from a child of the Devil to a child of God – see John 1:12; John 8:44. From this positional change, as we meditate upon Jesus Christ in the Scriptures, we are changed into his image (Christ-likeness) – see 2 Corinthians 3:18.

The bottom line is that **we need to change**. We need God's salvation because we are sinners, and we need to be transformed into His likeness – see Romans 12:2. Some people make statements like, "I will die a Catholic," because they don't want to change. What if you are going down **the wrong track** and somebody loves you enough to highlight this to you? Will you listen? **Is it working?** Do you have assurance of Eternal Life and lasting peace and satisfaction as a Catholic?

How does your **religion compare to the Word of God**? Does it matter to you? It matters to God. The Bible claims to be the only source of faith and practice.

Many remain Roman Catholic simply because they don't want to know the truth, and they refuse to change. We change our clothing daily; we change jobs from time to time; we change homes as well. If we have a health issue, we will change our diet. If a golfer were shown how he could hit a golf ball farther and straighter, I would think he would change his golf swing accordingly. Change is a part of life. It is not all bad. We can change for the better. Please don't gamble with your eternal destiny – see Mark 8:38. Good change is only one step away. Please submit to the authority of the Word of God and receive Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour – read Romans 10:9-13.

## **XX. “Salvation is of faith, but we must do our part.”**

Most, if not all, religions of the world do not deny the fact that faith is an essential part of all belief systems. So too the Roman Catholic Church teaches that we need to place our faith in Jesus Christ. But it doesn't stop there; there is also the inclusion of works as a part of this salvation process according to Roman Catholic teaching.

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that, through baptism, one receives sanctifying grace. In becoming a new creature through this initial sacrament, one must partake of the remaining sacraments that will impart actual grace, giving the Catholic power to perform good deeds and abstain from evil. This could lead to eternal life.

No matter how you might slice the cake, the long and short of it is simply this: Salvation according to the Catholic Church is through faith plus works.

### **What does the Bible teach about mixing faith and works for salvation?**

The Bible doesn't teach that salvation is obtained with a combination of faith and works. It is either one or the other – read Romans 4:13-14. The Bible teaches clearly that salvation is not of works, but that we can be made righteous by faith alone – see Romans 4:5. Abraham is given as an example of one that received this salvation by faith alone – read Romans 4:3-4; Genesis 15:6. King David also declares in his writings that no person is justified by works but by faith alone – read Romans 4:6-8; Psalm 32:1-11.

Romans chapter four also teaches that salvation is available at the exclusion of religious rituals. It is noted that Abraham was circumcised some 14 years after his confession of faith – read Romans 4:9-12; Genesis 17:10. This was amazing to the Jewish mind, which believed that circumcision was essential for salvation, and yet Abraham was justified without it. Also, within Romans chapter four, we see that salvation is available at the exclusion of rules and regulations. Once again, the Jewish mind believed that, by obeying the 613 commandments within the Torah (Law), a person could be made righteous. This was humanly impossible – read Romans 4:13-15.

This wonderful chapter goes on and concludes without doubt that salvation is by faith alone without works – see Romans 4:16. This salvation is according to God's grace, which is God doing for us what we can't do in our own strength. We are sinners by birth and by choice. We have all fallen short of God's perfect standard – read Romans 3:9-23.

This salvation is available to all who will firstly acknowledge their sin before a holy God; secondly, believe that Jesus died for their sins, was buried and rose again and thirdly, repent of their sin and by faith receive Jesus Christ as Saviour – read Romans 4:23-25.

There are many sincere people that believe they are on their way to Heaven because of what they **are** (religious), what they **know** and what they **do** – read Romans 2:17-20. We are saved (salvation) by faith alone and not by works (This is God's grace to us) – read Ephesians 2:8-9.

**Doesn't the Bible teach that works justified Abraham?** In James 2:14-26, Abraham is as an example of one that proved his faith by his works. When he willingly offered Isaac his son to God, this was a glowing example of faith that was already a part of his life. In the same way, Rahab the harlot gave evidence of her faith by hiding the Jewish spies in her home. Both gave evidence of saving faith by their works. We are justified before God by faith, and we prove we are justified by living this new life in Christ; this was evident in these two.

Genuine faith has an outflow; it will be evident before others. Just as a body without spirit is dead (a corpse), so faith without works is dead also – see James 2:26. Genuine saving faith will be evident in a person's life. Is it evident in your life? This same truth is also spelled out in Philippians 2:12. If there is genuine saving faith in our possession, there will be an outworking and evidence.

## **XXI. Do you have religion or spiritual reality?**

What is the heart of the issue between Roman Catholicism and Biblical Christianity?

**The Roman Catholic Church teaches that salvation is by faith plus works;** this is being religious, seeking God's approval. The Bible teaches that salvation is by faith alone in Jesus Christ as Saviour. This is true spiritual reality by entering into a personal relationship with God.

**The issue is also one of authority.** Which one is your ultimate authority, the Roman Catholic Church with a combination of the Bible and church traditions or the Bible alone? You must choose one or the other.

There are many other religions like the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses who have some regard for the Bible yet have their own additional materials (authorities). We have seen there is a conflict between the Roman Catholic Church's teachings (Bible plus tradition) and Bible teachings alone.

I was raised a Roman Catholic, and I always considered the Bible as the Word of God. At the age of fourteen, a youth pastor asked me the question, "Mario, if you were to die tonight, would you be one hundred percent certain that you would go to Heaven?" My answer was, "No, but I would like to know." My grandmother had passed away when I was eleven years old, and at that point I was faced with death for the first time in my life. The thought of death scared me and was the cause of many sleepless nights as I worried about my eternal destiny. "Will I go to heaven when I die or not?" was the question that had plagued my mind ever since my grandmother's death.

Three years later, a Bible was opened before me, and I read 1 John 5:13, which teaches we can know that we have Eternal Life. I wanted to know. So this youth leader showed me three main truths from the Bible:

- a. I was a sinner; and I deserved death, eternal separation from God, in Hell – read Romans 3:23; 6:23.
- b. Jesus Christ died for my sins, was buried and rose again – read 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.

- c. If I was prepared to repent of my sin, I could receive Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour by faith alone and have eternal life – read Romans 10:9-13.

I sincerely wanted this hope of eternal life; so on that Saturday afternoon in 1978, I invited Jesus Christ into my life with a prayer like this:

Dear God, I admit I am a sinner and I deserve death. I believe, Lord Jesus, that you died for my sins, were buried and rose again. I now repent of my sin and by faith invite you to be my Saviour from sin and give me eternal life. Amen!

I remember walking home feeling like a load had been lifted off my shoulders. And yes, the burden of sin in my life had indeed been lifted. I was now forgiven and a child of God – read John 1:12.

My friend, I was baptised as a child and had my Holy Communion at St. Michael's Catholic Church in Lane Cove; and my middle name in English means "rosary"; **yet I had no eternal hope.** Within the Roman Catholic Church, there is no assurance of eternal life. But God has promised eternal life to all those who receive Him as their personal Saviour – read John 10:28-30; Titus 1:2.

### **In conclusion:**

My goal in writing this booklet is not to offend anybody or to be critical. I appreciate the sincerity of all religious people. But, sincerity never equals 'Truth'.

My desire is for you to have this same hope of spiritual reality that I now have as a "born-again" child of God – read John 3:1-8.

The decision is yours. Will you accept the authority of God's Word, or will you continue to submit to the man-made 'Traditions of the Roman Catholic Church' that are clearly contrary to the Word of God?

Do you have religion or spiritual reality? **Religion will only condemn you** further in your sin and lead to a life of hypocrisy as you try to live a spiritual life – read Romans 2:17-29.

**Spiritual reality** is about having a personal relationship with the God of the Bible. Just like we were born into this world once, we need to be "born again" into God's family. By faith, this can be a spiritual reality in your life – read John 3:1-18. Will you make this decision?

I can genuinely say, "I have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ". He lives within me in the person of the Holy Spirit. He answers my prayers regularly. He teaches me spiritual truths as I read my bible daily. He gives me courage to share my faith with others. He gives me

power to live a peaceful, contented, joyful and victorious life. He gives me the power to overcome sin. He gives me guidance. He provides my every need. He gives me wisdom as I ask for it. He gives me the patience to love others and do to others, as I would have others do to me. He gives me the strength to endure those times of difficulties in my life. He had given me a lovely wife, three beautiful children that love God. His presence is with me 24/7 for He promises never to leave me – see Hebrews 13:5. My God is a wonderful, loving and faithful God. I know Him personally!

God is 'Real' in my life – see 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Is He real in your life?

He wants to be?

***Do you have religion or spiritual reality?***