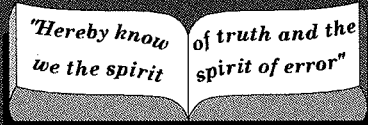


The Discerner



Volume 21, Number 3

July • August • September 2001

AN INTERDENOMINATIONAL HERESY-EXPOSING QUARTERLY

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EDITORIAL

By William A. BeVier

The Roman Catholic Church is the largest organization in professing Christendom. In this issue of **THE DISCERNER** we feature two articles dealing with this group. Bible-believing Christians need to be aware of what's going on in Roman Catholicism. One article by Elder Patrick Oliver stresses that nothing ever really changes in basic Roman Catholic doctrine, the other article by Dennis Costella indicates that by "mental gymnastics" another approach is being made as to who is a Roman Catholic. Criticism any time of Roman Catholicism in any form is certain to raise the ire of the devote. We are aware of this, but we need to know the truth from a Biblical perspective. We still need to be like the Bereans (Acts 17:10-11) and exercise a spirit of discernment (Heb. 5:14).

The article by Dennis Costella is reprinted with permission from **FOUNDATION: A Magazine of Biblical Fundamentalism**. We believe all of our readers need to know this development that by their reasoning every person who has ever been baptized is a Roman Catholic and under the auspices of the Pope of Rome. The Roman Catholic Church has long claimed itself to be monolithic, but now some are advocating this monolith exists in two parts, called the "Church of Mary" (Marian) and the "Church of Peter" (Petrine). It is unclear whether or not this is as yet official Roman Catholic doctrine in all aspects, but it is clearly an effort to continue to move toward "one world church." The Roman Church considers a Bible-believing Christian, regardless of his/her denominational affiliation or personal beliefs, a "Roman Catholic," if he/she has been baptized. Watch

for more of this concept in the future from various sources, including the secular media.

Our second article in this issue is on the subject of Purgatory by a former Roman Catholic. He clearly states the doctrine, its historic background, and a precise Biblical refutation of this false belief. This is a passionate presentation by one who knows whereof he speaks. He made a point in a letter to me that he welcomes responses to his article, which he one day would like to see printed in tract form. The address where he can be contacted appears at the end of his article.

Our third article is by our Vice President, Ervin D. Ingebretson, reminding us of the responsibility before God to nurture new believers and warning us by a specific example what can happen when we don't.

Dr. Roy Knuteson is always a welcome contributor to THE DISCERNER. His article in this issue points out how the true Gospel of the New Testament can be perverted and the four distinctives we should look for when anyone claims to be presenting the Gospel.

We also have included one book review in this issue. Since we already stock similar books, we have decided not to stock this book by Ankerberg and Weldon at this time. This is not to infer it is not a good book, it is.

THE BIBLICAL EVANGELIST in each issue has a column titled "Letters We Love" in which only positive comments about the publication are printed. This is not to say that publication, or ours for that matter, does not receive negative responses. It's just that the editor chooses to "accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative." We have chosen to print extracts from several comments we have received recently. I hope you can appreciate how they are a blessing and encouragement to us.

It is with regret that we notify you we have received a letter of resignation from Steve Lagoon, our Office Manager. The reason for his resignation is financial. He has a family to support and in order to do this properly he needs to return to the construction trade. We will miss Steve from the office, but he has indicated a desire to remain a member of our Board. He will still be associated with R.A.S. and you and we will continue to be availed of his knowledge and involvement.

The Church of Mary—An Alternative for Non-Catholics?

By Dennis Costella

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works

—(2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

Through the years of covering and reporting on ecumenical meetings in which both Roman Catholics and non-Catholics were represented, we have been amazed at the readiness, even enthusiasm, with which each received the other as fellow "Christians." Even meetings in which the Roman Catholic presence was virtually nonexistent (such as the Lausanne Conference, Billy Graham's Itinerant Evangelist Conferences, Urbana Youth Conferences, etc.), the leadership was always very careful to avoid giving the impression that Roman Catholics are lost and need to be saved. Some Evangelical leaders believe that only the "nominal" wayward Catholic (as Leighton Ford explained to the press at Amsterdam '87) needs to be evangelized. Ford's comment is consistent with the strategy of the Billy Graham crusades for decades: Invite the Roman Catholics to "repent" (without explaining that this includes the necessity of turning from the heresies of Romanism), make a decision for Christ, come forward and speak with a Roman Catholic counselor who will then challenge the individual to renew his baptismal vows and then send him back to the Roman church as a "believer" who is now a faithful Catholic.

As Bible-taught Fundamentalists, we understand the fact that sacramentalism, or a "works-salvation," is obviously a false gospel. Salvation by "faith plus works" and salvation by "faith alone" are concepts that are mutually exclusive — one is right and the other, therefore, is wrong. Thus, one could assume that Roman Catholics believe that all who call themselves "Christians," but who refuse to join the "one true church," the

Roman Catholic Church, are headed for eternal damnation despite their good intentions. And one could assume that the converse would also be true concerning a Bible-believer's evaluation of a Roman Catholic.

So, how is this major breach between Romanism and Evangelicalism being bridged? Obviously both parties are making a concerted effort to accept one another as *bona fide* "brethren in Christ." But how can the Roman Catholic hierarchy be so incredibly accommodating to the Evangelical community? And how can the professed Evangelical Bible-believer, in turn, reach out in faith and in good conscience to embrace the adherents of Romanism?

An editorial written in the December 2000 issue of *First Things*, a publication of The Institute on Religion and Public Life, seems to supply the answer. Associate Editor Daniel P. Moloney, a Roman Catholic journalist, presents in a concise and insightful way how the Roman Catholic hierarchy's ecumenical dream of ministering to the "full body of Christ" (non-Catholics are included in this number) can become a reality by means of the post-Vatican II theological framework. Sadly, much of the evangelical and mainline Protestant community, whether mindfully or obviously, is excitedly pursuing this ecumenical dream as well.

Moloney pointed out that Pope John Paul II, in his annual address to the curia in December of 1987 intruding the Marian year, stressed the importance of the successors of Peter (the popes) shepherding even those who are not officially joined to the Roman Catholic Church by way of the sacrament of Holy Baptism.

The Pope spoke of two dimensions or "profiles," or, one might even go so far as to say, two Churches within the one Church that is the Body of Christ: the Church of Mary and the Church of Peter. The Church of Peter or the "Petrine profile" refers to the exercise of the authority of jurisdiction and office – the official concern of the bishops – while the church of Mary or "Marian profile" consists of those who with Mary say "Yes" to God's call.

The Marian dimension is "supreme and preeminent," said the Pope, "richer in personal and communitarian implications" than the Petrine dimension. Pressing the image, the Pope insisted that the Petrine profile be thought of as in service to the Marian profile, that the chief purpose of office in

the Roman Catholic Church is... to aid and serve – all those who with the Mother of God respond faithfully and lovingly to the person of Jesus.

What this statement is saying, in other words, is that the apparatus is present whereby the non-Catholic Christian can feel accepted and find welcome within the confines of his new ecumenical fellowship. He can also have the benefit of the “Holy Father’s” guidance, care and blessing – even as a non-Catholic! How? Official Roman Catholic teaching states that not only is the “Church of Peter,” composed of all baptized Catholics, under the pope’s care but also the “Church of Mary,” which includes those who have said “Yes” to God but who have never been Roman Catholics or who have left the Catholic Church to join Evangelical or Charismatic churches.

And how does one say “Yes” to God according to Roman Catholic doctrine? Is it by faith in the finished, all-sufficient, substitutionary sacrifice of Christ on the cross? No! It is through the rite of baptism, “the sacrament of faith,” in most any Christian church. Notice carefully the following from the 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 1271:

Baptism constitutes the foundation of communion among all Christians, including those who are not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church: “For men who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are put in some, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church. Justified by faith in Baptism, [they] are incorporated into Christ; they therefore have a right to be called Christians, and with good reason are accepted as brothers by the children of the Catholic Church.” “Baptism therefore constitutes the sacramental bond of unity existing among all who through it are reborn.”

“It is also part of Catholic doctrine that all those who believe and are baptized... participate in the Body of Christ, whether or not they are in full communion with the body of Christ as it subsists in the Catholic Church. Which means that all Christians, including Protestants, make up the Church of Mary, and ought to be served and supported by the Church of Peter.”

This portion of the catechism explains why the Roman Catholic hierarchy, from the pope on down, can enter into dialogue and ministry with those from non-Catholic communions. In the view of the magisterium, any baptized individual is already in the fold (or, more specifically, in the Marian dimension of the Roman Catholic Church), whether he knows it or not; and as such, he is eligible for the nurturing care of the Petrine dimension of the Roman Catholic Church, the institutionalized church headed by Pope John Paul II. This latter aspect of the Roman Catholic Church is well known to the world, but Evangelical Christians must also be aware that the Roman Catholic Church recognizes a "Marian" aspect in its system, which, though much less distinguishable, is a genuine spiritual concept to Roman Catholics.

So what is the pope's role concerning this "Church of Mary," consisting of baptized non-Catholics? Official Roman Catholic teaching states that the pope is to minister to them as their "Holy Father," whether or not they consciously recognize or accept him to be so. How is this executed, practically speaking, with respect to the pope's interaction with Evangelical leaders? The Evangelicals, perhaps unwittingly, blindly follow, as the *First Things* editorial explains:

It is also part of Catholic doctrine that all those who believe and are baptized... participate in the Body of Christ, whether or not they are in full communion with the body of Christ as it subsists in the Catholic Church. Which means that all Christians, including Protestants, make up the Church of Mary, and ought to be served and supported by the Church of Peter.

While this way of putting it might make some evangelicals uncomfortable, others have already started using the resources this Pope has made accessible and attractive to the world. It is obvious that Charles Colson and Billy Graham pay more attention to the writings of the Holy Father and take them to heart more readily than do some dissenting Catholic priests and theologians. Pat Robertson for a time was sending copies of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as a gift to friends, while some Catholics view the *Catechism* as oppressive and authoritarian. It could even be argued that Campus Crusade and Prison Fellowship have done more to advance the Church of Mary than entire theology departments of some Catholic univer-

sities. These evangelical leaders recognize that Catholics and evangelicals share the same gospel, the same deposit of faith, and especially in recent decades, the same evangelical and apostolic imperative.... The Pope is surely following the Second Vatican Council's teaching that the hierarchy is the service of all believers.

From the Roman Catholic Church's Post-Vatican II perspective, baptized non-Catholics have already said "Yes" to God and, therefore, are already in the arms of the caring, shepherding, all-wise "Holy Father." Even more deplorable, however, is the growing sentiment among many Evangelicals that communion with Rome is something to be desired. How tragic! In times past, Bible-believers often pictured the prophesied one-world harlot church to be fathered by the pope of Rome as they witnessed other churches and even whole faiths of the world moving into an ecumenical relationship with the Roman Catholic Church. But now, apparently, no official membership with the Roman Catholic Church is necessary for the "Christians" of the world, for they are already members of the "Church of Mary"; and the head of the "Church of Peter" is anxiously awaiting to provide service to all! The stage for the one-world church is already set, and from the Roman Catholic perspective, the one church is already here, lovingly nurtured by the "successor of Peter."

Mary's experience preceded the supposed ascension of Peter to the position of Vicar of Christ on earth and, therefore, the current pope's primary duty is to shepherd **all**, and that absolutely includes those in the "Church of Mary." Notice again from the 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 773:

In the Church this communion of men with God... is the purpose which governs everything in her that is a sacramental means... Mary goes before us all in the holiness that is the Church's mystery as "the bride without spot or wrinkle." This is why the "Marian" dimension of the Church precedes the "Petrine."

The concluding appeal of Mr. Moloney to his Evangelical brethren is undoubtedly the desire of every knowledgeable Roman Catholic who believes that the true Body of Christ is, in fact, the Roman Catholic Church and that the Pope is the "Holy Father." Notice the hope he has that the evangelical community will continue to look to Rome for spiritual leadership in the

days ahead: "I am confident that many Christians who live in the Marian dimension of the Church will continue to discover the fullness that the Holy Spirit bestows in the ministry of Peter, who is called by the Good Shepherd to feed all the sheep."

How should any true Bible-believer respond to such a statement? With utmost clarity and conviction, the child of God must proclaim that he is *not* a member of the Church of Mary and that the pope is *not* the shepherd of his salvation in Christ! Roman Catholicism is as bereft of Biblical Truth as ever, and those who are deceived by it are in desperate need of understanding what the Roman Catholic Church believes and how it deceives both Roman Catholics and non-Catholics alike. The one-world, harlot church is already in the making, and true believers must beware!

An Open Rebuke to the Bishops & Priest of Rome

By Elder Patrick J. Oliver

*“And Jesus said unto him,
today thou shalt be with me in paradise”*

—*Luke 23:43*

Purgatory

The Bible and the Bible alone is the only source for religious truth. What does the Bible teach concerning a future state of our never dying souls? It informs us that there are two distinct places, and two alone where the soul lives on forever. The Bible calls the one Heaven: a place and state of bliss and eternal glory, appointed for the elect of God, who have been born of God, for those who have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and His work of salvation; the other place is called the Lake of Fire, prepared for those who reject Christ and His salvation. It is described as an abode of everlasting shame, contempt and endless torment, wherein a soul is locked up forever with nothing but the burnings of a conscience not washed by the precious blood of Christ. Nevertheless, the Roman Catholics teach that there is a third place, an additional, intervening state between the two. They call this place Purgatory.

Gregory the Great, about the year AD 593 first established the doctrine of Purgatory (somehow the early church managed to get along without this concept for six centuries). Why was this strange notion created without the least scriptural warrant? It is blasphemous and establishes a teaching dishonoring to the redemptive work of Christ. Gregory the Great, a most appropriate name, but perhaps an addendum is equally appropriate – Gregory the great blasphemer. Strong words, you might say. What else does one call a man who casts doubt on the redeeming merits of the blood of our dear Lord and Savior? No denomination holds to such ridiculous, unscriptural nonsense as this.

I will, in this article, not only refute such wrong-headed teachings, but will show, from the Holy Scripture, the truth concerning this disputed point. Rome does not base the doctrine of

purgatory on the Bible, but on a distinction it makes by dividing sin into two kinds. This distinction is as follows: according to Roman teaching a person can commit one of two types of sins, *mortal* or *venial*. *Mortal sin* is a soul-damning offense, whereas a *venial sin* is a pardonable offense against God. If a person dies with an unforgiven mortal sin, he is damned; but if he dies with some venial sins his soul can be purged of his offenses in the awful place called Purgatory. To a Bible-taught Christian such a distinction is unknown. Their sin is sin, and guilt is a part of its essential nature. True, in their effects upon the sinner, or in their influence upon society some sins are worse than others. To sin only in ignorance and infirmity is not in all respects as wicked as to sin knowingly and intentionally. Nevertheless, in relation to God and His holy law, all sins are the same, always mortal, i.e., always deadly, always damning. Men may talk of little sins, venial sins, and may even laugh about it, as I once did in my ignorance. God never does.

We have noted above, Gregory the Great was – to put it kindly – “inaccurate.” Shall we, then, appeal to Gregory’s somewhat fanciful imagination regarding this point, or to the unerring judgment of God? Surely, if all sin is indeed mortal, we should expect to find in Scripture some support for the teaching. And so we do. For example, we read in the Epistle to the Romans 6:23: “The wages of sin is death,” not limited to mortal sin, but spoken of sin overall; all sin is death, as it is written in Ezekiel 28:20, which says: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” Still more emphatic and conclusive on this point is James: “Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all” (James 2:10). Therefore, there is no soul, from the rising of the sun to its setting, who is not guilty of mortal sin. In other words, there is nothing to this distinction of venial and mortal sin in fixing the destinies of eternity. A sin, be it ever so “small,” is big enough to sink a soul to the awful abyss of the damned, if not canceled by the Savior’s blood. Away with such distinctions! If the distinction is unscriptural, so is the doctrine on which it is supposed to be founded.

Another peculiar idea associated with the concept of purgatory involves a supposed interval between the passage of the soul at the death of the body and its entrance into heaven. This was the opinion of the ancient heathen, Plato, who taught that there is a midpoint between the earthly realm and the afterlife, a midway station from which the prayers and sacrifices of the living might help them; thus, as we appeal to antiquity, we find

that this notion of an interval is pagan in its very origin. The Holy Scripture knows nothing of a halfway house for the dead. Of the rich man in Luke 16, we note that when he dies his soul passed *at once* into the region of the damned; of Lazarus, that his soul was borne *instantly* to the bosom of Abraham. More generally, Hebrews 9:27 (the Confraternity version of the Scripture [*nihil obstat* – accepted by the Roman Catholic Church]) states: “And just as it is appointed unto man; to die once, and after this comes the judgment.” The text with which this discussion began (Luke 23:43) furnishes us with another example of positive proof from God’s word. Who was the man to whom the Savior spoke these words? He was a malefactor, a criminal, one who was getting the just reward for his deeds.

Impressed by the Holy Spirit that this was indeed the Messiah, the crucified man addressed to him the prayer, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.” Recall also “no man can say Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Ghost” (1 Cor. 12:3). And what was the response of our Blessed Lord? He turned to the poor sinner who had asked for mercy and said, “Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise!” Notice He did not say, “Verily I say unto you, thou shalt go to purgatory!” Yet what man was more fit for purgatory? There was no opportunity to do penance here. There was no time to say a few hundred “Our Fathers” or “Hail Marys,” and he had no money to pay “Pope” Peter, nothing to present to the Prince of the Apostles to induce him to offer masses for the repose of his poor soul! There was no space granted him for the making of satisfaction! Praise the Lord! It wasn’t necessary. There was the Savior at his side, pouring out His precious blood and suffering the great redemptive sacrifice for the sins of His people. Now I ask you, would this be the case if the ordeal of purgatory were requisite to fit a soul for heaven? No, our Lord did not say: “A hundred years from now thou shalt be with Me in Paradise, but for years and years to come thou must suffer the agonies of purgatory, until they purge you of your sins.” Nor do we find one passage of Scripture on which to hang this theory of an interval between death and judgment. The Scriptures do, however, speak of an immediate transfer from this life to the abode of the hereafter, never of an intervening or intermediate state.

Another conception that the idea of purgatory involves is: That we may, by suffering render satisfaction for sin. This contention purports that Purgatory is a place in which the souls of

the pious dead, obnoxious to temporal punishment, make satisfaction. They render this satisfaction or deliverance in two ways: first, by suffering the punishment due; second, by interference of the Church, through indulgences, masses said for the dead, and prayers of the faithful. This conception, again, is opposed to many texts of Holy Writ. Where do we read that the souls of the pious, on departing this world, are subjected to purgatorial fires? Says the Romanist in 1 Cor. 3:13-15:

“Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.”

Here, exclaims the Roman Catholic apologist, is the proof of our doctrine clearly revealed. But, does it? Does the Apostle say in this passage that men’s *souls* are to be tried, as they contend for purgatory? He says: every man’s *work* is to be tried. A work is not a soul. Again, the passage states that *every* man’s work is to be tried, but purgatory is not for *every* man. It is only for those who die in venial sin, according to Roman Catholic doctrine. The Virgin Mary, they tell us, did not go to purgatory, or the Apostles, or those who die in mortal sin. So, the “fire” in this passage cannot be the fire of purgatory. The great function of the fire that Paul writes of is to try, i.e., test, prove every man’s work, of what sort it is, not to purify or purge; that is an altogether different process. Then, when shall this fiery process take place? Plainly, the passage declares, on a judgment day in the future. We have, accordingly, another example of how Rome will, to sustain its errors, seek to read things into the Scripture instead of letting the Scriptures speak for themselves.

There is no evidence whatever in Scripture that the saints suffer after death. “Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord, yea saith the Spirit, that they may *rest* [italics mine] from their labors” (Rev. 13:14); *rest*, not undergo pain or agony of body or soul. To the rich man Abraham spoke in this manner: “Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivest thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but *now he is comforted* [italics mine], and thou art tormented,” inferring that Lazarus instantly entered the enjoyment of heaven when he left this world. Where remains then as the apologists contend, the suffering?

The Money Factor: or Priestly Pick-pocketing

I think it is well known, that the doctrine of purgatory has been a goldmine for the Roman church. By this priest craft they have amassed together huge holdings in real estate, costly cathedrals, convents, monasteries, etc. In other words, money purchases the gifts given to the soul, even eternity. Let us test this doctrine against the objective truth of Scripture. We read in Acts 8 of a certain Simon, who professed to be converted and was baptized by Phillip, that when he saw how the laying on of hands conferred the gift of the Holy Spirit, he was anxious to obtain this power. "And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the Apostles' hands, the Holy Ghost was given, [i.e., they conferred miraculous endowments], he offered them money, saying, give me also this power, then on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost." But Peter said to him:

Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money! Thou has neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God, if peradventure the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee, for I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. Acts 8:20-23.

This Scripture is even more powerful, because it comes from the mouth of Peter, who according to Romanists was the vicar-general of Jesus Christ, and the prince of the apostles! "Thy money perish with thee!" Here, then, is a question we must ask, and may the Holy Spirit apply it with convicting power to everyone of my reader's conscience: if the man who *offers* money to buy the gift of God, must perish in his wickedness, what will be the end of the man, or men, who presume to *sell* the gift of God for money? I will tell you what will be the end of these miserable wretches. For a little help in this matter, I will call upon Charles Dickens. "Charles Dickens," you say? Now I know you're out in left field, with such nonsense. What has he to do with the doctrine in question?" Well if my reader will allow me to digress from my discussion, I believe I can tie things together to your satisfaction. I need not tell you that Charles Dickens is considered by many to be the greatest English writer of fiction this world has even seen. His many characters are human and real and under his subtle touch become unforgettable. I believe Dickens was a believer, and had a good understanding of the justice of God after this life is over. You will of course remember his immortal classic, A

Christmas Carol, and, although it is fictitious, I believe that Scrooge's talk with his dead partner contains the truth I am trying to convey, i.e., the Scriptural, inviolable law of the universe: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7).

It is Christmas Eve, and the ghostly apparition of Scrooge's dead partner, Jacob Marley, appears to him. Let's pick up the conversation.

The same face: the very same. "I know him! Marley's Ghost." But wrapped about him was a chain. The chain he drew was clasped about his middle. It was long, and wound about him like a tail; and it was made (for Scrooge observed it closely), of cash boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel.

"You are fettered," said Scrooge, trembling. "Tell me why?"

"I wear the chain I forged in life," replied the Ghost. "I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to *you*?"

Allow me, my reader, to skip a little of the dialogue, for I don't want to bore you. However, I love these lines of Marley's ghost and they are directly on point.

"Oh! Captive, bound, and double-ironed... not to know, that ages of incessant labor, by immortal creatures, for this earth must pass into eternity before the good of which it is susceptible is all developed. Not to know any Christian spirit working kindly in its little sphere, whatever it may be, will find its mortal life too short for its vast means of usefulness. Not to know that no space of regret can make amends for one life's opportunities misused! Yet such was I!"

"But you were always a good man of business, Jacob," faltered Scrooge, who now began to apply this to himself.

"Business!" cried the Ghost, wringing his hands again. "Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were all my business."

Let me apply now to this the subject: My dear priest of Rome, the Bible was your business, yet you knew it not; the Gospel was your business, not your idolatrous mass. Your congregation's spiritual needs were your business, not your pomp

and ceremony. Coming to know Him was your business: "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ Thou hast sent (John 17:3). He was your business, not religion.

"Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money! Thou has neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God, if peradventure the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee, for I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."

—Acts 8:20-23.

You priests who have been in the slavery of Rome for ten, twenty, thirty years or beyond, what a ponderous chain you have wrought! You made it "link by link and yard by yard." You girded it on of your own free will, and of your own free will you wore it.

Put your ear to the door of hell; hear the awful cries and laments of the damned spirits you have duped with your sham absolution. Open the door and gaze into those awful depths of misery and woe to which you are fated. Look into the caverns of the damned spirits and tell me what do you

see? Look and behold! There, over there, see the daughter of Herodias; she danced for the head of John the Baptist.

"I will that thou give me the head of John the Baptist," she replied, when asked by Herod, "Ask of me what you want" (Mark 6:21-28).

Look into the awful abyss, my dear charlatan priest, look and see one like unto you. See Judas. He wanted to betray his Lord for thirty pieces of silver. See him throw down the thirty pieces, but every time he throws them down, behold there they are again. How often in the two thousands years that Judas has been in Hell, do you think he has gone over the night of his betrayal? He perhaps sees the face of Jesus and hears those words, "Friend, wherefore art thou come?" (Mt. 26:50). God save you from what awaits you, my dear priests for you have betrayed the Lord for money extorted by this lie of purgatory.

Allow me to get to another chain that you have forged for yourself. Methinks I see a confessional box, and there is the priest in the middle. He leans to one side, forgives the sins of

the poor deluded soul and then to the other side, and on and on it goes. You know the scene quite well, don't you? You think that the confessional lines were long in Lent, my dear priest, wait until you get to Hell! You wanted to compel penitents (especially young people and women) to pour into your ears every thought, feeling, desire, emotion and act, until it kindles the fires of unholy thoughts in your soul. When the last star has burned out in the heavens, eternity is just begun. You will cry:

"I have no authority to forgive anybody; I knew it in life, but still I went along with the program. After all, what else could I do? I loved the uppermost seats at church affairs, political rallies; I loved to be addressed as 'Father,' though Christ forbids it. I knew that there is not any New Testament authority for the office of Priest. The whole super-structure of the Roman See is built on a lie. I did advance, and continued to advance, that which I knew was pagan in origin, unscriptural, and simony of the worse kind. I knew it then; I know it now, all to my everlasting shame!"

Now, our friend Scrooge had to suffer the visitation of three spirits, in order to be reclaimed. Scrooge declined the offer, but, said the Ghost, "Without their visits, you cannot hope to shun the path I tread." Let me say, I have no belief in ghosts, nevertheless, I do believe in the Holy Spirit who had paid you a visit, via my words. Unless you repent, my dear priest of Rome, you will without a doubt suffer the fate I have painted with my words. I will leave it to your conscience to fill in the strokes that I don't know of, but that you know, and the ever-living God knows. And now I will ask you to consider will your hands be strong, or will your heart be able to endure in the day that He shall deal with you? (Ezek. 22:14). Then you'll be afraid, and fearfulness will take hold of you, and wring from your proud, obdurate heart, and make you say, "Who can stand before the devouring fire, and who can dwell beside the everlasting burnings?" (Isa. 23:14). Then you will know what a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31)

Oh! My dear priest, it is truly sad, even of saddest of thoughts, to think, that a rational soul shall be eternally supported, preserved, and perpetuated in its being by the Omnipotent power of God, for the only purpose of suffering His unsatisfied justice. That contemplation alone staggers our finite minds, but unless you're prepared to call Jesus a liar, all I have written you will find in His preaching on this subject.

Nobody described Gehenna (Lake of Fire) as much as did Christ, the tenderhearted Savior. The warning that I sound in your ears is not sounded by an alarmist, nor by one who does not know whereof he speaks, but from one who has experienced the deceitfulness of Roman Catholicism. Hear me, I'm almost finished. There is but one way of escaping the awful place I have described, and one way alone; that is through the merits of Jesus Christ, not Holy Mother Church. If you think you can have Christ and the Popish religion you are sadly mistaken.

My assurance lies in the fact that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," and that "Whosoever believeth in Him hath everlasting life." I do believe in Him, and therefore, I know I have everlasting life. My dear deluded priest, don't stir beyond that. Throw away your rosaries, your unholy mass, penances, yea even the Transubstantiation nonsense. Look away from all your doings and look to Him who bore the wrath of God. "It is finished," Jesus cried. How dare you say it is not, by your blasphemous religion? I started my message with this Scripture, "And Jesus said to him, Today thou shalt be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). This Sunday take a good look at your congregation – look at their faces – for if the Lord does not save you they will be your worse tormentors. Maybe this is the last appeal my Lord will make through me to you. Perhaps you will be with them in perdition today. God forbid! May the Holy Spirit give you no rest until you rest in Him. God grant it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

The author welcomes any response addressed to:

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Protect the Faith

By *Ervin D. Ingebretson*

Proselytizing of sheep from “other fields” has caused some uneasiness for both traditional faiths and cult groups. In an issue of “Mormon America,” Richard and Joan Ostling verify this concern by the following statement: “The Southern Baptists in particular are uncomfortably aware that the greatest recent LDS growth in the United States has come on their own turf. Mormons number nearly 700,000 now in the Southeast.” This concern is voiced by the largest evangelical denomination in this nation. Also, speaking of the increase in the number of cults Van Baalen asked readers to bear in mind “the cults are the unpaid bills of the church” (The Chaos of the Cults, J. K. Van Baalen, p. 12).

Is there something that can be done to stem this tide? Yes, there is. Evangelicals must be more diligent in nurturing new believers to protect them in their newfound faith from the onslaught of the cult mentalities.

Leaving new believers to fend for themselves without nurturing is analogous to a parent offering a four, five or six-year old child the kitchen facilities to find and eat whatever the child desires and is capable of preparing. This is a recipe for disaster. Proper meals must be prepared for children’s physical growth by parents or responsible adults. The same is true for neophyte believers. Evangelicals, from all evidence, must be more actively involved in protecting new believers in their faith with sound teaching from the Word. The best antidote for the poison of falsehood and unbelief is the positive declaration of revealed truth – the Word of God.

How does one grow in his or her faith? Peter says, “As newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word that you may grow thereby...” (1 Pet. 2:2). David spoke clearly of the importance of the Word in his life (Psalm 119:11, 15, 16). The goal of spiritual maturity is to be like Christ, which is learned preeminently through knowledge of the Word. Pulpit ministry has the primary responsibility for presenting the Word and making appropriate application. Growth is not an option; nor is it automatic. It is no small tragedy when we see examples of lack of physical or mental growth. It may not be as obvious, but it is

just as tragic to see believers who never grow spiritually.

An important and necessary adjunct to pulpit ministry is the establishment of a process that encourages mentoring relationships. This is sharing one-on-one, in which the mentor influences another believer through teaching the Word of God and demonstrating a Christ-like example.

The effectiveness of this process has been successfully shown by para-church organizations such as Navigators, Campus Crusade for Christ, Officers' Christian Fellowship (military), and others. The goal of this type ministry is to prepare disciples who grow with Christ, stand true to the Word, and are able to withstand any intrusion by a wooing cult. It is putting into action the Great Commission, Jesus' last earthly command to the church, i.e., "disciple all nations" (Matthew 28:19, 20).

It is incumbent on churches to assume greater responsibility in nurturing the tender, untested faith of believers who may not be strong enough spiritually to resist the persistent invitation to join one of the many cults, or they may not even recognize them as cults.

When the Good News Becomes Bad News

By Roy E. Knutson, Ph.D.

Almost everyone knows that the word “gospel” means “good news.” The word occurs one hundred times in the New Testament. There are four instances, however, where the “good news” turns out to be “bad news” – very bad news – and that is when the Gospel is being perverted and becomes “another” or “different gospel.”

Paul warned of the misuse of the familiar Greek word *euangelion* in Galatians 1:6-7. “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of God, and are turning to a different gospel – which really is no gospel at all.” [All Scripture quotations are taken from The New International Version, unless otherwise noted.]

The preaching of this “different gospel” is such a serious error that anyone, including a hypothetical “angel from heaven” who does it, is under the anathema of God and will “be eternally condemned” (v. 8). This is so critical an issue that Paul doubly emphasizes it by repeating this serious warning word for word in the next verse (v. 9).

What constitutes a “different gospel”? Is there a sharp line of demarcation that can be crossed where the gospel is no longer good news? A careful study of the Word of God provides a strong “Yes” answer to the above question. The book of Galatians particularly, draws the line very clearly and precisely.

THE FOUR DISTINCTIVES

There are four distinctive characteristics that must be present in any Gospel presentation and the violation of any one of these is the point of departure into a false message and therefore rests under the condemnation of God.

THE GOD-MAN JESUS

The **FIRST** of these unique distinctives is the person and work of Jesus Christ. Here is where all the cults and many major denominations have departed from the faith. Unless Jesus Christ is declared to be the virgin-born Son of God, who is both

THE FOUR DISTINCTIVES

- *The person and work of Jesus Christ*
 - *Divine Revelation as contained in the Holy Bible*
 - *Gospel of grace alone*
 - *Understanding of the sin nature*
-

Almighty God from everlasting to everlasting, and Man, He is “another Jesus” – a counterfeit Christ that Paul warns against in 2 Corinthians 11:4. The biblical Gospel must also include the facts that “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

Church history is filled with the wreckage of human reasoning regarding the person of Jesus Christ. Many of the errors that were present in the first three centuries of the Christian era are present today. The ancient heresies of Docetism, Arianism, Sabellianism, Gnosticism, Monarchianism, Pelagianism, and Ebionitism all have their modern counterparts.

Whether it is the rejection of the Trinity, or the denial of the true humanity and deity of Christ, these cultists and others are guilty of preaching another Jesus and therefore an unscriptural gospel. A denial, for example, of the physical resurrection of our Lord is heresy. To declare that Jesus was raised spiritually, but not literally, as the Jehovah’s Witnesses do, reduces our Lord to a mere man and according to 1 Corinthians 15 makes preaching the faith “worthless.” It also makes the Apostles and others who saw Him to be “false witnesses” and utterly destroys any hope of personal resurrection (v. 45). The good news becomes bad news over the denial of this pivotal doctrine of Scripture. If a person is wrong on this subject, he is wrong everywhere and is in danger of hell fire no matter how sincere he may be.

BY DIVINE REVELATION

SECONDLY, the true Gospel must rest entirely upon divine revelation as contained in the Holy Bible. Paul declared: “I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:11-12).

Others, such as Joseph Smith and Ellen G. White may claim that they too have received new and additional revelation from Jesus Christ. But, here's the major difference: A careful reading of these extra-biblical writings reveals a sharp difference between the Gospel that Paul and the other Apostles preached and that preached by these latter-day "prophets." Every one of them proclaim a perverted gospel that includes human effort and goodness, law keeping, and an allegiance to their particular brand of religion, all of which is totally contrary to the Gospel of the New Testament. Paul's pointed question to the Galatians needs to be asked and answered today: "Are you now trying to attain your goal through human effort?" (Galatians 3:3).

THE GRACE FACTOR

THIRDLY, the true Gospel must be by grace and grace alone. This is the predominate theme of the books of Romans and Galatians. "Grace," simply defined, means that salvation is free, undeserved, and unmerited. "For by grace you have been saved through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not of works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Grace totally excludes all human effort for salvation. "We have been justified freely by his grace" says Romans 3:24, while Romans 11:6 further clarifies this by declaring: "...if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace." Obviously, grace and any human effort are mutually exclusive. There can be no mixing of the two, either for the reception, or retention of salvation.

To add even such an innocent religious ceremony as male circumcision is to make void the Gospel. Galatians 5:2 warns: "If you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all."

Strong words? Yes, but today many denominations have exchanged infant baptism for Jewish circumcision as a part of their New Covenant theology and therefore they rest under the same judgment of those who trusted in the ancient rite of circumcision for acceptance by God. One could paraphrase Paul and say: "If you have your babies baptized, Christ will be of no value to them at all."

If that seems too harsh, I challenge you to do some door-to-door evangelism and you will quickly discover how many people are trusting in their baptism as an infant, or as an adult, for

their eternal salvation. Such persons have “fallen from grace” according to Galatians 5:4.

TOTAL DEPRAVITY

FOURTHLY, the good news of salvation by grace must include the awful news that personal sin is the great separator from God. It is a myth to say, “God loves the sinner, but hates his sin.” To the untaught and the worldling, that may sound very reasonable and even scriptural, but it is a lie! There is no such dichotomy taught in the Bible. Psalm 11:7 reveals that God “is angry with the sinner everyday” (KJV). John 3:36 states that “whosoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains [present tense] on him.” Romans 1:18 reveals that the “wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men.” God does not express His holy anger against sin alone, but must, by the very nature of mankind, vent His wrath against all sinners everywhere.

Accompanying this revelation is the thoroughly biblical doctrine of the total depravity of every human being. Romans 3:10 and 12 concludes: “As it is written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one.... There is no one who does good, not even one.’”

In the light of these verses, how can anyone believe there is any goodness of eternal value in human nature? This doctrine is, therefore, necessary for any valid Gospel message. There must be open acknowledgement of the universal fact of sin in order that God may have opportunity to manifest His gracious nature. Galatians 3:22 states: “But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin so that which was promised, being given through Jesus Christ might be given to all who believe.”

In order for God to demonstrate His grace, there must be those who need it and can receive it. Therefore, God chose to allow His creatures the freedom of choice, knowing full well that they would disobey even the simplest of commands. By permitting this terrible backdrop of sin, God was able to demonstrate His amazing grace in providing salvation to whoever will call on the name of the Lord for the forgiveness of sin. Such persons “are justified freely by his grace” (Romans 3:24).

THE FOUR ESSENTIALS

Four things are absolutely essential if the Gospel is preached in its fullness and is not watered-down and perverted.

These include: a biblically-defined Savior, a biblically-originated message, a biblically-based message of grace, and a biblically-oriented understanding of human nature. Anything less, or more, falls under the condemnation of God.

In these days of confusion and compromise it is imperative that every “gospel” presentation be checked against the Holy Scriptures. Any message that falls short of proclaiming the whole counsel of God must be exposed and rejected. Many are ignorant and naïve on this critical question: “What is the true gospel?” May the Lord raise up a host of Christians who, like the Berean believers, “examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11).

“By this gospel you are saved if you hold firmly to the word I preached unto you. Otherwise you have believed in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:2)

BOOK REVIEW

Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions

By John Ankerberg and John Weldon

Reviewed by Rev. Ervin D. Ingebretson

There are numerous guides, dictionaries, and encyclopedias exposing cults and new religions. Each one has special features, which are helpful to the reader. In each of these works the authors wish to convey as much information as possible.

Ankerberg and Weldon have co-authored an Encyclopedia that has many special features. Their intention is to provide a user-friendly format, which allows the reader to glean specific information without reading the entire volume.

Every chapter begins with a series of facts about the group – a Primary Table of Contents, Info at a Glance (key information about the group) and a Doctrinal Summary. Other features include brief Scriptures references related to each group, special resource material, first editions that a group considers authoritative and assistance to the church level on the necessity of doctrinal and apologetic knowledge.

One special feature that the authors have provided is the Doctrinal Appendix. This valuable section is designed to provide quick information on major biblical doctrinal themes. With this one can compare group doctrines in a theme with traditional biblical teaching.

One outstanding quality of this work is the thoroughness with which the authors have dealt with each facet of the group's belief system. Realizing the extensive work done by other researchers, they have made copious references to resource material, which would be helpful to the reader.

These highly respected researchers and authors in cult religions spent seven years in preparing this work. In their review of more than thirty influential groups, the authors' intent is to provide easy access into information relative to each.

This valuable reference book is an essential tool for anyone in ministry – pastors, teachers, students or anyone who is drawn to one of these emerging belief systems so prevalent in our world.

[The volume is expensive, and R.A.S. will make it available only to special orders.]

Letters From Readers

The following are excerpts from letters we have recently received at the office of Religion Analysis Service.

"Your article on Jehovah's Witnesses in the April-June 2001 issue of The Discerner is excellent! Enclosed is our renewal.... What a joy to know the truth and to know the living God!"
—C.V. in Texas

"Please accept the enclosed gift as a token of my appreciation for all the great years of service you have given my ministry and myself. I truly appreciate... and value the knowledge that has been gained by the many excellent books I have purchased from you and read. I hope this gift is helpful to you."
—L. G. in New York

"I would like to continue my subscription to The Discerner.... My kids and I are really enjoying reading this. Thanks!"
—D. P. in Kansas

"I appreciate The Discerner very much. Your exposure of these blind leaders is commendable. Even though I am in my eighty fifth year, the Lord is so good. In spite of my failing sight, I am still able [to] share with many the warnings you continue [to] proclaim with the printed page.... How we thank God that we don't [know] all the future holds, we know who holds the future, 'even so come Lord Jesus.' A fellow laborer."
—F. E. in Ontario, Canada

"Thank you for the excellent articles in 'The Discerner,' April-June 2001, Vol. 21, No. 2. I read them all and I appreciate what I was able to learn."
—S.J. in California

"The article on the JW's and Michael was excellent. I sent it to a cousin of mine who has been caught up in that cult for years."
—R. K. in Colorado

"THE DISCERNER is filled with dynamic information that every Christian worker needs. Your publication which we have received [for] over 40 years is priority # one in my reading. I know no other publication that carries the excellence of knowledge and authority. Each issue is incredible."
—D.W. in California

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