

*What the Bible
says about the*
Catholic Church

Moisés Pinedo



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In memory of my father—Raúl Pinedo—the person who, during a very fragile and short life, taught me how firm and vast the eternal promise is.

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Introduction

He was the son of nobility, a disciplined warrior, a knight of battle, and a lover of freedom, “Son of the Sun,” and owner of a great inheritance. Upon the death of his father, he was enthroned. He fought bravely against his brother to keep the scepter, and defeated him, taking total control of one of the most majestic empires of ancient times. Having a welcoming and noble heart, he accepted without resistance the visit of a group of men who, with new traditions, language, and technology, claimed to come in peace and justified their presence as carriers of the Christian faith and a message of friendship from the Spanish king, Charles I.

Convinced of their noble intentions, the trusting monarch went to visit the chief of the Spanish group. But on his way, one of them (a friar with a crucifix in his hand) showed him a Bible and told him about a sovereign God and His “most excellent representative on Earth”—the pope—who had conceded the lands of the monarch to the Spanish king. Upon hearing this, the monarch asked the friar where he had obtained these words. The friar said that the words were inside the Bible. The monarch, who probably never had held a book in his hands, expecting it to tell him something, shook the book so it would speak to him. Then he put the book near to his ear. When he heard nothing, he threw it down to the ground.

It was at this crucial moment that the friar screamed, “Sacrilège!,” the Spanish leader gave the attack signal, and the trusting monarch became their prisoner.

After nine months the monarch was accused slanderously with the following charges: fratricide, polygamy, incest, idolatry, and conspiracy against the Spaniards. In accordance with the charges against him, the monarch was condemned to be burned at the stake. However, he offered to fill three rooms of the prison with gold and silver in exchange for his life. Having striven to fulfill his promise, he anxiously awaited the time of his release, trusting the word of the “conquerors.” But they deceived the monarch, and planned to carry out the sentence. His only reprieve was to be strangled instead of burned, because of his willingness to be baptized in the “Christian faith,” adopting the name of Francisco. In 1533, at about 35 years old, the young monarch died at the hands of the Spanish “conquerors” who used their religion to take possession of the noble’s empire and riches. In 1537, Friar Vicente Valverde (the friar who gave the monarch the Bible) was appointed first bishop of Peru.

This account explains how Inca Atahualpa lost his life, empire, and glory. And this was the way Catholicism was imposed on the Tahuantinsuyo Empire, thus fixing the religious course for the countries of this Empire.

The Spaniards forced their religion on the Peruvian people with atrocious ferocity. History records this event,

and we can do nothing to change it. If you were born in a country “conquered” by Spanish forces, this story may remind you of the past sufferings of your nation and the origin of its religion.

Today many people, without knowing or considering the past, raise the flag of Catholicism and defend it “to the hilt.” Others answer inquiries about their Catholic faith by saying that it is the religion of their parents, in which they were born, and it is the one in which they will stay until death. But they overlook the important fact that this religion was forced upon their ancestors.

Although stories such as the conquests, “holy” inquisitions, and reforms speak loudly against Catholicism, they are not the conclusive authority that judges Catholicism. Friar Vicente Valverde, in speaking to the Inca, showed him the Bible and suggested that the Inca could find the truth of his words in it, thus verifying the words of Catholicism. Though the reaction of the friar demonstrated the deceitfulness of his intentions, and though the Bible would give no credit to the friar’s words, the friar did know (although he did not care) that the Bible contained **the truth**.

This same knowledge justifies many, but condemns many more. Jesus said, “Sanctify them by Your truth. **Your word is truth**” (John 17:17, emp. added). Jesus was clear and convincing: there is a unique and immutable truth—the Word of God. He indicated that there was,

and is, only one way in which man can be sanctified—by this truth. Therefore, it is by this truth (the Word of God) that I want to weigh Catholic doctrine and verify whether its teachings are true and acceptable before God. Jesus also said:

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' (Matthew 7:21-23).

It is clear that these men (who the Lord will deny knowing) were, or pretended to be, religious. However, instead of doing the will of the Father, they did their own will. It should not be our desire simply to be religious people, but truly devout, godly people. It should not be our desire to do our own will, but **the will of the Father** in heaven, which can be found only in the Bible.

If you are Catholic and have an intense desire to do God's will, I ask you to read this book and see what the Word of God says. If you are not Catholic but want to know the truth, this book may help you in your search. If you have already found the truth of the Word of God, this book may help you to defend it (1 Peter 3:15).

Chapter 1

ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF CATHOLICISM

Often Catholics make two important assertions: (1) The Catholic Church is the oldest church. [Catholics are firmly convinced that the Catholic Church is much older than any **Protestant** group that exists today. Although this assertion is historically correct, is it true that the Catholic Church is the oldest **church**?] (2) The Catholic Church is the biblical church. [Catholics claim that their church is the one described in the Bible and, therefore, the church which God approves.]

These two claims bear some serious implications. First, if the Catholic Church is the oldest church, then: (a) there could not be any church prior to it; (b) the first church, which Christ promised He was going to establish, must be the Catholic Church; and (c) all biblical and/or

historical record of the first church should point to Catholicism. Second, if the Catholic Church is the biblical church, then: (a) the Bible should have a record of this church; and (b) its teachings and practices should be approved by the Bible.

ORIGIN OF CHRISTIANITY

To determine whether the Catholic Church is the oldest church, we must go to the Bible to find a record of the first church. The prophet Daniel said that

...**the God of heaven will set up a kingdom** which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever (2:44, emp. added).

God had a plan for the followers of His Son to be part of a kingdom different from any other, a spiritual kingdom that would stand forever: the church (cf. Colossians 1:13). But when did this divine institution begin?

Matthew 16:18 records the first time the term “church” is introduced in the New Testament. Jesus said: “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My **church**, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (emp. added). The term “church,” from the Greek *ekklesia*, was generally used by the Greeks to refer to a political assembly (cf. Acts 19:41). This term is

used for the first time to describe the followers of Christ in Matthew 16:18.

When Jesus spoke of His church in this verse, He declared three very important things. First, Jesus said, “I **will build** my church.” The future tense of the verb indicates that the church was not yet established. It did not exist at that time. Second, Jesus said, “I will build,” indicating that Christ Himself would establish the church and be its foundation. Third, Jesus said, “**My** church,” indicating that the Church would belong to Him.

Notice again Jesus’ statement to Peter, “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church” (Matthew 16:18). Using two Greek terms—*petros* and *petra*—the New Testament makes clear that this “rock” (*petra*) would be the foundation upon which Jesus would build His church. [For a more detailed study about these Greek terms, see Chapter 2, p. 34.] But to what or to whom does this “rock” refer? Matthew tells us that Jesus had asked His disciples who they thought He was. “Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’” (Matthew 16:16). Because of this declaration, Jesus made the statement mentioned above (Matthew 16:18). Therefore, it can mean only one thing: Jesus was going to build His church on **the confession that Peter had made about Him**. In other words, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” would be the foundation upon which the church

was to be built. Jesus promised Peter that he would be the blessed person to open the doors of Christianity (or the church), but Peter (*petros*) would **not** be the rock (*petra*) of the church.

Although these verses in Matthew 16 do not give us the beginning of the first church, they do give us an exact prediction of its origin, including the following:

1. This church was not yet built at the time Jesus was speaking (vs. 18).
2. This church would be built by Christ, Who would also be its foundation (vs. 18).
3. This church would belong to Christ (vs. 18).
4. This church would be built on the confession that Jesus is Christ (vss. 16,18).
5. Peter would open (symbolically) the doors of this church (vs. 19).

So then, when did these things happen, and when did the first church come into existence?

Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them (Acts 2:41).

This verse, recorded by Luke, tells us the result of the sermon Peter and the other apostles preached on Pentecost. The Bible notes that the apostles had stayed in Jerusalem after Jesus' ascension, waiting for the promise of the Father (i.e., the arrival of the Holy Spirit; cf. Acts 1:4,12; 2:1). When the Holy Spirit was sent, the apostles began to speak in different languages (Acts 2:4-11). Many

people believed, but there were also some who mocked (Acts 2:13). Then, Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and preached to those who were listening to him (Acts 2:14). After showing convincing evidence of the Messianic veracity of Jesus, Peter declared, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that **God has made this Jesus**, whom you crucified, **both Lord and Christ**” (Acts 2:36, emp. added).

Luke’s account takes our minds back to the words of Jesus. Jesus had predicted that Peter would open the doors of the church, and that the church would be built on his confession (Matthew 16:16-18). In Acts 2:36, Peter not only opened the doors of Christianity, but he also confessed once more that Jesus was the Lord and the Christ (i.e., the rock on which the church would be built). Therefore, it was on this exact day that the words of Jesus were fulfilled. Acts 2:41 indicates that those who believed “were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.” The question then becomes, “To what were the people who believed and were baptized added?” Verse 47 gives us the answer: “the Lord added to the **church** daily those who were being saved.” [NOTE: The ASV omits the word “church” and notes “them,” but the idea is the same. Concerning this rendering, Boles stated that the meaning is that those who were baptized, “were by this process added together, and thus formed the church” (1941, p. 52)]. This is the first biblical text

that speaks of the church as being in existence; it is at this exact moment in Scripture that the presence of the **first** church is noted. Peter had opened the doors of the church through the preaching of the Word. He had confessed once more the deity of Jesus. And the Lord had added to His church the people who obeyed.

Which church, then, is the oldest church? The answer is, of course, the church that Christ built in Acts 2. But what church was this? Was this the beginning of the Catholic Church (as Catholicism teaches)? Note that Christ said He was going to build **His** church (Matthew 16:18), not the Catholic Church.

Greet one another with a holy kiss. **The churches of Christ** greet you (Romans 16:16, emp. added).

Although there were various congregations that praised God in many parts of the world when the apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, there was still a unique characteristic about them: all of them belonged to Christ (i.e., they were churches **of** Christ), for Christ said that He would build His church. Therefore, all of them honorably bore the name of their Founder—Christ.

Acts 2 informs us that the church of Christ was established in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (c. A.D. 30). It had a unique foundation, Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11). Christ, not Peter, was the cornerstone of the church (cf. 1 Peter 2:4-8). The church was comprised of a group of believers who took the title “Christians” (not “Catholics”) by divine authority (Acts 11:26; cf. Isaiah

62:2). They made up the only body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4). The church also was considered the bride of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:24; Revelation 19:7). Christ was its authority and its Head (Colossians 1:18); it had no earthly head. In its organization, human names and divisions were condemned (1 Corinthians 1:10-13). This was the wonderful, divine institution that God established on Earth—the church of His Son, the church of Christ (see Miller, 2007).

ORIGIN OF CATHOLICISM

If the Catholic Church is **not** the oldest church, how and when did it become a historical entity? When the church of the Lord began in Acts 2, it grew rapidly. According to Acts 2:41, about 3,000 people believed the preaching of Peter and the other apostles, and were baptized. Acts 4:4 tells us that shortly thereafter the number of believers was at least 5,000, and Acts 6:7 informs us that “the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem.”

At the beginning, the Roman government considered Christians to be one of several insignificant Jewish sects. The book of Acts concludes by noting that even in Roman custody, Paul continued preaching and teaching “with all confidence, no one forbidding him” (Acts 28:31). The Romans underestimated the power and influence of Christianity, allowing the church time and

opportunities to grow in its early years (Acts 18:12-16; 23:23-29). However, there was always great opposition from the orthodox Jewish leaders of that time who intellectually, psychologically, and physically persecuted the apostles and other Christians (e.g., Acts 4:1-3,18; 5:17-18; 9:1-2,22-24; 13:45,50; 17:4-5,13; 21:27-31; 23:12-22).

Although persecution was a terrible scourge for Christians, they had been warned about it and knew how they should react. Jesus had warned His disciples on different occasions about the coming persecutions for His name's sake (Matthew 10:22). He told them that they would be persecuted in the same ways He was persecuted (John 15:19-20). In fact, persecution from the Jews became a reality shortly after the church began (Acts 8:1). Because of their hypocrisy and ignorance of the Scriptures, the hard-hearted Jews hated the Gospel message.

Jesus also had advised His disciples to escape to other cities when they were persecuted (Matthew 10:23). He wanted them not only to seek safety but also to preach the Gospel in other places. At first, Christians did not want to leave the safety and security of their homelands, but persecution forced their departure (Acts 8:1; 11:19; etc.). As they scattered, Christians began to obey the Great Commission given by the Lord to "go into all the world and preach the gospel," announcing the arrival of the kingdom of heaven (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19; cf. Acts 8:4; 14:4-7; et al.).

As a result of their worldwide efforts to teach and the jealousy of Jews in many of the places to which Christians traveled, Christianity gained not only religious interest but also political attention. The Roman government began to pay more attention to this “new religion” which frequently was accused of being troublesome and blasphemous toward the government (cf. Acts 17:6-9; 19:23-27).

Suetonius, a Roman historian, seems to confirm this fact by writing the following about Claudius Caesar: “He banished from Rome all the Jews, who were continually making disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus” (1890, p. 318). Clearly, by the time of the Emperor Claudius (A.D. 41-54), efforts to intimidate and discredit Christians were already a serious matter (cf. Acts 18:2). When Claudius died, the infamous Nero took over. He had grand dreams of building a magnificent Rome to satisfy his own pleasures. Many historians believe that Nero was responsible for the great fire that consumed Rome in A.D. 64 and killed many of its inhabitants (e.g., Suetonius, Dio Cassius, et al.; cf. Nelson, 1985, p. 450). Many of his contemporaries also believed Nero was responsible. To suppress these rumors, Nero unfairly charged Christians with the crime and punished them in unbelievably horrible ways. His actions encouraged hatred toward Christians (cf. Tacitus, 1836, pp. 287-288). Christians never had enjoyed the approval of the Roman Empire, but Nero was the first emperor to instigate an

intense persecution against them. Excessive, intense persecution continued for centuries. As James Baird wrote, "In actuality, Christianity was opposed more vigorously than any other religion in the long history of Rome" (1978, p. 29).

But beside the misfortunes brought upon Christians by the opponents of divine justice, there was another danger on the horizon, a danger even worse than the persecution itself: **the predicted apostasy**. In His earthly ministry, Jesus taught His disciples to live for the truth, to teach the truth, and even to die for the truth. The truth of His Word (John 17:17) was an invaluable treasure. Jesus knew that after His ascension, the truth would be challenged, and many would depart from it. On one occasion, Jesus warned His disciples, "Beware of the false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves" (Matthew 7:15). Paul confirmed what Jesus said when he wrote, "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock" (Acts 20:29). The apostle John wrote about the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy as a present reality (1 John 4:1). The apostasy which Jesus predicted existed then, and many already had left the faith (cf. 2 Timothy 4:10).

However, the influence of the apostles still was strong and they guarded the purity of the truth. Many of the apostolic writings preserved in the New Testament were

directed toward correcting false teachings, defending the faith, and warning new Christians of dangerous theological doctrines that would arise (cf. Galatians 1:6-10; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 1 Peter 3:15; 1 John). To set in order some things that were lacking in some congregations and to defend “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), God commanded (through the apostles) that a plurality of elders (also called “bishops” or “pastors”—Acts 20:17,28; Titus 1:5,7; 1 Peter 5:1-4) be appointed in each congregation of the church (Titus 1:5-9; cf. Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-7). The elders were in charge of guiding and feeding the Lord’s flock (Acts 20:28). It was their responsibility to watch over the church which Christ bought with His own blood (Ephesians 5:25; Hebrews 7:26-27).

Upon the death of the apostles (who left no apostolic successors), the elders, along with the deacons, evangelists, and teachers, took total responsibility of defending the faith. Many of them had been instructed directly by the apostles, and thus they were a fundamental part of the spiritual development of the church. [NOTE: Some of these men sometimes are called the “church fathers” or “apostolic fathers.”] In his book, *The Eternal Kingdom*, F.W. Mattox wrote:

During the first fifty years after the death of the Apostle John, the church struggled to maintain Apostolic purity. The literature of this period, written by men who are commonly called the “Apostolic Fathers” and “Apolo-

gists,” shows clearly the efforts made to maintain the New Testament pattern and the trends that later brought on apostasy (1961, p. 107).

Although monumental, many of these early apologists’ efforts to unify the church were based erroneously upon mere human rationality. Little by little, new ideas began to be accepted, which instigated changes in the church. The first main change had to do with the organization of the church, specifically with the authority of the elders. As we have noted, in the early days of the church each congregation had a **plurality** of elders who **simultaneously** watched over it. Nevertheless, many began to consider one elder as greater than the others, and eventually he alone was given the title of “bishop.” Disputes and contentions for power began. Later, “bishops” began to preside individually over various congregations in a city, which they called a “diocese” (Latourette, 1965, p. 67).

One of the people who strove to unify the church under only one man (i.e., “the Bishop”) was Ignatius of Antioch. In his letter to the Ephesians, he wrote:

For if I in this brief space of time, have enjoyed such fellowship with your bishop—I mean not of a mere human, but of a spiritual nature—how much more do I reckon you happy who are so joined to him as the Church is to Jesus Christ, and as Jesus Christ is to the Father, that so all things may agree in unity!... Let us be careful, then, not to set ourselves in opposition to the bishop,

in order that we may be subject to God (Roberts and Donaldson, 1973, 1:51).

This new structure (i.e., one bishop having authority over others) began as a call to defend the truth, but it caused such a departure from the divine pattern that by A.D. 150, the government of many local congregations differed completely from the simple organization outlined in the New Testament. This “innocent” change in the organization of the church was the seed which preceded the germination of the Catholic movement many years later.

In time, the bishops who exercised authority in certain regions began to meet together to discuss matters that concerned all of them. Eventually these meetings became councils where creeds and new ideas were declared formally binding on all Christians, and alleged heretics were condemned.

Constantine, Emperor of Rome, assembled the first of these councils, the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325). By the time of his reign, the Christian population had grown tremendously. In spite of constant persecution and the growing apostasy, many Christians had remained faithful to God, and their influence was growing. The faith, influence, and courage of these Christians (which led many to die for love of the truth) were obvious to Constantine. Christianity was thought to be, in some ways, a potential threat to the Empire if it continued to grow. Therefore, there were only two options: (1) try to eradicate

Christianity from the Empire by increasing opposition to it (a tactic which had failed for almost three centuries), or (2) “go with the flow” so that Christianity would help unify and strengthen the Empire. Constantine decided not only to stop persecution against Christianity but to promote it. To help the church, Constantine ordered that 50 hand-written copies of the Bible be produced, and he placed some Christians in high positions in his government (Miller and Stevens, 1969, 5:48,51). Additionally, he restored places of worship to Christians without demanding payment (see “The Edict...,” n.d.).

Under Constantine’s direction, more changes were made—especially in the organization of the church. Since the end of persecution was something that Christians thought impossible, and since favoritism from the government seemed even less attainable, many Christians allowed themselves to be influenced by the government to the point that they deviated more and more from the truth. Under Constantine’s influence, a new ecclesiastical organization began to develop, modeled after the organization of the Roman government. Although “Christianity” thrived under his influence, it is ironic that Constantine himself was not a Christian. However, just before his death—and surely with the hope that his sins would be removed—he agreed to be baptized for the Christian cause (see Hutchinson and Garrison, 1959, p. 146).

Although Catholicism did not actually come into existence during the time of Constantine, certainly his influence and his legacy were fundamental stones upon which Catholicism soon built its power. As the church obtained benefits from the government, it became more and more similar to the government and moved further from the divine pattern. By the seventh century, many Christians, accepting the model of the Roman government, installed one man, the pope, in Rome to exercise universal ecclesiastical power. According to the model of the counselors for the Roman emperor, a group of cardinals was chosen to be advisors to the pope. According to the model of the Roman governors, bishops were appointed over dioceses. And, in accordance with the model of the Roman Universal (i.e., catholic) Empire, a new church—the Roman Catholic Church—was established. Consequently, the Catholic Church was established at the beginning of the seventh century, under the leadership of the first man to be called “pope” universally, Boniface III.

CATHOLIC DEVELOPMENT

A new church was born, a church completely different from the church established by Christ. While the church of Christ was born in Jerusalem (Acts 1:12; 2:1; etc.), this church was born in Rome. While the church of Christ was born with spiritual power (Acts 2:2-4),

this church was born with political and military power. While the church of Christ was born under the authority of only one divine Head (Colossians 1:18), this church was born under the authority of one human head—the pope. This new church soon invaded the Earth with its new doctrines.

However, an unexpected threat for this kind of Christianity was quickly approaching from the East: Islam. With Muhammad as its leader, the religion of Islam originated in A.D. 622 and spread aggressively. Less than 25 years from the beginning of the “Hegira” (i.e., Muhammad’s flight from Mecca), the followers of Muhammad had taken control of Egypt, Palestine, Persia, and Syria (Mattox, 1961, p. 173). With its thirst for conquest, this religion threatened to convert the whole world to its beliefs. Soon the threat to Catholicism became increasingly obvious. Many Catholics in conquered nations had converted to Islam out of fear; the advancement of this doctrine over Roman influence and its official religion seemed inevitable. The Roman religion, and the unity of the nation that depended on it, would collapse soon if something were not done quickly. Thus the conflicts between Catholics and Muslims gave rise to the infamous Crusades.

The Crusades (from 1096 until 1270) were military expeditions that started out as a fulfillment of a “solemn vow” to regain the “holy places” in Palestine from the hands of the Muslims. In November 1095, Pope Urban

He encouraged the masses to fight together against the Islamic Seljuk Turks who invaded the Byzantine Empire and subjected Greek, Syrian, and Armenian Catholics. He also wanted to extend his political and religious power. To encourage Catholics to involve themselves in a bloody war in the “name of God,” the pope offered forgiveness of sins, care for the lands belonging to crusaders, and the prospect of plunder (see Hitchens and Roupp, 2001, p. 186).

Although multitudes of people answered the call to join the Crusades, they failed to accomplish the initial goal of recovering the Holy Lands. After many years of fighting and much loss of life, the Holy Lands were still in Muslim hands. Nevertheless, the Crusades improved the relationship between Catholic nations and stopped the advancement of the Turks in Europe.

Shortly after the Crusades, new ideologies, which Catholicism considered heresies, threatened the Catholic Church. Multitudes of people, led by relentless religious leaders, executed those considered to be heretics without judicial process. The need for judicial regulation concerning heresy, the Catholic concern about the growth of new revolutionary ideas, and the desire to increase the power of the Catholic Church, gave rise to another wave of bloodshed paradoxically known in history as the “Holy” Inquisition.

The Inquisition is described generally as the judicial institution created in the Middle Ages to deal with the enemies of the state religion (i.e., Catholicism). There were three types of inquisitions.

1. The Episcopal Inquisition was established by Pope Lucius III in 1184. It was overseen and administered by local bishops. Once the orthodox doctrines were established, any deviation from them was investigated and studied by the bishop of the respective diocese. If the “crime” was confirmed, it was punished, primarily by canonic penances (see Chami, 1999a).
2. The Pontifical Inquisition was created by Pope Gregory IX in 1231 (see Schmandt, 1988, 10:277). This type of inquisition was entrusted to the Dominican order which answered only to the pontiff. It was introduced in France in 1233, in Aragon in 1238, and in Italy in 1254 (Mattox, 1961, pp. 214-215). The inquisitors would go to the place of the alleged heresy, and with the help of the authorities, ask the heretics to present themselves voluntarily before the tribunal. The public also was encouraged to report heretics; anyone could accuse anyone else of heresy. The accused was forced to confess his “heresy” without an opportunity to confront his accusers or defend himself. A long imprisonment awaited the “heretic” who

denied the charges. His imprisonment would be interrupted by numerous torture sessions until he confessed his “heresy.” If he continued to refuse to confess, he was turned over to the civil authorities who administered the death penalty to the “obstinate heretic.”

3. The Spanish Inquisition is considered the most dreadful of all. It began in 1478 with the approval of Pope Sixtus IV, and it lasted until 1834 (see “Inquisition,” 1997, 6:328). This tribunal was different from the Pontifical Inquisition because the inquisitor was appointed by the king rather than the pope, so the inquisitor became a servant of the state rather than the church (see Chami, 1999b). Some of the principal reasons for this inquisition were:
 - a. The Jewish “threat”—In the 14th and 15th centuries, Europe was ravaged by grave economic crises. Many plagues and epidemics contributed to this situation. Because of their strict hygiene practices, the Jews in Europe survived these epidemics and plagues. While Europeans fell into despair and poverty, most Jews retained their economic status. This situation produced many protests against the Jews and increased the political and religious avarice for, and confiscation of, Jewish wealth.

Forced to give up their economic activities, and being pressured by fanatical priests, many Jews converted to the Catholic religion at the beginning of the 15th century. Many Catholics became jealous of the continued financial progress and social position of these Jews and accused them of artificial, insincere conversion (see Domínguez, n.d.).

- b. The need for unity in the kingdom—Spain was united politically under the “Catholic Rulers,” Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, but there still were different religious ideologies in the country. Hoping to unify their country religiously, the rulers asked the pope for permission to “purify” their kingdom of non-Catholic ideologies by means of the Inquisition (see Chami, 1999b).

These were some reasons for the cruel Spanish Inquisition. In time, this brutal tribunal dedicated itself to the persecution of Muslims, alleged witches, and supporters of Protestantism.

Though prior inquisitions were cruel, the Spanish Inquisition was devised to terrify even the vilest criminal. Its instruments of torture were even more innovative and inhumane than those of earlier times. Torture treatments included, but were not limited to (1) dislocation of the joints of the body; (2) mutilation of vaginal, anal, and

oral interior cavities; (3) removal of tongues, nipples, ears, noses, genitals, and intestines; (4) breaking of legs, arms, toes, and fingers; (5) flattening of knuckles, nails, and heads; (6) sawing of bodies in half; (7) perforation of skin and bones; (8) tearing of skin from the face, abdomen, back, extremities, and sinuses; and (9) stretching of body extremities (see Rodriguez, 2007).

Although Catholicism may want to deny its past, history speaks loudly concerning the atrocities committed in the name of the Catholic faith. Catholicism may try to hide behind the injustices committed by other religious groups to cover its own disgrace, but the truth is that Catholic methodology was the inspiration for the bloody canvas of other religious “artists.” There is no doubt that the Crusades and Inquisitions played a major role in the development and growth of the Catholic Church in a world that did not want to conform to this kind of religion.

CATHOLICISM IN RECENT TIMES

In the past, the Catholic Church used violent methods to destroy opposition to its teachings and practices. Today, without the torture, tribunals, and slaughter, Catholicism seems passive toward the growth of other religions.

The beginning of the 16th century added new fuel to the fire of the Inquisition. Ninety-five reasons for this were nailed to the door of the Catholic Church building

in Wittenberg, Germany. Who was responsible? One man: Martin Luther. Although some men before him had attempted to ignite the fire of reformation (e.g., John Wycliffe, John Hus, et al.), the Reformation movement was ineffective until Luther.

Martin Luther was born in Eisleben, Saxony, Germany in 1483. He was the son of a poor miner and paid for his studies at the University of Erfurt with alms he collected. In 1505, he became more interested in the salvation of his soul and the search for spiritual peace than the study of law. He entered the Augustinian monastery at Erfurt where he became a devout, but spiritually troubled, monk. By 1508, Luther had come to the conclusion that some teachings and organization of the Catholic Church were completely different from those of the New Testament. The immorality of the clergy in Rome, irreverence toward the sacraments by their own defenders, and the avarice of those who collected indulgences and other penalties set Martin Luther on a collision course with the Catholic Church. In 1517, his 95 theses disturbed the Catholic world to the point that, by 1520, the pope drew up a bull calling for Luther to recant his teachings or be excommunicated. However, he did not succumb to this threat, and continued to spread his teachings (see Mattox, 1961, pp. 243-261; Pelikan, 1988, 12:531-533). Others, such as Huldreich Zwingli (1484-1531) in Switzerland and John Calvin (1509-1564) in France and Geneva, Switzerland,

also contributed greatly to the Reformation and the development of Protestant religions.

Various conditions helped the progress of the Reformation in the 16th century. (1) The Renaissance—This cultural movement stimulated intellectual freedom and awakened enthusiastic study of the Scriptures in Europe. Many people began to realize the difference between Catholicism and New Testament Christianity. (2) Corruption of the hierarchy in the Catholic Church—Money bought rights and privileges, and immorality ruled the day, even among the Catholic clergy. Inconsistency between faith and practice became notorious. (3) Secular sovereigns' support of opposition to Catholic hierarchy—By this time, the Catholic Church owned a third of the land of Western Europe. Kings and rulers were eager to possess this land, as well as other properties that the church had taken for itself. (4) The advent of the printing press—Luther and others used the printing press to spread their ideas and the Scriptures throughout Germany and other countries (see Mattox, 1961, pp. 239-246). By 1542, Protestantism was spreading to many places and was even penetrating Italy with its doctrines. Because of his fear of this new ideological rebellion, Pope Paul III incited the public and church leaders to return to the harsh levels of the Inquisition. In spite of this, Protestantism flourished.

The Catholic Church had encountered a great enemy that seemingly lacked the faintest intention of yielding.

However, the “Holy Office” of the Inquisition continued work during the subsequent centuries and expanded to the colonies of Spain in the New World. The tribunal of the Inquisition had jurisdiction over other tribunals organized in Latin American colonies. In these colonies, the Inquisition did not reach the same disgraceful level it did in Europe since natives merely were beginning to learn the Catholic religion and did not yet understand every Catholic dogma. But the poor example of “kindness” shown in conquered nations could not erase the inherent cruelty of the “holy” tribunal.

In 1808, Joseph Bonaparte (brother of Napoleon) signed a decree terminating the “Holy Office,” but it was not until 1834 that the final edict of its abolition was published (see O’Malley, 2001; “Inquisition,” 1997, 6:328). Having its political, military, and social arm broken, the only thing left for the Catholic Church was to “follow the herd” and accept what seemed to be the end of its dictatorship.

In sharp contrast to its past, the Catholic Church has become progressively more tolerant of other religions in spite of its public, verbal opposition. This tolerance has led to a mixture of Catholicism with evangelical religions, such as Lutheranism, Pentecostalism, etc., resulting in serious repercussions for Catholicism worldwide. This situation clearly shows that this kind of religion is based not on the Bible, but on religious preferences. No one can

say with certainty what the Catholic Church will become or accept in the future, but history vividly illuminates its past beliefs and practices.

Chapter 2

THE PAPACY

George H. Bush said of him: “When you are in his presence you say to yourself: ‘Here is a great man, a great leader.’ He is a man of liberty, of faith, who suffers every time the Church, or man, is oppressed. He will occupy, with all authority, a privileged position in the history of our time. I am not Catholic, but towards him I feel a deeply profound respect and a sincere affection” (quoted in Mirás, n.d.).

Of whom was the former President of the United States speaking? He was referring to the late Karol Wojtyła, commonly known as Pope John Paul II. Having been considered the “successor of the apostle Peter” for 26 years, and the alleged heir of an endless hierarchical legacy, John Paul II influenced the hearts of many

Catholics, as well as many other religious people. He was a representative of the monopolized throne of the Catholic Church—the papacy.

What is the papacy? Is there scriptural basis for this Catholic institution? Did God designate a legacy of “ecclesiastical leaders” on Earth? Apart from what people may think concerning this institution or its members, and apart from any eulogies, blessings, insults, or condemnations that religious people may offer concerning this ecclesiastical order, we must open the pages of the Bible, as well as the pages of history, to analyze whether the papacy (with its long list of members) is a divine institution, or simply a human invention that is unworthy of the religious honor bestowed upon it.

THE ALLEGED BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE PAPACY

The papacy is an ecclesiastic system in which the pope (considered as the successor of the apostle Peter) oversees the government of the Catholic Church as its universal “head” (see Joyce, 1999). Although people may disagree with the basis for the papacy, the truth is that this ecclesiastical order does exist, and thus its existence needs to be explained. Since Catholicism teaches that the basis for the establishment of the papacy is divine and biblical, we must turn to the Bible to verify or refute this teaching.

Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” This is the Bible verse to which the Catholic apologist quickly turns in order to defend the establishment of the papacy. Through an arbitrary interpretation of this verse—an interpretation which suggests that Jesus chose Peter, and ultimately his successors, to be the “rock” (foundation) upon which the church would be built—the Catholic Church has built a grand structure with a mere man as its head. But what did Jesus mean in this verse recorded by Matthew? Was He establishing a human hierarchy over the church? Was Jesus declaring that Peter was the “rock” of the church?

Before analyzing this passage, please think about it logically. From the reading of this verse, would anyone, without any preconceived religious idea, understand that Jesus was granting the title of “pope” to Peter? Would anyone arrive at the conclusion that a successive papacy was being established? In fact, absent any Catholic influence, the answer would be an emphatic “No!”

Matthew 16:18 relates an incident that took place in Caesarea Philippi, when the Lord asked His disciples, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” (Matthew 16:13). The disciples answered by reciting the various popular opinions about Jesus’ identity. Then, Jesus, making the question more personal, asked His own dis-

ciples: “But who do **you** say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15, emp. added). To this second question, only the impulsive Peter dared to answer, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). Due to his response, Jesus addressed Peter with the declaration, “Upon this rock I will build my church” (16:18). Consequently, Jesus’ statement in Matthew 16:18 is connected exclusively to Peter’s **confession** concerning Christ’s deity and not to a future pontificate.

We must also examine the difference between two Greek words used in the text: “You are Peter (*petros*) and upon this rock (*petra*) I will build My church” (Matthew 16:18). In reference to Peter, the Holy Spirit recorded the Greek word *petros*—“a detached stone or boulder, or a stone that might be thrown or easily moved” (Vine, 1966, 3:302). In contrast, in reference to the “rock,” the Holy Spirit recorded the Greek word *petra*, which denotes a solid mass of rock (Vine, 3:302). Furthermore, these two words are in a different gender; the word *petros* is masculine, while the word *petra* is feminine (cf. Boles, 1952, pp. 344-345; Coffman, 1984, p. 248). Therefore, *petros* refers to the Aramaic name Jesus gave Peter (*Cephas*, John 1:42), while the word used for “rock” (*petra*) refers to the very foundation of the church, i.e., the truth that Jesus is the Son of God and the Messiah (cf. Matthew 16:16).

Although these two Greek words clearly show that Peter was neither the foundation nor the head of the church, it still is important to note what Peter himself said about the “rock.” Some Catholics, using their knowledge and speculations about the language of the text, will argue fervently that they understand, better than any other religious person, what Jesus was telling Peter. Nevertheless, if anyone could guarantee a proper understanding of Jesus’ message, it would have been Peter himself, who heard the words of Jesus firsthand.

In his first epistle, Peter, by divine inspiration, used the Greek word *lithos* to refer to Jesus: “Coming to Him as to a living stone (*lithos*), rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious.... Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone (*lithos*), elect, precious’.... ‘The stone (*lithos*) which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone’” (1 Peter 2:4-7). Then, in the following verse (2:8), the apostle interchangeably used *lithos* and *petra*—the same Greek word recorded in Matthew 16:18—when he described Jesus as “a stone (*lithos*) of stumbling and a rock (*petra*) of offense.” In Acts 4, Peter, speaking again by divine inspiration (vs. 8), said of Jesus: “This is the ‘stone (*lithos*) which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone’” (4:11). Without a doubt, Peter, more than any religious

person of our modern times, conveyed the true meaning of the word used in Matthew 16:18.

We need to determine what the other apostles and early Christians believed concerning the “rock,” the foundation of the church. If Jesus referred to Peter as the “rock,” it is logical to think that this was the “truth” that those closest to Him understood and believed, and not the “truth” that some religious people “discovered” centuries later. The inspired apostle Paul told the Corinthians that the Israelites in the wilderness “all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock (*petra*) that followed them, and that Rock (*petra*) was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:4). How much more clearly could it be stated? Since the Old Testament, the rock referred to Christ, not Peter. In Ephesians 2:20, Paul stated, “[H]aving been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, **Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone...**” (emp. added). By a study of these passages, it is obvious that the apostles and other Christians of the New Testament knew, believed, and taught that the “rock” referred to Christ, not Peter.

We also must consider Jesus’ teachings concerning the “rock.” In Luke 20:17 (following His parable of the wicked vinedressers), Jesus quoted the words of Psalm 118:22, as Peter did, which describe Him as “the living stone” (*lithos*). He went on to say, “Whoever falls on that stone (*lithos*) will be broken; but on whomever it falls,

it will grind him to powder” (Luke 20:18; cf. Matthew 21:42,44; Mark 12:10). His comments were directed at the Jewish people, particularly the chief priests and scribes who showed disdain toward those sent by God, including the Messiah. These religious leaders knew “He was speaking of them” (Matthew 21:45), and understood that He was referring to Himself as the chief cornerstone that would crush any who disbelieved in Him.

If Jesus prophetically said, “Upon this rock **I will build** my church” (Matthew 16:18, emp. added), we would expect to find this prophecy’s fulfillment. The biblical evidence shows that the “rock” refers to Peter’s confession of Jesus’ deity, and by extension, to Jesus Himself. Jesus promised that **He** would build **His** church on the foundation of Who He is, “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” as described by Peter in Matthew 16:16. In fact, the realization that Jesus was the Son of God and the Messiah was the striking truth that compelled 3,000 people to believe in Jesus, repent, and be baptized to be part of the church of the Lord (Acts 2:36-47). In Jerusalem, on the Day of Pentecost, only 50 days after His resurrection, Christ fulfilled His prophecy that “upon this rock” (i.e., the fact that Jesus is God and the Messiah; Matthew 16:16; cf. Acts 2:22-36) He would build His church. On that memorable day, Peter stood before the crowds not to declare himself as the first “pope” of the church, or as the “father” of all believers. Rather, he

stood humbly to give honor and acknowledge the deity of the One Who made the church a reality.

There is no biblical basis on which to defend the papacy. To adopt a rock (i.e., a foundation) other than that which is already laid, is to build upon a man-made foundation, which is unstable and one day will collapse. To accept a foundation other than Christ, is to usurp His God-given role as the Head of the church which He bought with His own blood (Acts 20:28). Paul wrote, “For **no other foundation can anyone lay** than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11, emp. added).

WAS PETER A POPE?

Although using Matthew 16:18 to establish the doctrine of the papacy is a completely unfounded exegesis, many advocates of Petrine tradition still assert that, in fact, Peter was established as, and was considered to be, the first pope. Consider some of the arguments that are presented in favor of this assertion.

Argument #1: Peter received the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 16:19)

With this statement Catholicism argues that Peter was granted supreme power or authority over the church. Although the biblical context supports no such interpretation, people of various religions agree that Peter was granted “something special” that was given to no

other apostle. This “something” has often been misinterpreted.

We need to understand what “kingdom of heaven” means. Some people have suggested that it refers to heaven itself, and thus, they have represented Peter as the one who allows or prevents access into the eternal reward. But this interpretation is inconceivable since it finds itself in clear opposition to the context of this passage. Reading Matthew 16:18, we understand that the subject under discussion is not heaven itself, but the church. Therefore, Jesus spoke of the church as being the kingdom of heaven. This is shown not only in the context of Matthew 16:18, but it also is taught in many other passages throughout the New Testament (e.g., Mark 9:1; Colossians 1:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; Hebrews 12:28).

Further, we need to understand the nature of the “keys” given to Peter. H. Leo Boles wrote, “To use the keys was to open the door or give the terms of entrance into the kingdom of God” (1952, p. 348). In other words, because of Peter’s confession about Jesus (Matthew 16:16), Jesus gave him the privilege of being the first man to tell lost souls how to become Christians and thus become part of the Lord’s church. Barnes put it this way:

When the Saviour says, therefore, he will give to Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven, he means that he will make him *the instrument of opening the door of*

faith to the world—the *first* to preach the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles (2005a, p. 171, italics in orig.).

There is no doubt that the “keys” represented the opportunities Peter would have to welcome the world, for the very first time, to the Christian age and to the kingdom of heaven—the church.

Also, we need to know **when** Peter used the “keys.” Jesus’ declaration was in a prophetic form. Peter would have the opportunity to open the doors of the church in the future. The Bible clearly shows us the fulfillment of this prophecy in Acts 2. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit like the other apostles (2:4), stood and give the first recorded Gospel sermon after the resurrection of Jesus (2:14-38). It was at that moment when Jesus’ words were fulfilled. Because of the preaching of Peter and the other apostles, 3,000 Jews (cf. 2:5) were baptized into Christ and entered through the open doors of the church (2:41-47). However, the church would be composed not only of Jews, but also Gentiles. Acts 10 tells us that Peter opened the doors of the church to the Gentiles, in the same way he opened the doors of the church to the Jews. This was the “special something” given to Peter because of his confession—the privilege of being the first to preach the Gospel (after the resurrection of Christ) to both the Jews and the Gentiles.

Peter opened the doors of the church, and since then the doors of the church have remained open. Only Peter received this privilege. Jesus said, “I will give **you** [Peter]

the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 16:19, emp. added). There are no individuals, such as popes, opening and closing the doors of the church.

Argument #2: Peter received the power of binding and loosing (Matthew 16:19)

With this argument Catholicism affirms two things concerning Peter: (1) that he received the authority to forgive sins; and (2) that Jesus considered anything Peter would do with His church as approved, authoritative, and good. In other words, Jesus gave him the gift of “infallibility.”

In order to analyze what Jesus said about Peter, we must take into account that the context of Matthew 16:19 is linked to the subject of the church, and not to the forgiveness of sins or the concession of some kind of infallibility about doctrinal matters. A biblical text that can help us understand Matthew 16:19 is Matthew 18:18, where Jesus made the same promise to **all** His apostles. Jesus said, “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Of this text, Boles has noted, “**This is the same thought as in Matt. 16:19.** This shows that it has a broader application than that of the discipline of an erring brother. **The Holy Spirit would guide the apostles in their instruction to the erring brother and the church**” (1952, p. 377, emp. added). In His declaration in Matthew 16:19, Jesus

affirmed that the conditions of the Christian system that Peter and the other apostles would expound already had been required by Heaven.

The Greek grammar of these verses sheds more light on the meaning of Jesus' statement. A.T. Robertson noted that "[t]he passive perfect future occurs in the N.T. only in the periphrastic form in such examples as Matthew 16:19 and Matthew 18:18" (1934, p. 361). Therefore, the text should read, "whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven." By saying this, Jesus declared that resolutions made on Earth were subject to decisions made in heaven. The apostles would preach in accordance with what was already bound or loosed in heaven. This was based not on the infallibility of a man, but on the infallibility of the Holy Spirit promised to the apostles in the first century (John 16:13; cf. Matthew 10:19-20). Today we have the inspired, infallible teachings of the Holy Spirit recorded for us in the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Jesus **never** established Peter as a pope. The titles "Pope," "Universal Bishop," "Earthly Head of the Church," "Pontiff," and others never came from the mouth of Jesus to describe Peter. Regardless of the privileges given to Peter, his authority and rights were the same authority and rights given to the other apostles of the Lord (cf.

1 Corinthians 9:1-5; 12:28; 2 Corinthians 11:5; 12:11; Galatians 2:8).

WHO WAS PETER?

If Peter was not the first pope, then the question becomes, “Who was Peter?” Was he equal to the other apostles, or did he deserve a position of supremacy among the others? The arguments that establish Peter’s identity may be presented as follows.

Peter was only a man

Although this declaration is obvious to many, sometimes its implications are overlooked. When Cornelius lay prostrate before Peter (cf. Acts 10:25), he told him, “Stand up; I too am just a man” (Acts 10:26, NASB). With this statement Peter implied three very important points: (a) that he was “**too**...a man”—that is to say, a man just like Cornelius; (b) that he was “**a** man”—that is to say, just like all men; and (c) that he was “**just** a man”—that is to say that he was not God, and ultimately was unworthy of worship. Peter, with all humility, understood that his human nature prevented him from accepting worship. On the other hand, the pope, being just a man like Peter, expects men to bow before him, kiss his feet, and revere him, thus receiving worship that does not belong to him. What a difference between Peter and his alleged successors! Not even God’s angels allow men

to show adoration by kneeling before them (Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9). One can only be astonished at the tremendous audacity of one who usurps the place that belongs only to God!

Peter was an apostle with the same authority and rights as the other apostles

On one occasion, the apostles of the Lord were arguing about who was the greatest among them (Luke 22:24), so Jesus told them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them...**But not so among you**” (Luke 22:24-26, emp. added; cf. Matthew 18:1-5; Mark 9:33-37; Luke 9:46-48). Jesus never would have made this comment if Peter had more authority and rights than the other apostles as Catholicism suggests. In fact, if Peter was to be considered more honorable than the other apostles, this would have been the opportune time to clarify this point to the rest of the apostles who were “hungry for another’s glory.” However, Jesus assured them that this would not be the case among His apostles.

On another occasion, the mother of John and James came before Jesus with them, asking Him to allow her two sons to sit by Him in His kingdom, one on the right and the other on the left (Matthew 20:20-21). Jesus pointed out that they did not know what they were asking (Matthew 20:22), and added, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them.... **Yet it shall not be so among you**” (Matthew 20:25-26, emp. added). If Jesus

considered Peter as greater than the other disciples, He could have clarified the issue immediately by telling Zebedee's wife and sons that they were asking for an honor already given to Peter. But, He did not do that. Today it seems that many religious people want to make it so, and exalt Peter above the other apostles, in spite of what Jesus said.

Many Catholics try to justify their claim that Peter was the first pope by affirming that he was the greatest of the apostles. They declare that Peter was greater because: (1) he always is mentioned first in the lists of the apostles (e.g., Matthew 10:2; Mark 3:16; Luke 6:14-16; Acts 1:13); (2) he was the apostle who recognized Jesus as Lord in Matthew 16:16; and (3) Jesus told him to care for His sheep (John 21:15-19). Are these arguments sufficient for establishing the papacy or supremacy for Peter? No. Consider the case for any other apostle. For example, it could be said that John was the "greatest" of the apostles because: (1) in the Bible he is referred to as the "disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23; 21:20,24); (2) he rested on Jesus' bosom just before His arrest (John 13:25; 21:20)—certainly a posture that suggests a close relationship; and (3) Jesus charged him with the responsibility of caring for His mother (John 19:26-27). Does this mean that we also should consider John as a pope? If not, should we consider Peter as a pope when **all** of the apostles had the **same** authority and their own

privileges? Indeed, Jesus gave all of His disciples, not just Peter, authority (Matthew 28:19-20).

Finally, consider the words of Paul. He said: “[F]or in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing” (2 Corinthians 12:11). From this verse, we conclude that Paul was inferior to none of the apostles, and that Peter was neither lesser nor greater than Paul.

Peter was an apostle who had the same power as the other apostles

Some religious people have spread the myth that Peter possessed more miraculous power than the other apostles, and that, therefore, he was greater than the rest. Yet, Matthew 17:14-21 presents the account of an epileptic boy who was brought to the disciples of Jesus (including Peter), but **they could not** heal him. If Peter had a power that was “more effective” than the other apostles’ power, he should have been able to perform this miracle. However, the boy was healed only after he was taken to Jesus. Jesus then reprimanded **all** the apostles for their lack of faith.

Near the end of His ministry, Jesus promised **all** of His disciples that “he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do” (John 14:12). In Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit came with power, He empowered not only Peter, but also the rest of the apostles (vss. 1-4). This is confirmed when we read that “fear came upon every soul, and many wonders

and signs were done **through the apostles**” (Acts 2:43, emp. added). There is no doubt that the apostle Peter was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, but that power also was manifested in the rest of the apostles and was **never** grounds for considering one apostle as being superior to another.

Peter was a man who made mistakes

Peter committed many mistakes just as any other person. The New Testament records that he: (a) doubted Jesus (Matthew 14:28-31); (b) acted impulsively against his fellow man (John 18:10-11); (c) denied Jesus three times (Matthew 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:15-18,25-27); (d) was overwhelmed by his failure (John 21:3); and (e) acted hypocritically before the church (Galatians 2:11-21; Paul “withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed”—a confrontation that would have been considered insolent if Peter was the “head of the church”). We should not belittle Peter, but we must understand that Peter, like all servants of God, had his faults and should never be considered **greater** than the other apostles, or any other Christian (cf. Matthew 11:11).

Neither Jesus, nor the apostles, nor the early Christians considered Peter as superior to the other apostles. He was simply a man privileged to be part of the apostolic ministry and a member of the body of Christ, which is the church. There is only one Head of the church, and

that Head is Jesus Christ, not Peter (Ephesians 1:20-22; 5:23; Colossians 1:18; et al.).

THE ORIGIN OF THE PAPACY

The Bible clearly teaches that Peter was not the first pope and that he was simply one of the apostles of Jesus. The question remains: When did the papacy begin? Since the Bible authorizes no hierarchy like the papacy, we will focus our attention on history to learn how it came into existence.

When Christ established His church in the first century (A.D. 30; cf. Acts 2), “He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors [i.e., bishops or elders] and teachers” (Ephesians 4:11). Jesus **never** elevated one bishop over others, but rather established an equable office for service. Sadly, man deviated from the original biblical pattern in search of power, honor, and deification. The first indication of this deviation was the distinction among the terms “bishops,” “elders,” and “pastors”—titles which the New Testament writers used interchangeably (e.g., Acts 20:17,28; Titus 1:5,7; 1 Peter 5:1-4). The title “Bishop” was given more significance and applied to only one man who was given sole authority over a local congregation, unlike bishops during apostolic times (cf. Acts 14:23; 15:4; 20:17; Titus 1:5; James 5:14). Soon, the “Bishop” ruled over not only one congregation, but over a “diocese,” several

congregations in a city or an entire district (see Miller and Stevens, 1969, 44).

With the influence of Constantine (A.D. 280-337), who made Christianity a “religion of power,” the bishops strengthened and increased their privileges. During this time there were five metropolises: Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, and Jerusalem. Rome in the West and Constantinople in the East gained greater prominence because of their locations (Mattox, 1961, p. 137). While the power of the episcopacy grew in these cities, so did the controversy over which of these two cities, and their representative churches and bishops, should have supremacy.

On October 10, 366, a man named Damasus was elected Bishop of Rome. He was an energetic man who fought for the pontificate against his opponent Ursinus, another bishop elected by a small number of followers (see “Damasus I,” 1997, 3:865-866). During his pontificate, Damasus fought to confirm his position in the Church of Rome. He also fought to compel the other cities to recognize the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome over all other bishops. Damasus even went as far as to assert that the “Church of Rome was supreme over all others, not because of what the council [of Rome in 369 and of Antioch in 378—MP] decided, but rather because Jesus placed Peter above the rest, elevating

him as the cornerstone of the church itself" ("Saint Damasus," 2005).

In spite of Damasus' efforts to establish the preeminence of Rome and his pontificate, he did not finish his work. After his death in December 384, Siricius was elected as the Pontiff of Rome. He was less educated than Damasus, but empowered himself with a higher level of authority than other bishops had demanded. Siricius claimed inherent authority without consideration of the Scriptures. He demanded, and threatened others, in order to gain more and more power. He was the first to refer to himself as Peter's heir (see Merdinger, 1997, p. 26). Siricius died on November 26, 399. Without a doubt, he and Damasus were principal forces behind the development of a universal ecclesiastical hierarchy.

In 440, Leo I became the pontiff. He was an ardent defender of the supremacy of the Roman bishop over the bishops in the West. In a declaration to the Bishop of Constantinople, he stated:

Constantinople has its own glory and by the mercy of God has become the seat of the empire. But secular matters are based on one thing, and ecclesiastical matters on another. Nothing will stand which is not built on the Rock which the Lord laid in the foundation.... Your city is royal but you cannot make it Apostolic (quoted in Mattox, 1961, pp. 139-140).

The supremacy referred to by Leo I was based on the assumption that the Lord exalted Rome, including its

church and pontiff, over other major cities because of traditions about Peter. By that time it was accepted as “fact” that Peter had been the first Bishop of Rome and that he had been martyred there. Those traditions, along with Rome’s legacy as an evangelistic influence in the first century, gave the city a “divine aura” that supposedly connected it to the apostolic age and distinguished it from other cities. These beliefs greatly influenced the development of a hierarchy in the church.

On September 13, 590, Gregory the Great was named Bishop of Rome. He was another advocate of Petrine tradition, and named himself “Pope” and the “Head of the Universal Church.” By the end of his pontificate, the theory of Peter’s primacy and that of the Bishop of Rome was firmly established. Finally, with the appearance of Boniface III on the papal throne on February 19, 607, Roman papacy became universally accepted. Boniface III lived only a few months after his election. Many other bishops followed his legacy of “runners for supremacy.”

The apostle Paul told the Ephesians, “For the husband is the head of the wife, and **Christ also is the head of the church**, being Himself the savior of the body” (5:23, emp. added). Just as there should be only **one** husband with authority over one wife, there is only **one** Person with authority over the one church. That Person is Jesus Christ!

THE “INFALLIBLE” HISTORY OF THE PAPACY

One of the most treasured doctrines of the Roman papacy is that of infallibility. This dogma was issued by Pope Pius IX and was approved and defined by the Vatican I Council in 1870. The conciliar document declares that

when the Roman Pontiff speaks EX CATHEDRA...he possesses, by the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, that infallibility which the divine Redeemer willed his Church to enjoy in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals. Therefore, such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are of themselves, and not by the consent of the Church, irreformable (“First Dogmatic...,” 4.9).

In other words, papal infallibility means that the pope makes, or should make, **no** mistakes in matters concerning the doctrine of the Catholic Church. The Council even went so far as to state that “should anyone, which God forbid, have the temerity to reject this definition [of papal infallibility—MP] of ours: let him be anathema [condemned—MP]” (“First Dogmatic...,” 4.9).

For more than a century, this dogma has plagued many Catholics who have worked feverishly to try to harmonize the nature of the “infallible” dogma with the declarations, teachings, and revelations of the popes who lived before and after its establishment. After all, it is claimed that the Catholic Church does not create new

dogmas; rather, it proposes eternal truths already contained in the “deposit of faith” (see “Roman Catholic...,” 1892, 8:772; Dixon, 1852, p. 197). Therefore, it could be said that every pope has been subject to “infallibility” without knowing it.

History militates against papal infallibility. For example, Pope Honorius I (A.D. 625-638) was deemed a “heretic” for many years after his death for espousing the doctrine of monotheletism (the doctrine that acknowledged two distinct natures within Christ, but only one divine will). He was censured by the Third Council of Constantinople in 680 (see “Honorius I,” 2001). Another pope, Eugenius IV (1431-1447), condemned Joan of Arc, considering her to be a participant of witchcraft, though Benedict XV canonized her as a “saint” in 1920 (see “Joan...,” 2001). Other popes, such as Paul III, Paul IV, Sixtus IV, Pius IX, et al., authorized, promoted, incited, and reinforced the “Holy” Inquisition for which the late Pope John Paul II had to apologize worldwide.

The same John Paul II (1978-2005) gave a fatal blow to the doctrine of infallibility. In opposition to the declarations of other popes and to Catholic doctrine itself, this pope declared:

- The Spirit of Christ uses churches and ecclesial communities other than the Catholic Church as means of salvation (1979, 4.32).

- People outside the Catholic Church and the Gospel can attain salvation by the grace of Christ (1990, 1.10).
- People can be saved by living a good moral life, without knowing anything about Christ and the Catholic Church (1993, 3).
- There is sanctification outside the Catholic Church (1995, 1.12).
- The martyrs of any religious community can find the extraordinary grace of the Holy Spirit (1995, 3.84).

Furthermore, concerning the erroneous concept of organic evolution, on October 22, 1996, Pope John Paul II declared that “new knowledge has led to the recognition of the theory of evolution as more than a hypothesis” (see John Paul II, 1996). But if evolution is to be considered **more** than merely a hypothesis, Adam disappears! Ultimately, then, how can it be, as Catholics allege, that humanity carries the sin of the first man? Should they not say, instead, that humanity carries the “sin” of the last primate from which we “descended” (as if primates could sin!)?

Due to this obvious failure to satisfy the demands of infallibility, Catholicism has to explain, reformulate, and justify the dogma. Innumerable “clarifications” have been offered to calm Catholics and other religious people who question its veracity. Concerning the possibility that the

pope could fall into heresy, Cardinal Cajetan, one of the most outspoken supporters of papal infallibility, maintained that “this only applies to the pope as a private individual, for then he is as fallible as any other person” (quoted in Fernhout, 1994, p. 106).

In a Web site devoted to Catholic apologetics, the following is said about the pope:

And if he is a heretic, at least he is not going to declare his heresies as part of the doctrine of the profession, that is, things which we are required to believe and observe. It was never permitted by the Holy Spirit (see Toth, Hillaire, and Rascón, n.d).

Other apologists even have gone so far as to declare that

it is true that certain popes have contradicted other popes, in their private opinions or concerning disciplinary dogmas; but there was never a Pope who would officially contradict what a previous Pope officially taught about faith and moral matters. The same could be said about ecumenical councils, which also teach with infallibility. **There was not an ecumenical council that would contradict the teaching of a previous ecumenical council concerning faith and morals** (Keating, n.d., emp. added).

Now Catholicism proposes that, in reality, the pope can make mistakes in religious matters, but he **never** will do it officially. [This is very convenient, since Catholicism itself defines what is “official.”] In the same way, we are told that the councils invoked by the popes teach with

infallibility and **never** contradict each other. But are these statements true? We are going to let the two last **official** councils of the Catholic Church answer this question.

In its Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, Vatican I Council expressed the following:

The abandonment and rejection of the Christian religion, and **the denial of God and his Christ**, has plunged the minds of many into the abyss of pantheism, materialism and atheism, and the consequence is that they strive to destroy rational nature itself, to deny any criterion of what is right and just.... **And so we, following in the footsteps of our predecessors, in accordance with our supreme apostolic office, have never left off teaching and defending Catholic truth and condemning erroneous doctrines** (1870, 7,10, emp. added).

While Vatican I condemned erroneous doctrines such as the denial of Christ, Vatican II declares:

The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth.... **Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God**, they revere Him as a prophet (“Declaration Nostra Aetate...,” 1965, 3, emp. added).

But Muslims’ refusal to acknowledge Jesus as God is a denial of God and His Christ, and thus the heresy condemned by Vatican I.

In its canonic sentence on written revelation, Vatican I states:

If anyone does not receive as sacred and canonical **the complete books of Sacred Scripture with all their parts**, as the holy Council of Trent listed them, or denies that they were divinely inspired: **let him be anathema** [condemned—MP] (“Canons,” 1870, 2.4, emp. added).

However, Vatican II, in speaking about Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions that discard much of canonical Scripture, declared that these religions

try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing “ways,” comprising teachings, rules of life, and **sacred** rites. The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, **though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men** (“Declaration Nostra Aetate...,” 1965, 2, emp. added).

On the permanence of the Petrine primacy of the Roman pontiffs, Vatican I, in its *Pastor Aeternus*, declares:

Therefore, **if anyone says** that it is not by the institution of Christ the Lord himself (that is to say, by divine law) that blessed Peter should have perpetual successors in the primacy over the whole Church; or **that the Roman Pontiff is not the successor of blessed Peter in this primacy: let him be anathema** (“First Dogmatic...,” 1870, 2.5, parenthetical item in orig., emp. added).

However, Vatican II claims:

The Church recognizes that in many ways she is linked with those who, being baptized, are honored with the name of Christian, **though they do not profess the faith in its entirety or do not preserve unity of communion with the successor of Peter** [that is to say, they do not accept the papal hierarchy—MP]. For there are many who honor Sacred Scripture, taking it as a norm of belief and a pattern of life, and who show a sincere zeal. They lovingly believe in God the Father Almighty and in Christ, the Son of God and Saviour. They are consecrated by baptism, in which **they are united with Christ** (“Dogmatic Constitution...,” 1964, 2.15, emp. added).

Now Vatican II has “united to Christ” the same people who, for refusing Petrine hierarchy, were condemned as anathema by Vatican I. Truth be told, the Vatican II Council, invoked by John XXIII, cannot coexist with Vatican I Council, invoked by Pius IX (the father of the dogma of infallibility). These two councils stand as permanent historical evidence of papal fallibility.

Upon analyzing the allegedly infallible history of the popes, we can arrive only at the same conclusion to which Adrian VI (another supposedly infallible pope) arrived in the 16th century: “The pope may err even in what belongs to the faith” (McClintock and Strong, 1867-1880, 1:83).

Certainly, the doctrine of papal infallibility has caused, and continues to cause, many people to accept false doctrines such as original sin, the assumption of Mary,

the canonization of saints, the “factuality” of evolution, and even papal “infallibility” itself—doctrines that are completely lacking biblical foundation. Christians must understand that there is only one infallible truth—the Word of God (John 17:17). It is this truth from which we need to obtain the salvation of our souls. It will keep us away from error and apostasy. In the end, when our Savior returns in the clouds to reward and punish in a universal Judgment, it will not be the words of men’s **fallible** councils, but the Word of God, that will be open; then the Lord will give the “canonical” sentence.

PAPAL CELIBACY

One of the Catholic doctrines that is considered demonstrative of papal dedication to holiness is that of celibacy. For most professed Catholics, the idea of a married pope is blasphemous. In fact, from a Catholic perspective, the idea of a “papa pope” with a wife is unthinkable. But it is important to ask if the doctrine of papal celibacy is biblical.

When we speak of “celibacy” in a religious sense, we are referring to the unmarried state of a person for ecclesiastical purposes. Addressing the subject of celibacy, a Catholic apologist states:

[T]he “sacerdotal celibacy” is not a “law” of obligatory character for all of the Church, but is better understood as an “ecclesiastical discipline” that emerged to **fulfill**

the advice of the Apostle Paul and, above all, our Lord Jesus Christ (see Zavala, 2000a, emp. added).

Through this declaration, we understand that celibacy is **not** considered a mandatory law but a “submission” to the advice of the apostle Paul and Jesus. But to what advice is this statement referring? The same apologist clarifies that it is referring to the apostle’s statement in 1 Corinthians 7:7 (“For I wish that all men were even as I myself”), and Jesus’ statement made in Matthew 19:11-12 (“There are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it”).

Do these declarations provide any biblical authority for papal celibacy? Even celibacy supporters, when confronted with the biblical evidence, are forced to admit that celibacy is **not** a “law of obligatory character.” The truth is that Paul, stating optional advice due to the “present distress” (vs. 26), mentioned that it was better to remain single in order to give more attention to the “things of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:32-34). However, Paul mentioned that not everybody has the same gift from God. In fact, some had a gift “in **this** manner” (i.e., remaining unmarried; cf. 1 Corinthians 7:7), and others had a gift “in **that** manner” (i.e., to be married; cf. 1 Corinthians 7:7). Therefore, Paul, having declared, “But even if you do marry, you have not sinned” (1 Corinthians 7:28), concluded that whoever marries “does well,” and

he that does not, during a time of distress, “does better” (1 Corinthians 7:38).

Jesus’ statement in Matthew 19:12 (“He who is able to accept it, let him accept it”) did **not** imply that the “incapacity” to accept celibacy was a sin. Paul agreed (1 Corinthians 7:28). Rather, Jesus implied that many lacked the “gift of abstinence,” so it would be better for them to marry and avoid fornication (1 Corinthians 7:9). The Bible does not obligate anyone to marry nor to remain single.

But if the choice is between “what is good” and “what is better” (in a time of distress; 1 Corinthians 7:38), Catholics may argue: “Why question the practice of celibacy in our religion?” The truth is that the problem is rooted, not in the personal choice of staying unmarried, but in God’s **requirements** for those who fill specific ecclesiastical roles. The Bible tells us that God constituted different ministries in the church (Ephesians 4:11). Every one of those ministries had (and has) its specific qualification requirements in the Bible. For example, in the case of apostleship, the requirements included learning directly from Jesus and seeing Him after His resurrection (Acts 1:21-22). Even Paul saw the resurrected Lord while on his way to Damascus (Acts 9:3-5; 22:6-8). He learned the Gospel directly from the Lord (Galatians 1:11-12).

There are also biblical requirements concerning bishops. Since the pope is considered the “Universal Bishop,”

it is expected that he “universally” fulfills the requisites for bishops. Let us, then, go to the Bible and see whether or not celibacy is a requirement for bishops.

The title “bishop” is equivalent to the title “elder” or “pastor.” These three terms refer to the same person in the same office (e.g., Acts 20:17,20; Titus 1:5,7; 1 Peter 5:1-2). In 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, we find the biblical requirements for bishops. Paul began his statement about the requirements for bishops with the following expression: “A bishop then **must be...**” (1 Timothy 3:2, emp. added). With these words, the apostle Paul implied that a bishop did not have the option to fulfill the following requirements, but rather that every one was **mandatory**.

Generally, the requirements focus on the morality of the prospective bishop. Among these is the following: “**the husband of one wife...**one who rules his own house well, **having his children** in submission with all reverence” (1 Timothy 3:2,4, emp. added). If we connect these requirements with Paul’s statement in 1 Timothy 3:2, we learn that for the bishop it was (and is) **necessary** to be a husband, and to have his home and children in subjection to the Lord. Does this conclusion contradict the idea that the Bible obligates no one to marry? No. The Bible obligates no one to marry, just as it obligates no one to be a bishop of a congregation. Paul himself indicated, “If a man **desires** [desire is optional] the posi-

tion of a bishop, he **desires** a good work” (1 Timothy 3:1, emp. added).

Although the Bible obligates no one to marry or to be a bishop, it **requires** that he who “desires” the office of a bishop must be a person who is already married and already has children who are under God’s subjection. This simply means that the unmarried (good and faithful as they may be) cannot be bishops, since they fail to meet the divine qualifications for this office. It is important to notice here that being unmarried impedes no one from serving God, since there are many other ministries in which to serve Him. The bishop’s office, though, is reserved for faithful, married men who have children.

Why is this the case? Paul said that it is better to remain unmarried (1 Corinthians 7:38). Does that imply that the unmarried one could “serve better” in the office of a bishop? Certainly, remaining unmarried is a good decision that allows more freedom (from obligations inherent in marriage) to serve God and spread the Gospel (particularly in a time of oppression and persecutions; see Lyons, 2004a). The Bible does not require preachers, evangelists, and teachers to be married. But, bishops keep watch over the internal affairs of the congregational **family** and should be married. Paul stated in 1 Timothy 3:5: “[F]or if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?” It

is necessary for the bishop to demonstrate that he can govern his own physical family (wife and children). In doing so, he shows his ability to be a bishop over a spiritual family (a local congregation of the church). The wisdom in this requirement becomes evident when we consider that the church is formed by many families, and, therefore, needs leaders who have shown faithfulness and wisdom in leading their own families. A man who has never been married has no family subjected to him. Because of this, he does **not** fit all qualifications of a bishop.

Still, some may argue, “Paul was a great apostle who was unmarried. Did he not do a great work for the church?” Absolutely! Paul was a great apostle and evangelist, but he was **not** a bishop. He knew the requisites for a bishop and, therefore, did not dare to take this title. When teaching the young man Titus, he told him who could be a bishop: “A man [who] is blameless, **the husband of one wife, having faithful children** not accused of dissipation or insubordination” (Titus 1:6, emp. added).

Considering once more the papal order, we should ask if the “Universal Bishop” of the Catholic Church—the pope—fulfills God’s episcopal requirements of being married and having children. What many Catholics consider to be blasphemous (a married bishop with children) is, in fact, a biblical requirement for bishops. And, what many Catholics consider a symbol of purity

and selfless sacrifice (papal celibacy) is disobedience to the Word of God.

Today, although the Catholic Church allows marriage for its members, it **does prohibit** marriage among those who participate in the role of bishop (as well as many priests, monks, and nuns). The apostle Paul (to whom many Catholic defenders appeal for argumentation in favor of celibacy) wrote: “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, **forbidding to marry**, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth” (1 Timothy 4:1-3, emp. added). The Catholic Church prohibits marriage when it **forbids** a bishop to marry. It falls away from the faith when it rejects the divine requirements for bishops and instead requires the opposite. Prohibition of marriage is a false doctrine about which the Holy Spirit warned us.

THE “CHASTE” HISTORY OF PAPAL CELIBACY

Although the Bible clearly does not support the doctrine of celibacy as a requisite to any office of the church, the Catholic Church has established celibacy as a distinctive mark of the papacy and other Catholic offices. In fact,

the current pope, Benedict XVI, affirmed that celibacy (imposed by Pope Gregory VII in the Council of Rome in 1074) “is really a special way of conforming oneself to Christ’s own way of life” (“Pope Pens...,” 2007). Therefore, whoever wants to serve as a priest, and finally as the Universal Bishop of the Catholic Church (the pope), must be celibate.

According to Catholic doctrine, Peter was the “first pope.” And, since popes are considered to be Peter’s successors and keepers of Petrine tradition, one would expect them to follow Peter’s example in every aspect—including the acceptance or rejection of celibacy. Matthew 8:14-15 records that Jesus healed one of Peter’s relatives. This relative was none other than his mother-in-law. The text states, “Now when Jesus had come into Peter’s house, He saw **his wife’s mother** lying sick with a fever” (emp. added). Some have tried to argue that this lady was the mother-in-law of another disciple—not Peter. However, the grammar of the text in Matthew (and in the parallel records of Mark and Luke) is very clear when it says that Jesus came to **Peter’s house** and saw **his** mother-in-law (cf. Mark 1:30; Luke 4:38). The only conclusion from a straightforward reading of the text is that if Jesus saw Peter’s mother-in-law, then Peter had a wife!

The apostle Paul also confirmed that Peter was married when he wrote, “Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the broth-

ers of the Lord, and **Cephas?**” (1 Corinthians 9:5, emp. added). Paul identified Peter (also called Cephas; cf. John 1:42; 1 Corinthians 1:12) as someone who already had taken advantage of his right to be married. Additionally, in the first epistle that bears his name, the apostle Peter identified himself as an elder of the church (cf. 1 Peter 5:1). As we observed in the last section, one of the qualifications of elders of the church is to be “the husband of one wife, having faithful children” (Titus 1:5-6). Every piece of biblical evidence on this subject points to the fact that Peter was a married man.

While Catholics appeal to Peter for support of the papacy, ironically, they will not appeal to Peter to argue in favor of papal celibacy for one important reason: Peter was not celibate! Here Catholics exalt Paul, who opted to be celibate. But if popes are the alleged successors of Peter (not Paul), should they not follow Peter’s example?

Like many other teachings of the Catholic Church, celibacy is a man-made doctrine. Though many consider it as a sign of purity, celibacy, imposed on those who aspire to ecclesiastical office, is simply a sign of apostasy (1 Timothy 4:1-3). Consider, for example, the immoral things many “celibate” popes did during their papacies.

Pope Sergius III served as pope from A.D. 904 to 911. History records that he began a “shameful succession” of immoral popes (Schaff, 1910, 4:285). He “owed his

elevation [to the papacy—MP] to the influence of the shameless Theodora [a Roman noblewoman—MP] and her no less shameless daughters Marozia and Theodora.... He was grossly immoral, and lived in licentious relations with Marozia, who bore him several children, among them the future pope John XI” (McClintock and Strong, 1867-1880, 9:570).

Pope John XII served as pope from A.D. 955 to 963. He is considered “one of the most scandalous popes of history” (“John XII,” 1997). Philip Schaff noted that “[h]e was one of the most immoral and wicked popes, ranking with Benedict IX., John XXIII., and Alexander VI. He was charged by a Roman Synod, no one contradicting, with almost every crime of which...human nature is capable, and deposed as a monster of iniquity” (1910, 4:287). Writing around A.D. 1000, a Catholic monk recorded that “John XII loved hunting, had vain thoughts, liked women reunions more than liturgical and ecclesiastical assemblies, was pleased by tumultuous insolences of young people and, concerning lasciviousness and audacity, he surpassed even the pagans” (quoted in Hernández, n.d.). It is recorded that he died “of a stroke while in bed with a married woman” (Walsh, 2001, p. 663).

Pope John XXIII served as pope from A.D. 1410 to 1415. It is said that “he was destitute of every moral virtue, and capable of every vice” (Schaff, 1910, 6:145). He was accused “on seventy charges, which included almost

every crime known to man. He had been unchaste from his youth,...committed adultery with his brother's wife, violated nuns and other virgins, was guilty of sodomy and other nameless vices" (Schaff, 6:158). Finally, he was removed from office by the council of Constance and erased from the official list of the papacy.

Pope Innocent VIII served as pope from A.D. 1484 to 1492. "His conduct was disgracefully irregular: he had seven illegitimate children by different women, and was, besides, married when he took orders" (McClintock and Strong, 1867-1880, 4:593). It is said that his children numbered "16, all of them children by married women" (Schaff, 1910, 6:438). It also is said that "the success of Innocent VIII in increasing the population of Rome was a favorite topic with the wits of the day" (McClintock and Strong, 4:594).

Pope Alexander VI served as pope from A.D. 1492 to 1503. In their *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, McClintock and Strong point out that Alexander is considered "the most depraved of all the popes" (1867-1880, 4:594). They explained: "His youth was a very dissolute one; and he early formed a criminal connection with a Roman lady living in Spain with her two daughters. He soon seduced the daughters also; and one of them, Rosa Vanozza, became his life-long mistress.... His pontificate of eleven years was a stormy one, as he made every thing subordinate to

the purpose of raising his bastard children above the heads of the oldest princely houses of Italy” (1:145-146). A Roman Catholic historian says that he was “one of the greatest and most horrible monsters in nature that could scandalize the holy chair. His beastly morals, his immense ambition, his insatiable avarice, his detestable cruelty, his furious lusts, and monstrous incest with his daughter Lucretia, are, at large, described by Guicciardini Ciaconius, and other authentic papal historians” (as quoted in Barnes, 2005b, p. 82). The following words summarize Pope Alexander’s life: “To Alexander nothing was sacred,—office, virtue, marriage, or life” (Schaff, 1910, 6:462).

Pope Paul III served as pope from A.D. 1534 to 1549. Before his pontificate, he had four children—Pier Luigi, Paolo, Ranuccio, and Costanza—by a Roman mistress (see “Paul III,” 1997, 9:205). History summarizes his life as “largely given up to pleasure and frivolity. He kept low company, supported mistresses, became a father, and in many ways gained an unenviable notoriety” (McClintock and Strong, 1867-1880, 7:831).

More examples could be given, since papal history is characterized more by its sins than by its “holiness.” But the examples listed above clearly prove that many “celibate” popes were anything but celibate, and moreover, anything but chaste.

When men departed further from the truth of God's Word, they deified themselves, choosing an earthly representative (the pope) to usurp the place of God. Many immoral men, thirsty for glory and power, desired the human office (i.e., the papacy) that apostasy promoted. These men fought for this office, hating each other and killing their fellow man. And, in their zeal, they **pretended** to fulfill the demand for celibacy imposed by human tradition, while giving free rein to their carnal passions.

What sacrifice did these "selfless" popes endure by being "celibate" (i.e., unmarried) if they had the lovers they desired? What altruism did these popes exhibit by disallowing themselves to have **only one wife**, yet diving into indescribable immoralities with **many** lovers, including relatives, nuns, prostitutes, and other men's wives during nights of "celibate solitude"? The truth is, this kind of "celibacy" has produced many illegitimate children in the history of Catholic religion!

The Catholic who points to 1 Corinthians 7:7-8 in order to provide biblical support to papal celibacy, should read the advice of Paul in the following verse in order to see that celibacy is not demanded, nor should it be sought in order to institute a certain ecclesiastical order: "[B]ut if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For **it is better to marry than to burn with passion**" (1 Corinthians 7:9, emp. added). Many popes, as well as many local bishops, priests, monks, nuns, etc., have

burned with passion for centuries, and many are adding logs to the fire today. The Bible warns: “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, **sexually immoral**, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8, emp. added).

Chapter 3

IMAGES

Religious images occupy a special place in the hearts of members of the Catholic community. Images are honored, venerated, prayed to, blessed, displayed, kissed, bought, and sold by the devout. It is no secret that the majority, perhaps all, of Catholic Church buildings are full of images. Catholicism claims that “[i]t is right to show respect to the pictures and images of Christ and His saints, because they are representations and memorials of them” (O’Brien, 1901, p. 175).

Are the images of Catholicism only “inoffensive” images, like photographs of family that many of us carry in our wallets? Does the Bible authorize the Catholic use of religious images? These questions and others should

be answered with an open Bible, not with subjective emotions or traditions of men.

**“WE DO NOT WORSHIP,
WE ONLY VENERATE!”**

I have chosen this subtitle in order to address one of the most well-known, but least understood, arguments in favor of religious images. In a conversation about religious iconography, it is not surprising to hear the word “venerate” from the mouths of Catholics. The argument used is: “We don’t worship wood, relics, or images. We **venerate** them” (see Porvaznik, 2007, emp. added). This common assertion is a result of ignorance of the etymology and usage of the word “venerate” and of the implications of the Bible’s teaching concerning to Whom we are to give religious honor.

Once, when speaking with a very devout Catholic who used this word “venerate,” I asked her: “What do you understand the word ‘venerate’ to mean?” She could not answer the question. She had used this word frequently, even though she did not know what it meant. Consequently, the first question we should answer is: What is the meaning of the word “venerate”?

The *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* records the following definition of “venerate”: “[R]egard with **great respect**,...from Latin *venerat-venerari* ‘**adore, revere**’” (Pearsall, 2002, p. 1590, emp. added). The *Webster’s*

New World Dictionary of the American Language gives the following definitions for “venerate”: **to worship, reverence...**, to look upon with feeling of deep respect; regard as venerable; **revere**” (1964, p. 1616, emp. added). The *Espasa Dictionary of Synonyms and Antonyms* lists the following synonyms (among others) for the word “venerate”: **Worship**, honor, reverence, **idolize**, exalt, etc. (1996). Finally, the *Catholic Cofrade Dictionary* notes the following definition for the word “venerate”: “**To worship** God, Saints or sacred things” (2005, emp. added).

We can see easily, by its etymology and synonymy, that a primary meaning of the word “venerate” is simply “to worship or to revere.” Additionally, note that the *Catholic Cofrade Dictionary* applies the word “venerate” to God and “sacred things.” Therefore, when the supporter of Catholicism insists, “We do not worship, we only venerate,” he is actually confirming that Catholics worship images like they worship God.

The truth is that the word “venerate” has been **deliberately** substituted for the word “worship” to excuse the polytheistic practice of Catholicism. Since the meaning of the word “venerate” is unfamiliar to many, it has become a major argument in defense of religious iconography. But if the supporter of Catholicism would only open his dictionary, and look up the meaning of the word that he uses so casually, his favorite argument would soon disappear like the morning mist on a hot summer day.

In fact, the very etymology and correct usage of the word “venerate” exposes the error of iconography. We completely agree that Catholics “only venerate” (i.e., they worship).

But what about respecting images? Are the images of the so-called “saints” and of other “sacred” objects, worthy of respect? What does the Bible say? In addressing images made for religious purposes, Exodus 20:5 warns: “You shall not bow down to them nor serve them [i.e., you shall not show them any kind of respect, service, or worship]” (emp. added; cf. 1 John 5:21). In spite of the divine warning, some in the Catholic community insist: “[I]f someone bows down, doing it only as an expression of respect and affection, **there is nothing wrong with it**” (Zavala, 2000b, emp. added). It seems that some supporters of images read the verse in this way: “You shall not bow down to them, except in the case of giving them respect and affection.” However, such a statement is not in the Bible! Making images for the purpose of religious “veneration,” reverence, respect, or affection is condemned by God.

In the end, who should we believe? Should we believe God Who tells us, “You shall not bow down to images,” or religious people who tell us, “There is nothing wrong with it”? In the beginning, God warned man: “[F]or in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:17). But the serpent said to the woman: “You will not surely

die” (Genesis 3:4). Every Bible student knows very well what happened to the first human couple who listened to the serpent’s assurance that everything was going to be fine. Many religious people today should take more seriously God’s commands about Whom we worship because disobeying His commands **is always wrong!**

“IMAGES YES, IDOLS NO!”

On a Web site devoted to Catholic apologetics, under the title “Images Yes, Idols No,” we find the following emphatic declaration: “Catholics do not have ‘idols’ like ancient pagan people, WE ONLY HAVE IMAGES” (see Rojas, 2000, capitals in original). With this declaration, two things are proposed: (1) The “veneration” of Catholic images is not idolatry; and (2) there is a difference between an idol and an image. Since we have seen in the last section that the first proposition is erroneous, i.e., the “veneration” of Catholic images really is worship, in this section we will focus on the second proposition: Is there a difference between an idol and an image?

The *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* suggests, among others, the following definitions for “image”: (1) “a representation of the external form of a person or thing in art; (2) a visible impression obtained by a camera, telescope, or other device; (3) a person or thing closely resembling another; (4) likeness; or (5) **an idol**” (Pearsall, 2002, p. 708, emp. added). Defining the word

“idol,” the same dictionary notes the following: (1) “an **image** or representation of a god used as an object of worship; and (2) an object of adulation” (p. 706, emp. added). There are some differences between an image and an idol. An image may be a photograph, a portrait, a comparison, a picture on the television, or a piece of art. However, it is very important to note that an image **also** may be an object of worship (i.e., an idol).

Some (who actually mean well) argue that “all images are idols.” But if that were the case, one could accuse virtually everyone of being an idolater, since most people have at least one photograph of someone in their wallet, purse, or on their wall. Theoretically, God could also be called “idolatrous” since He made man in His “image and likeness” (Genesis 1:26-27). But this is not a legitimate argument. In truth, some images are idols. The person who wants to please God must examine the Scriptures carefully to determine which images (idols) he should reject. Let’s look at the biblical teaching concerning idols.

An idol is any image to which religious reverence and honor is offered

Exodus 20:4-5 reads: “You shall not make for yourself a carved **image—any likeness** of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; **you shall not bow down to them nor serve them**” (emp. added). Many times,

the advocate of religious iconography argues that the images Catholicism promotes are not idols, since they do not represent pagan gods; rather they represent “holy” people, and in some cases, the true God (see Rojas, 2000). Nevertheless, the text in Exodus does not support such an argument. God condemns **any** image (either of a pagan god or of the incarnated Son of God) made for the purpose of worship and honor (cf. Acts 17:24-25,29). God protected against erroneous interpretations by saying: “You shall not make for yourself a carved image...of anything that is in heaven above...or that is in the earth beneath...or that is in the water under the earth.” The question then becomes, what image designed for the purpose of worship or honor would fall outside these parameters? Are the Catholic images, which are “venerated” and honored, representations of anything that is in heaven, earth, water, or under water?

An idol is any image that does not deserve the religious honor given to it

When the devil tempted Jesus in the desert, he said to Him: “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me” (Matthew 4:9). To this temptation, Jesus answered: “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve” (Matthew 4:10). With this singular and scriptural assessment, Jesus made clear to the Christians’ enemy that only one Being deserves such regard and worship. Jesus’ point was not that the devil

did not deserve worship because of what he **was** (i.e., an evil spirit condemned to hell), rather His point was that the devil did not deserve worship because of what he **was not** (i.e., the sovereign God over all creation).

Some people believe that Jesus condemns worship directed toward the devil merely because the devil is intrinsically malevolent, but that He condones worship to “benevolent” beings (whether or not they are divine). But the truth is that God alone is the Being Who deserves worship (cf. Isaiah 42:8). Are the images of Catholicism divine? Do they deserve honor and worship? Certainly not! When someone prostrates himself before these images, he voluntarily agrees to obey the tempter’s request to be worshiped.

An idol is any image which is religiously honored but cannot respond

The book of 1 Kings records one of the most interesting stories of the Old Testament concerning idols. Here Elijah challenged the prophets of an ancient god, Baal, to give a demonstration of their god’s “power.” The challenge consisted of preparing an altar, cutting a bull in pieces, placing it on the altar, and then calling on their god to send fire from heaven to consume the offering. The challenge was accepted. Then, “they took the bull which was given them, and they prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon, saying, ‘O Baal, hear us!’ But **there was no voice; no**

one answered. Then they leaped about the altar which they had made” (1 Kings 18:26, emp. added). They certainly worshipped, but Baal could not answer, simply because he was not God. In contrast, Elijah prepared an altar and a sacrifice, soaked them completely with water, and prayed to Almighty God. God instantly sent fire from heaven, that not only consumed the altar and the offering, but also “licked up the water” around the altar (1 Kings 18:30-38).

The supporters of Catholicism argue that their images do perform miracles (see Cruz, 1993; Nickell, 1999), but where is the evidence for their “miracles”? Why do they do them “in secret” and only for those who profess Catholicism? Why do they not show their “greatness,” as the greatness of God was shown when He sent fire from heaven? If someone had asked Baal’s prophets if their god performed miracles, or could send fire from heaven, how would they have answered? They would have said, “Yes.” That was the reason they accepted and pleaded with their god and leaped about the altar. But Baal was helpless to perform a miracle. Can religious images work miracles today? They could not do it before, and the situation has not changed.

An idol is any image, religiously honored, that cannot do anything

In one of the most illustrative biblical passages about idols, the psalmist wrote:

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; eyes they have, but they do not see; they have ears, but they do not hear; noses they have, but they do not smell; they have hands, but they do not handle; feet they have, but they do not walk; nor do they mutter through their throat. Those who make them are like them; so is everyone who trusts in them (115:4-8).

What else could be said? This seems to be an exact description of the images made for religious purposes today. Can the images of Catholicism achieve anything more than the images described by the psalmist? Can they repair their own broken noses after being hit by the ball of a little child? Can they clean their dust, touch up their paint, or pick up the money that is placed before them? Do not Catholics light candles to them because the images cannot do it by themselves? And do not Catholics blow out those candles because the images, although having mouths, cannot blow them out? Do not Catholics hold processions and carry them around the city because, although they have feet, they cannot walk or even take the first public bus? What difference do we find between the idols of Psalm 115 and the alleged "inoffensive images" of Catholicism?

An idol is any image, religiously honored, that degrades the concept of Deity

Advocates of religious iconography may continue to argue that their images are not idols because they are not representations of false gods; rather they are representations of “holy” people and the true God. But we already have seen that these images also fall in the category of idols.

Another very important point must be stressed. In speaking to the Athenians, Paul exhorted them: “Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, **we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising**” (Acts 17:29, emp. added). It is not God’s desire to be represented by something material or by something that is the product of man’s imagination. It is God’s desire that we, His offspring, understand this very important fact: There is nothing in this world—not gold or silver or anything else—that can be compared to God. To represent His nature in a material object is to minimize His greatness. Jesus also declared: “No one has seen God at any time” (John 1:18). If no one has seen Him at any time, who could make a faithful representation of Him? An imagination capable of such is possible only in pagan minds!

There are many images—expressed in photographs of loved ones, in art, on \$50 or \$100 bills, etc.—that

God has **not** condemned. But there are many others that are projected to be representations “worthy” of the honor due only to God. Faithful Christians must reject idols (1 John 5:21).

THE ALLEGED BIBLICAL BASIS FOR RELIGIOUS ICONOGRAPHY

Although the Bible clearly condemns religious iconography, some try to find any hint of biblical support for devotion to man-made images. They have twisted Bible verses to create a shield of protection against the clear teachings of the Word of God, and have formulated different arguments.

Argument #1: God commanded images to be made for veneration

This argument originates from God’s commandment to Moses to make two golden cherubs on the lid of the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:18-21; cf. O’Brien, 1901, p. 175). The argument is faulty for the following reasons.

First, God commanded that the cherubs be made **not** as objects of veneration or worship. The cherubs were to sit on the lid of the Ark of the Covenant, but they were no more special than the other objects or furnishings of the tabernacle. Each object in the tabernacle (and later the temple) had special significance and purpose, but none was an object of worship.

Second, the nature and purpose of the Old Testament should be considered. The inspired writer of Hebrews tells us that the first covenant had an “**earthly** sanctuary” (9:1, emp. added). The tabernacle and its furnishings were models or patterns of the “greater and more perfect tabernacle **not made with hands,**” of which Christ is the High Priest (9:11, emp. added; cf. 8:5). The tabernacle and its contents were **figures and shadows** of heavenly things (9:23; 10:1) and of a new covenant (8:5-6). Now we, “having boldness to enter the Holiest [i.e., the Holy of Holies],” having “a High Priest [Jesus] over the house of God” (10:21), are admonished to leave behind the “oldness of the letter” (Romans 7:6) and accept the heavenly conditions of the new covenant established by Christ (Hebrews 8:1-6; 9:11-15).

Third, we should consider the authoritative and prohibitive nature of divine commands. God **commanded** Moses to make the cherubs (and other objects for the tabernacle) as representations of heavenly things that would be part of the New Covenant after the sacrifice of Christ. True servants of God do not promote, authorize, or offer anything that “He [has] not commanded” (Leviticus 10:1-2). The desires of God’s servant must be subjected to divine authority and divine command. Where is the divine command which authorizes religious iconography? There is not one single biblical text that approves or allows the worship of images.

Fourth, God's commands concerning the construction and use of the tabernacle and its contents were made under the Old Testament and were exclusively for the people chosen by God at that time, i.e., the Israelites. Christians no longer follow the Old Testament methodology of worship, since it was taken away when Jesus died, and replaced it with a better covenant (Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 10).

The symbols of the Old Covenant, including the cherubs on the Ark of the Covenant, were never objects of worship. Neither Exodus 25:18-21 nor any other Scripture (such as the reference to the bronze serpent in Numbers 21:9; cf. 2 Kings 18:4) authorize religious iconography.

Argument #2: Servants of God bowed before images, indicating divine acceptance of such veneration

It has been argued that the Bible promotes the veneration of images because Joshua 7:6 says that Joshua and the elders of Israel "bowed down before the Ark, and there were the two images of the cherubs, and nothing happened to them" (Zavala, 2000b). Although at first glance this passage may seem to favor religious iconography, consider the following points often overlooked.

First of all, the nature of the Old Testament should be considered again. Under the Old Covenant, God "dwelt" in a special way in the tabernacle (over the Ark), and from there He spoke to the people of Israel (Exodus

25:22; 30:36; Leviticus 16:2). However, under the New Testament, God “does not dwell in temples made with hands” (Acts 17:24). If God does not dwell in temples made with human hands, would He dwell in images made with human hands?

Second, it is essential to consider the context of Joshua 7:6. Although Catholics argue that Joshua and the elders of Israel bowed down to honor and venerate the images of the cherubs that were on the Ark, the context reveals completely different facts. Verse six informs us that Joshua “tore his clothes,” and he and the elders of the people “put dust on their heads.” Tearing one’s garments and covering one’s head with dust or ashes were signs of great sorrow, shame, or penitence (cf. Job 1:20; Genesis 37:29,34; 2 Samuel 3:31; 2 Samuel 13:30-31; Lamentations 2:10; et al.). They never were signs of worship. It is certain that Joshua and the elders of Israel did not have the faintest intention of giving honor to or worshipping the Ark of the Covenant or the cherubs on it.

Argument #3: In Bible times, people bowed before servants of God as a sign of reverence or veneration

Second Kings 4:27 records an event in which a woman came to Elisha, a prophet of God, and grabbed his feet. It has been said that this is a clear biblical example that showing reverence to certain people, and by implication to images, is authorized by God. But the truth is that this

is one of the most shameful arguments used by some supporters of Catholicism. It is a deliberately dishonest use of the Word of God and a desperate attempt to excuse false doctrine.

First, a straightforward reading of the context reveals that the woman did not grab Elisha's feet to "venerate" him. Because this woman had been very hospitable to Elisha (2 Kings 4:8-10), he promised her that God would give her a child. Her son was born within the time Elisha promised but died at a very early age (4:20). The woman went to Elisha, grabbed his feet, and demanded an explanation because her soul was "in deep distress" (4:27). Note her words: "Did I ask a son of my lord? Did I not say, 'Do not deceive me?'" (2 Kings 4:28). If she had been "venerating" Elisha, would she have accused him of deceiving her? Of course not! The woman was grieving, her son had died, and she wanted help. At no time did this poor woman's grief represent veneration of Elisha.

Second, if 2 Kings 4:27 authorizes the veneration of servants of God (as some Catholic apologists claim), this verse still would not authorize showing reverence toward **images**. But this verse authorizes veneration of neither men nor images! The Bible clearly condemns bowing before men to venerate or worship them (cf. Acts 10:25-26).

Third, the narrative in 2 Kings 4:27 describes an incidental scene completely separate from any kind of worship. This verse does not imply or authorize—much less command—men to worship servants of God. Those who advocate such, advocate a practice that lacks biblical authority (see Chapter 2, pp. 43-44).

Argument #4: In Bible times, people carried images in processions

It is said that 2 Samuel 6 describes a religious procession in which an icon was carried because “David gathered all the choice men of Israel” (6:1), “set the ark of God on a new cart” (6:3), and everybody “played music before the Lord” (6:5). Consider the following points.

Modern-day Catholic processions are characterized by a large number of people carrying images on a special day. Although the situation recorded in 2 Samuel 6 may seem similar, the principle is not the same. The Ark of God had been left in Kiriath-Jearim for about four decades, and David wanted to bring it to the capital city of Jerusalem. At no time was it David’s intention to “show off” the Ark of God or to encourage the multitudes to worship it, nor was that day designated as holy. In Jerusalem, the Ark would occupy a special and permanent place in the temple that Solomon (David’s son) would build.

The Ark was never to be worshipped. God never commanded that the Ark, or any other object with religious significance, be carried in religious processions like the

ones Catholics perform. There are no similarities between the reasons for which the Ark of the Covenant was brought to Jerusalem and the motivations for religious processions honoring the images of Catholicism, and there is no biblical authority for such processions.

Argument #5: Jesus did not condemn images

In Mark 12, we read that some Jews tried to trick Jesus with a question about paying taxes to Caesar. Jesus took a Roman coin and asked, “Whose image and inscription is this?” (12:16). Because of this simple question, and because He did not condemn Caesar’s likeness on the coin, some Catholics argue that Jesus authorized veneration of images by indirectly promoting them.

First, the fact that Jesus did not condemn an image does not mean that He approved religious images or their veneration. To argue such on the basis of this incident would imply that Jesus approved veneration of immoral political leaders, not the images of “saints” or deity (as Catholics claim). Would Jesus approve, or encourage, the veneration of images representing evil Roman emperors such as Tiberius and Nero? Obviously not! God had condemned this from ancient times (cf. Daniel 3).

Second, the context of Mark 12 should be considered. Some Catholic apologists have argued that if God really condemns religious images, this incident in the life of Christ would have been an excellent time to do it (see

Gagnon, n.d.). But Jesus' discussion with the Jews was not on the subject of idolatry. The discussion at hand was based on the question presented to Him by the Jewish religious leaders: "Is it lawful to give tribute [taxes] to Caesar, or not?" (Mark 12:14). The question was not, "Is it lawful to worship images or not?" Jesus' reply was related directly to their question: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17). Jesus' answer cannot be applied to a totally unrelated question.

Simply put, there is **not** one single text, in either the Old or New Testament, that supports (by direct command, example, or implication) the worship of images in order to draw near to God. Those who support this erroneous doctrine have become "futile in their thoughts" and have "changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man" (Romans 1:21-24).

BIBLICAL WARNINGS

Some Catholic apologists want us to believe that there is nothing wrong with venerating images, but what does the Bible say? Deuteronomy 4:15-19 notes the following:

Take careful heed to yourselves, for you saw no form when the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, lest you act **corruptly** and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of any figure: the likeness

of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth or the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground or the likeness of any fish that is in the water beneath the earth. And take heed, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to worship them and serve them, which the Lord your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage (emp. added).

The divine warning is very clear: veneration or worship of images is evidence of the corruption of the human heart.

In the next chapter of the same book, God warned: “You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth” (5:8). Is this commandment difficult to understand? The Bible continues: “You shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the **iniquity** of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me” (5:9, emp. added). Again, the Bible is clear: the production of images or sculptures for the purpose of religious veneration is iniquity before Jehovah.

Concerning the singularity of God, the prophet Isaiah wrote: “To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him?... ‘To whom then

will you liken Me, or to whom shall I be equal?’ says the Holy One” (40:18,25). There is no way to compare a man-made object to God, or to make an image that represents His greatness. Those who attempt to do so degrade the person of God.

Jeremiah declared: “Everyone is dull-hearted, without knowledge; every metalsmith is put to shame by the carved image; for his molded image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them” (51:17). The images of worship are simply false gods; they have no life in them. Those who worship images should be ashamed because “their molded images are wind and confusion” (Isaiah 41:29). Jeremiah added: “They [the idols] are futile, a work of errors; in the time of their punishment they shall perish” (51:18).

In an illustrative passage concerning idolatry, Hosea wrote: “Do not rejoice, O Israel, with joy like other peoples, for you have played the **harlot** against your God. You have made love for hire on every threshing floor” (9:1, emp. added; cf. Hosea 8). The biblical comparison is very clear: idolatry is considered to be spiritual prostitution. It is ironic that many consider physical fornication or prostitution to be detestable activities before God, but they overlook, and even defend, spiritual fornication and prostitution.

Paul declared of those who tried to make representations of God: “Professing to be wise, they became **fools**,

and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things” (Romans 1:22-23, emp. added). Any defense of physical representations of deity is evidence of man’s foolish desire to reduce spiritual things to an earthly level. Concerning these men, Paul added: “Therefore, God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts” (Romans 1:24). Ultimately, such men separate themselves from God by their sinful actions (Isaiah 59:1-2). God will not force them to change their ways, but one day will take vengeance on all those who do not obey Him (2 Thessalonians 1:8). The apostle John wrote, “but the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, **idolaters**, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8, emp. added).

God will condemn those who participate in idolatry. No gods of gold, silver, wood, or stone will be able to intervene on their behalf. There is only One Who can mediate between us and God the Father—“the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). John encouraged the first-century Christians by saying: “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21). Twenty-first-century Christians also must heed this warning.

Chapter 4

MARY

No woman in all of history stands out more than Mary. Her fame is due to the fact that God chose her to bring into the world the long-awaited Savior and Messiah, Jesus Christ. Since Jesus Christ was the greatest Person ever to set foot on the Earth—the Teacher of teachers, the Man Who has changed more lives than any other throughout the centuries, and the One Who gives mankind the opportunity to be free from the bonds of sin—everything associated with His life, His character, and His teachings has been a source of great interest to many. The desire to know more about the Lord has led many to place excessive emphasis on those who were close to Him and uninspired traditions about them.

Questions arise: Who would have been the closest to God Incarnate? Who could tell us, in profound detail, about His nights of infancy, His adolescent anxieties, and the afflictions of His ministry? Obviously, the woman who held the Savior of the world in her arms from the time of His birth, calmed His crying with her lullabies, healed His childhood wounds, and watched Him grow and become a man, would have been closer to Him than any other human being. So, by virtue of her relationship to Jesus, some argue that Mary is deserving of greater honor than anyone else who ever has obeyed God.

Catholics have elevated Mary to a higher level than God ever intended. The supporters of human traditions have united their forces to make Mary not just a “maid-servant of the Lord” (Luke 1:38), but rather the “Mother of God.” We will open the Bible to examine the things related to this special woman who “found favor with God” (Luke 1:30).

WAS MARY SINLESS?

Many assertions have been made about Mary, and many religious traditions surround her. One prominent Catholic declaration about Mary states that she was sinless (see *Catechism...*, 1994, 491). In reality, this statement implies two things that even some Catholics do not know or understand: (1) Mary was the only person (apart from Jesus Christ) who came into the world without the con-

tamination of “original sin,” and (2) Mary was the only person (apart from Jesus Christ) who never committed sin. We will consider these two assertions briefly.

We agree (in part) with the first assertion. Mary was born free of the contamination of Adam’s sin, but she was not the only one. In fact, **everyone** arrives in this world without the contamination of original sin. The Catholic doctrine, which teaches that all people inherit Adam’s sin (which led to the requirement of infant baptism), originated from a misinterpretation of some biblical passages. It is an example of great familiarity with tradition and very little understanding of the Scriptures. The doctrine of “original sin” has caused many problems for Catholicism. It undermined the high level to which Catholics had elevated Mary, as well as the image of her they created. They had to find a way to preserve the sinless image of Mary that they had created. So, in 1854, policymakers within the Catholic Church “liberated” Mary, stating that she was born without original sin (see Herbermann, 1913, 7:674-675). This allowed her to wear the title “Most Holy.”

Romans 5:12 has been used extensively to support the Catholic doctrine of “original sin.” In this passage, Paul wrote: “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.” At first glance, this text may seem to support the idea of original sin;

however, a proper study of this verse will show that this is not the case.

First, Paul said that “through one man sin entered **the world.**” Paul did not say that sin entered into every person at birth. Rather, sin became a part of the world in general. Second, Paul said that **death** entered the world through sin. This refers exclusively to the death that Adam and Eve experienced in the beginning. Third, Paul noted that “death spread to all men, because **all sinned.**” The text does not say that death spread to all men because Adam sinned but because all sinned. It is clear that humanity is the recipient of the **consequence** of Adam’s sin (i.e., death), but is not the recipient of the **guilt** of Adam’s sin. Each accountable person dies for his or her own sin (Romans 3:23).

Ezekiel 18:20 declares: “The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself” (cf. Deuteronomy 24:16; Jeremiah 31:30). Since the Bible emphatically affirms that the son does not bear the guilt (or iniquity) of the father, this means that Cain, Abel, and Seth did not carry the sin of their father, Adam. How, then, can we possibly carry Adam’s sin? The truth is that children are born without sin. This is why Jesus said that in order to enter into the kingdom of heaven, one should become

like a child (Matthew 18:3). But if children come into this world “dragging” the sin of the first man and, therefore, are contaminated, what sense would it make for Jesus to encourage us to be like them? [For a more extensive study on this subject, see Chapter 5, pp. 139-143.]

A just and righteous God would not (and will not) condemn all humanity for the sin of one man. No man on Earth bears the sin that Adam committed. Mary, just like everyone else in this world, was born without the contamination of any original sin.

But what about the assertion that Mary was the only person (apart from Jesus Christ) who never committed sin? No Bible verse explicitly declares that Mary committed any sin (just as there is no verse which declares that Seth, Enoch, Stephen, Philemon, etc., committed sin), but many Bible verses explicitly state that **everyone** sins. Therefore, Mary sinned. We should not belittle the impressive biblical record of Mary. But she, like any other human being, needed a Savior to take away her sins.

Paul was very emphatic about this subject: “For **all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23, emp. added). Paul allowed no exceptions. He wrote that all have sinned. There is no doubt that the word “all” includes Mary. Paul agreed with the psalmist’s inspired assessment of humanity: “There is none righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10; cf. Psalms 14:3; 53:1-3). But if

Mary never committed sin, the text should read: “There is none righteous, except Mary.”

It is important to note that the Bible places emphasis on what all, except Jesus, have done (i.e., sinned). One of the major differences between the sons of men and the Son of Man is that we succumb to sin, but Jesus never did. Hebrews 4:15 notes: “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet **without sin**” (emp. added; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21). What praise or honor should be given to Jesus Christ (our High Priest) if He achieved that which a mere human had already achieved? If Mary never sinned, why did God give the high priesthood of the church to Jesus instead of her? In fact, the declaration of the Hebrews writer would lose its power if someone else had already achieved sinless perfection.

Mary herself acknowledged this great doctrinal truth, i.e., that all have sinned and are in need of a Savior. She declared: “And my spirit has rejoiced in God **my Savior**” (Luke 1:47, emp. added). This fits with what the angel told Joseph about Mary: “And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for **He will save His people from their sins**” (Matthew 1:21, emp. added). Jesus came to save mankind from the bondage of sin. When Mary recognized God as her Savior, she also recognized that, just as any other human being, she needed

salvation. If Mary lived and left this life without committing sin, it follows that she would not have needed a Savior. Why, then, did she refer to God as her “Savior”? If she was sinless, from what was she saved?

Finally, God’s grace for Mary was not earned—but **given**. Advocates of the doctrine of the Most Holy Immaculate Conception argue that when the angel called Mary the “highly favored one” (Luke 1:28), he implied that she was pure in the highest sense of the word and, ultimately, without any vestige of sin. Nevertheless, the expression “highly favored one” is not intended to emphasize some sort of unique nature of Mary, but rather the nature of God’s immeasurable favor. Verse 30 states: “Then the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.’” The great peculiarity of Mary’s life is not some sort of unique moral nature that she **achieved**, but rather the greatness of divine favor and grace that she **received** from God. Mary understood this point very well and declared: “Behold the **maidservant** of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38, emp. added).

If Mary was not exempt from sin, how was Jesus born without sin? As we already indicated, no child bears the iniquity of his or her parents (Ezekiel 18:20). If it were necessary for Mary to have been sinless, in the absolute sense of the word, in order to have a sinless child, then sinlessness also would be required of Mary’s parents,

in order to conceive a “sinless” Mary. In turn, all Mary’s ancestors logically would have had to meet the same requirement.

We conclude from the Bible: (1) Like every other person ever born, Mary was born without any kind of original sin; (2) like every other person ever born (apart from Jesus Christ), Mary was not exempt from sin and its consequences; and (3) like every other person ever born (apart from Jesus Christ), Mary was in need of a Savior. These biblical facts do not minimize the importance of Mary’s role in fulfilling God’s divine plan to save man. Because of her godly life, God chose this particular young Jewish virgin to bring forth the Messiah. However, she was not sinless. Throughout history, God has used ordinary, imperfect men and women to accomplish extraordinary things, bringing them closer to “perfection” through His Son, Jesus Christ.

THE VIRGINITY OF MARY

The idea of Mary’s perpetual virginity is critical to Catholic Mariology (see Herbermann, 1913, 15:459-472). Catholics maintain that Mary was a virgin, not only before and during the conception of Jesus, but also afterward, for the rest of her life. This idea is known as the “Perpetual Virginity” of Mary. But, was Mary a virgin for the **totality** of her life?

All Christians (or at least those who believe the biblical record is inspired) agree that Mary was a virgin when God's angel informed her that she was with child of the Holy Spirit. Matthew is plain when he states: "**Before they** [Joseph and Mary] **came together**, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 1:18, emp. added). Luke records Mary's question upon hearing that she was to bring forth a son: "Can this be, since **I do not know a man?**" (Luke 1:34, emp. added). The word "know" in Luke 1:34 obviously was used not for "having an idea or notion about a man," but in reference to "having conjugal relations." [Mary thought it was impossible for her to have conceived a child since "she did not know a man."] The word "know" comes from the Greek *ginosko* and, in the context of Luke 1:34, is "used to convey the thought of connection or union, as between man and woman" (Vine, 1966, 2:298). The Bible clearly teaches that Mary was a virgin at the time of Jesus' conception (cf. Isaiah 7:14). But what about **after** giving birth to the Savior?

First, consider Catholicism's ideas about virginity itself. If they define virginity as "the intact conservation of a woman's hymen" (the membrane located in the vulva), naturally Mary would have "lost her virginity" at the moment of Jesus' birth. The Bible records that Mary's conception was miraculous (Matthew 1:18), but to say that

her pregnancy, as well as her delivery, were miraculous would be a forced interpretation of the text.

Second, consider the word “till” in Matthew 1:25 (“and [Joseph] did not know her **till** she had brought forth her firstborn Son”), in connection with the word “before” in Matthew 1:18 (“**before** they [Joseph and Mary] came together”). The Greek phrase *heos hou*, translated “till,” does not necessarily imply that Joseph and Mary had sexual relations after Jesus’ birth. However, as Lewis noted, the rest of the New Testament bears out the fact that where this phrase is preceded by a negative, it “**always** implies that the negated action did take place later” (quoted in Miller, 2003). Most probably, Matthew’s use of the words “till” and “before” emphasizes an opposite post-condition to a virgin state. Also note that Matthew wrote his gospel account (between A.D. 40 and A.D. 70) after the events of his record had transpired. Thus, if he had wanted the reader to understand that Mary was a virgin for all her life, surely he would have been very clear on that matter. But his wording leads to an opposite conclusion.

Third, as Joseph pondered Mary’s sudden pregnancy (although they had not yet “come together,” according to Matthew 1:18), “an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to **take to you Mary your wife**’” (Matthew 1:20, emp. added). This phrase (“to take to you Mary your wife”),

as Barnes noted, means to “recognize her as such, and to **treat** her as such” (2005a, p. 6, emp. added). God’s angel encouraged Joseph not only to take Mary, but to take her as his wife, not as a sister or a roommate for life. The truth is clear: Mary became Joseph’s wife in the absolute physical sense of the word.

Fourth, both Matthew (1:25) and Luke (2:7) record that Mary gave birth to her **firstborn** son. “Firstborn” comes from two Greek words: *protos*, meaning first, and *tikto*, meaning to beget (Vine, 1966, 2:104). In these verses, Jesus is referred to as Mary’s first son, which may imply that Mary had more children after Jesus’ birth. It also is worth mentioning that while Luke referred to baby Jesus as Mary’s **firstborn** (*prototokos*; 2:7), one chapter earlier he referred to the infant John (the only son of Zacharias and Elizabeth) as Elizabeth’s **son** (*huios*; 1:57). This does not prove that Mary had other children, but adds to the weight of the case against Mary’s perpetual virginity.

Other passages in the New Testament provide evidence to conclude, beyond any doubt, that Jesus had half-brothers and half-sisters who were born to Joseph and Mary sometime after they “came together” (Matthew 1:18). For example, Mark 3 tells us about a disturbance that arose while Jesus was teaching a crowd of people. “Then **His brothers and His mother** came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him” (Mark 3:31, emp. added; cf. Matthew 12:46-50). Mark also noted that the

people around Jesus “said to Him, ‘Look, **Your mother and Your brothers** are outside seeking You’” (3:32, emp. added). Not only did Mark identify these people as Jesus’ direct relatives, but he recorded that the multitude (who knew Jesus) identified the same group of people as His family. Additionally, when pointing out the superiority of His spiritual family over His physical family (who was looking for Him), Jesus said: “For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother” (Mark 3:35). Jesus’ statement emphasizes the unique and intimate relationship between Christ and His followers. He did not intend to convey that those who do the will of God are His spiritual **cousins**, but His spiritual **brothers and sisters!**

Matthew 13:53-58 is similar to Mark 3:31-35. Matthew records Jesus’ arrival in His hometown, Nazareth of Galilee, where He taught the people in their synagogue (13:54). When the people heard Jesus’ teaching, “they were astonished and said, ‘Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And **His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?** And **His sisters**, are they not all with us?’” (13:54-56, emp. added).

Various theories attempt to avoid the fact that Joseph and Mary had children together. One of the theories maintains that the “brothers” mentioned in Matthew 13 were His apostles. This theory fails to recognize that

Jesus did not arrive at just any country but “to **His own country**” (13:54, emp. added). Those who identified Jesus’ brothers and sisters knew very well who Jesus was and who His close relatives were, as evidenced by the fact that they identified Jesus’ family members by name. One reason they marveled at His teaching was the fact they knew His earthly family consisted of ordinary people. It is ironic that many Catholics accept that the phrase “carpenter’s son” literally identifies Jesus’ adoptive father, Joseph, and that the phrase “His mother called Mary” literally identifies Jesus’ mother, while they deny that the phrases “His brothers” and “His sisters” literally identify Jesus’ half brothers and sisters. What kind of interpretation is that? Furthermore, even though the names James, Simon, and Judas (listed by the multitude) may remind us of the names of three of Jesus’ apostles (Matthew 10:2-4), no apostle was named Joses (Joseph—Matthew 13:55). It is clear that these “brothers” were not Jesus’ apostles. If “His brothers” refers to the apostles, pray tell, to whom does the phrase “His sisters” refer?

Luke offers more evidence that the men referred to as Jesus’ brothers could not be His apostles. In Acts 1:13, he identified the apostles (at this time only eleven) by name. Then, in verse 14, he added: “These all [the apostles of verse 13] continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and **with His brothers**” (emp. added). Paul

made the same distinction when he asked, “Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, **the brothers of the Lord**, and Cephas?” (1 Corinthians 9:5, emp. added). There can be no doubt that “the brothers of the Lord’ about whom Luke and Paul wrote were a different group from the apostles.

Due to the weight of the biblical evidence, few Catholics maintain that Jesus’ brothers were His apostles. Rather, many of them have suggested that these “brothers” and “sisters” were His **disciples** or **followers**. But, again, the biblical evidence is overwhelming.

When the people identified Jesus in Matthew 13:53-58, they connected Him with a family composed of a “carpenter,” “Mary,” “His brothers” (James, Joses, Simon and Judas), and “His sisters.” Why would the people refer to Joseph and Mary and then connect them to His “spiritual family” (followers) in order to establish Jesus’ identity? Why would they have named only four of Jesus’ “followers”? John helps us to conclude that these “brothers” and “sisters” were not Jesus’ disciples or followers. In chapter seven of his gospel account, John tells us that “**His** [Jesus’] **brothers** therefore said to Him, ‘Depart from here and go into Judea, that **Your disciples** also may see the works that You are doing’” (7:3, emp. added). John made a clear distinction between Jesus’ brothers and His disciples or followers. He went on to state that “even His brothers did not believe in Him”

(7:5). By this time, Jesus' brothers were not counted in the group known as "His disciples," those who believed in Him. Luke also makes a distinction when, in Acts 1:14, he identifies a group known as Jesus' brothers, while in verse 15 he gives the number of the disciples: "[A]ltogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty." Although by the time the event of Acts 1 transpired, Jesus' brothers believed in Him and were counted in the number of His disciples, they still were described as having been closely related to the Savior. Truth be told, these "brothers" and "sisters" were neither Jesus' disciples nor His followers during His ministry.

Is it possible that these "brothers" and "sisters" were Jesus' **cousins** or other near relatives? In trying to defend this theory, a Catholic apologist turned his attention to Joses (Joseph), one of Jesus' brothers listed in Matthew 13:55. He argued that the Jews "never name their sons after their parents.... Therefore, Joseph cannot be the son of Joseph [the carpenter—MP]" (Zavala, 2000c). This conclusion is unfounded. First, tradition may reflect what a majority of people do, but it cannot accurately represent every individual case. It cannot be said that Jews "**never** name their sons after their parents." Second, by Jesus' time, Hebrew tradition had been influenced greatly by Greek and other cultures (e.g., Babylonian, Persian, etc.). As it happens with modern influence (e.g., Latin children called by English names), by this period Jewish tradition

was a mixture of different customs. Third, Luke shed light on the Hebrew tradition of naming babies by Jesus' time. Concerning the immediate time after the birth of John the baptizer, Luke recorded that the "neighbors and relatives...called him [John] **by the name of his father, Zacharias**" (1:58-59, emp. added). Why would Hebrew relatives and neighbors do so if it was not an accepted tradition? Luke further informs us that when Elizabeth (John's mother) responded that the child "shall be called John" (vs. 60), they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name" (vs. 61). The conclusion is clear (and shows the lack of Bible knowledge of some Catholic apologists): By Jesus' time it was acceptable to name a son after his father. Therefore, Joseph (Joses—Matthew 13:55) refers to the son of Joseph the carpenter.

It is true that the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament Hebrew) uses *adelphos* (brother) with a broader meaning to refer to a near relative or kinsman who is not technically a brother. However, this use does not establish the meaning "cousin" for *adelphos* in the New Testament. As Walther Gunther has indicated, "In no case in the New Testament can *adelphos* be interpreted with certainty in this sense [i.e., as cousins—MP]" (see Brown, 1975, 1:256). Lewis declared, even more emphatically, "'Brothers' (*adelphos*) never means 'cousins' in New Testament Greek" (1976, 1:181, emp. added).

Therefore, interpreting *adelphos* as “cousins” only in New Testament passages that make reference to Jesus’ brothers is an arbitrary exegesis that lacks contextual and/or textual basis (see Miller, 2003).

Paul offers additional circumstantial evidence. When defending his apostleship before the Galatians, he declared that when he arrived in Jerusalem, he “saw none of the other apostles except **James, the Lord’s brother**” (1:19, emp. added). This information fits perfectly with Matthew 13:55, where James is identified as one of Jesus’ brothers. Further, when Jude wrote his epistle, he introduced himself as “a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and **brother of James**” (vs. 1, emp. added). As a way of confirmation, Matthew identified James and Jude as Jesus’ brothers. [NOTE: Contrary to what some Catholics have declared (e.g., Tapias, 2006; Arráiz, n.d.), this James, brother of Jesus, was not James the apostle (cf. Galatians 1:17-19) and, therefore, was not the son of Alphaeus, but the son of Joseph the carpenter. As far as we know, neither of the two apostles with the name James had a brother named Jude (cf. Matthew 10:2-3).]

If Jesus, indeed, had physical half-brothers, why did He commend the care of His mother to one of His disciples while on the cross (John 19:25-27)? Does this show that Jesus had no brothers who could take care of His mother? No. Jesus’ brothers disbelieved in Him during His ministry (John 7:5). [Apparently they became

Jesus' disciples after His resurrection.] This may have been the principal reason why Jesus trusted one of His apostles to take care of His mother instead of one of His physical brothers. Jesus always prioritized His spiritual family above His physical family (Matthew 12:48-50).

One last point should be discussed. It has been argued obstinately (as a “last ray of hope” for Mary’s “perpetual virginity”) that Mary had no more children after Jesus because the Bible never mentions “children of Mary” (see Salza, n.d.). Why is the specific phrase “children of Mary” needed when so many biblical passages, which we have mentioned previously, clearly indicate that she and Joseph had children together after Jesus’ birth? Do they need the specific phrase “children of Mary” to come to this conclusion? It is interesting to note that while some Catholic apologists refuse to believe that Mary had other children because the Bible does not record the phrase “children of Mary,” they accept and promote ideas and phrases, such as “Most Holy Immaculate,” “Ever Virgin,” “Mother of the Church,” and “Mother of God,” that the Bible does not mention, much less support.

Demonstrating that Mary had more children does not, in any way, impugn her dignity. But to justify their worship of Mary, Marianists have looked for a way to distinguish her from any other woman and elevate her to the level of “sublimely pure”—which, they think, is obtained by means of her “virginity.” When God created man and

woman, it was His pure and sublime desire that the two would come together to produce descendants (Genesis 1:28). Since Mary was a creation of God, we know that she could enjoy that blessing from Him. The Hebrews writer tells us that the conjugal relationship between a husband and wife is honorable (13:4), and Paul wrote that such a relationship is necessary for those who are married (1 Corinthians 7:3-5). From all we are told about Mary in Scripture, it is reasonable to believe that Mary, as an obedient servant of our Lord (Luke 1:38), also was obedient in this respect.

IS MARY THE MOTHER OF GOD?

Catholics have recited the “Hail Mary” prayer for many years. It includes the words “Holy Mary, **Mother of God.**” These words represent one of the most treasured doctrines of Catholicism. In A.D. 431, the Council of Ephesus proclaimed Mary “to be the mother of God because God the Word took flesh and became man and from his very conception united to himself the temple he took from her” (“Formula of Union...” n.d.). One of the arguments used extensively to support this doctrine is presented as follows: (1) Mary was the mother of Jesus; (2) Jesus is God; (3) therefore, Mary is the “Mother of God.” This syllogism may seem logical, but the conclusion is superficial. Consider the following.

First, although the Bible documents that Mary became the mother of Jesus and clearly teaches that Jesus is God, it never states, or even implies, that Mary was (or is) the “Mother of God.” For a theological syllogism to explain correctly the relationship between Mary and God, it must be based on biblical truth. We can propose correctly that (1) Jesus is God (Hebrews 1:8); (2) God became flesh (John 1:1,14); (3) therefore, Mary is the mother of Jesus according to the flesh (Romans 9:5), i.e., Jesus’ physical body.

Second, we should keep in mind that Deity is not constituted by a literal family—with fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters—like some of the gods of Greek and Roman mythology. Although we refer to the first and second Persons of the Godhead as the Father and the Son, these titles do not denote a literal familial bond, but emphasize their united and divine nature. To refer to Mary as the “Mother of God” is to misunderstand the nature of Deity and misapply Scripture.

Third, consider the consequences which develop from such an inappropriate use of the syllogism aforementioned. Since the Bible records that Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18), Catholics conclude that it is correct to refer to Mary as “the daughter of God the Father, Mother of Jesus Christ, and true spouse of the Holy Spirit” (Peffley, n.d., p. 3). If the Holy Spirit is Mary’s “husband” (and, therefore, Jesus’ “father”), and Jesus is

God, would not the Holy Spirit be the “father” of God? This is not only a completely erroneous application of Scripture, but also blasphemous theology. Now let us consider some additional evidence from the Bible that further explains Mary’s relationship to God.

God does not have a physical mother

Speaking to the Son, the Father declared, “Your throne, O **God**, is forever and ever” (Hebrews 1:8, emp. added). In God’s revelation to the apostle John, the resurrected Christ said, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, **the Beginning and the End**...who is and who was and who is to come” (Revelation 1:8, emp. added). The Son did not have a beginning; He **is** the Beginning. “He was in the beginning with God” (John 1:1-2). Paul pointed out, “He is **before** all things, and in Him all things consist” (Colossians 1:17, emp. added).

The Son’s existence did not begin with His conception in Mary’s womb. He was alive in eternity (cf. Micah 5:2), and, at the right time in history, He became flesh (John 1:1,14). Paul put it this way: “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law” (Galatians 4:4). On the other hand, Mary came into a time-bound world long after the creation of the Universe. She, like all human beings, was not eternal. She was not divine, not “from everlasting to everlasting” (Micah 5:2). She could not

have provided an eternal nature to her Son. He is Deity. He is the “eternally blessed God” (Romans 9:5).

Consider how Jesus explained His divine nature. When addressing the Pharisees, He asked them: “‘What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?’ They said to Him, ‘**The son of David.**’ He said to them, ‘How then does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord’... If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his Son?’” (Matthew 22:42-45, emp. added). The Pharisees failed to answer the question correctly because they were thinking about the physical body of the Messiah. While Christ was a physical descendant of David (cf. Luke 1:32; Matthew 1:1), according to His divine nature He did not have a physical father, since He Himself is before all (John 8:58). In the same way that David could not be the father of the divine Messiah since he called Him “Lord,” Mary cannot be the “Mother of God” since she calls Him “Lord” in Luke 1:38,46-47. The truth is, as Paul explains, “according to **the flesh**, Christ came” through the patriarchs, David, and, yes, Mary, but according to **His deity**, He is the “eternally blessed God” who is over all (Romans 9:5, emp. added).

Mary never was considered the “Mother of God”

There is not a single verse in the Bible that describes Mary as the “Mother of God.” In fact, none of the inspired writers of either the Old or New Testament gave even

a hint that she should be regarded as such. This idea is based purely on human tradition. Mary considered herself as a “**maidservant** of the Lord” (Luke 1:38, emp. added) and considered God as her “Savior” (Luke 1:47). Sadly, many have distorted this concept.

When speaking about the blessing of being chosen by God to be the mother of the Messiah, Mary declared: “For He [God] has regarded the **lowly state** of His maidservant” (Luke 1:48, emp. added). Certainly the words “lowly state” would be inappropriate to refer to Mary if she is the “Mother of God.” W.E. Vine has noted that the Greek word for “lowly state” is *tapeinosis*, which denotes “abasement, humiliation, or low estate” (1966, 3:23). Mary was conscious of the humble state of her **human** condition.

Additionally, the New Testament makes it very clear Who became flesh. It was **God** Who took on the form of a man (John 1:14) and was born of a woman (Galatians 4:4). The woman did not become “divine” in order to conceive the Son of God. The Bible mentions Mary as the mother of Jesus, but never as the “Mother of God” (cf. Mark 3:31; Luke 8:19; Acts 1:14; et al.).

Mary never was worshipped as the “Mother of God”

Catholics worship Mary, claiming that she has “divine maternity” (“Dogmatic Constitution...,” 1964, 8.3). But if Mary is to be worshipped as the “Mother of God,” we

should expect to find a biblical command to do so, or a biblical example of approved action. However, such commands and examples are nowhere to be found. From the first moment Mary appears in the biblical record, there is no indication of her being the object of worship of any kind. When God's angel announced to Mary that she would give birth to the Messiah, the heavenly messenger did not worship her (Luke 1:26-38). The shepherds, who came to the stable, praised **God**—not Mary—for what they had witnessed (Luke 2:16-20). Later, the wise men came to a house and “saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped **Him**” (Matthew 2:11, emp. added)—not Mary. Simeon and Anna, who had waited their entire lives for the Messiah, recognized Jesus as the One sent by God. They did not offer any special acknowledgement or praise to Mary (Luke 2:21-38). Additionally, Jesus' disciples never gave Mary any preeminence during their gatherings, much less worshipped her as the “Mother of God” (cf. Acts 1:14-26).

When Mary asked for Jesus' help at the wedding in Cana, He said, “**Woman**, what does your concern have to do with Me?” (John 2:4, emp. added). He used the word “woman” not in a derogatory way but as an expression of respect and affection (cf. Matthew 15:28; John 19:26; 20:15; Lyons, 2004b). He may have used “woman” instead of “mother” to emphasize that “in his

calling Jesus knows no mother or earthly relative, [but] he is their Lord and Savior as well as of all men” (Lanski, 1961, p. 189).

Jesus made it clear that Mary had no preeminence among His followers or before God. On one occasion, “He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, ‘Here are **My mother** and My brothers!’” (Matthew 12:49, emp. added). Jesus wanted His disciples to understand that anyone who believed in Him and obeyed the will of the Father would be blessed as part of His family. But He did not say that any member of that family was worthy of worship or adoration.

Another incident in Jesus’ ministry is worth mentioning. While Jesus was teaching the multitudes, “a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, ‘Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!’” (Luke 11:27). Jesus responded, “**More than that**, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it” (11:28, emp. added). Again, Jesus made it clear that there was nothing about Mary that elevated her above anyone else who heard the Word of God and obeyed it. Jesus Himself taught us not to consider His mother as the “Mother of God,” a person to be worshipped.

The title “Mother of God” is unbiblical, as are other titles given to Mary, such as “Mother of the Church,” “Mother of Mercy, Life, Gentleness, and Hope,” “Door to

Heaven,” etc. Worship directed toward her (or any other mere human being), rather than to Almighty God, not only denigrates appreciation and respect for Deity, but also leads further into apostasy.

DOES MARY INTERCEDE FOR CHRISTIANS?

It has been argued that “Mary is the creature **closest** to God. Moreover, while Christ is the mediator of all grace between God and creation, Mary is the mediator of all grace between Christ and humanity. Consequently, Mary is a powerful intercessor for all who turn to her” (see Zoltan, 1994, emp. added). As we saw in the previous section, Mary is not Deity and should not be worshipped as such. If she is not Deity, is she the closest human being to Deity? Does she play an active role in heaven, interceding for individual Christians? Does she make intercession for us in prayer or have an effect on our salvation?

Mary is no closer to God than any other person, past or present

When referring to Deity, the Bible mentions only the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19; cf. Matthew 3:16-17; John 10:30; 17:21; Acts 5:3-4). Mary is never mentioned in that context. Further, the heaven where God and His angels reside (Deuteronomy 10:14;

26:15; 1 Kings 8:27,30) is not yet inhabited by human beings. Jesus said: “**No one has ascended to heaven** but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man” (John 3:13, emp. added). These words represent the truth about **all** the people who have left this world (including Mary). No one is in heaven because heaven is reserved for all faithful servants of God since time began (cf. John 14:1-3). Not until after the Second Coming of Christ and the final Judgment will it become home for the faithful, both living and dead (Matthew 25:31-46; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

The idea that Mary occupies a special place in heaven, close to the Son, is a tradition. It shows a lack of understanding concerning biblical teachings on the afterlife. In Luke 16:19-31, Jesus explained that the dead (saved and lost) go to a place called “hades” (16:23, Hebrew *sheol*)—a spiritual waiting place that separates the consolation of the righteous (referred to as “paradise,” cf. Luke 23:43) from the torment of the wicked. In hades, the righteous begin to taste part of the joy that awaits them in eternity, while the wicked begin to taste part of the suffering that awaits them. Hades is not the dwelling place of God; God dwells in heaven. Mary, along with Abraham and other faithful servants from the past, is waiting in hades until its dead are delivered up, when the Lord returns to judge each man and woman according to his or her works (Revelation 20:13). In this

spiritual realm that precedes heaven, there is nothing that those who are there can do for those who are here (Luke 16:27-31).

The gift of intercession was not given to Mary

Catholics have given the title of “Intercessor for the Saints” to Mary, although nowhere in the Bible is it applied to her. “Intercession” means “seeking the presence and hearing of God on behalf of others” (Vine, 1966, 2:267). There are only two areas in which Christians need intercession: salvation and prayers. If Mary is now, or ever has been, involved as “Intercessor for the Saints,” there should be ample evidence in Scripture.

Concerning salvation, the apostle Peter clearly stated that “there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12, NASB). Of course, he was referring to Jesus Christ. Paul wrote: “[T]here is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). The Hebrews writer added: “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He [Jesus] always lives to make intercession for them” (7:25). Jesus is **the one and only** Mediator (Intercessor) between God and Man, and He lives to continually intercede for those who come to God.

But what about prayer? Does Mary intercede in the prayers of Christians? No, she does not. This intercession also belongs to Jesus. When teaching His disciples to pray to the Father (Matthew 6:9), Jesus did not teach them to pray to (or through) Mary. And yet, Catholicism created a prayer—the “Hail Mary”—to include the words “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of death.” In John 14:13-14, Jesus declared: “And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it” (cf. John 16:24). Jesus is **the only One** Who can mediate or intercede in our prayers, since “[a]ll things that the Father has are [His]” (John 16:15). If all things that the Father has are the Son’s, then what is left for Mary?

The prerogative of intercession supposedly given to Mary also is argued from the fact that she “interceded” before Jesus on behalf of a family at a wedding in Cana because the wine was running out during the celebration (John 2:2-3). This simple, solitary, tiny thread of argumentation, lost in a loom of confusion, has been misused extensively by the supporters of Marianism. By going to Jesus with a request for help, Mary was not intervening on behalf of anyone’s spiritual needs; she only **reported** the situation to Jesus. Moreover, consider Jesus’ response: “Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me?” (John 2:4). With these words, He emphasized that Mary’s

concerns did not dictate His actions. Whatever He did in Cana that day would be according to **God's** will, not because of human or motherly influences or desires.

If the situation recorded in John chapter two establishes Mary as the “Intercessor of the Saints,” what should we conclude from Matthew 8:5-13 and other passages that tell of similar circumstances? In Matthew chapter eight, a centurion “interceded” before Jesus for his servant who was in bed, paralyzed, and greatly tormented. Seeing the centurion’s faith, Jesus performed a miracle and cured the sick servant. Should we consider this centurion as the “Intercessor for the Paralytics, the Sick, and the Tormented”? Should any paralytic, or anyone suffering from physical or mental illness, pray to this man of great faith, asking him to intercede with God on their behalf? [The Bible further condemns the act of invoking the dead (cf. Deuteronomy 18:10-13; 1 Chronicles 10:13-14; Isaiah 8:19).] Neither this centurion, nor Abraham, nor Mary, nor anyone else—living or dead—can intercede before the throne of God in favor of the faithful Christian, except Jesus Christ Himself.

Mary, like all men and women, needed intercession

In Luke 1:47, Mary raised her voice and declared: “My spirit has rejoiced in **God my Savior**” (emp. added). If she had a Savior, then she needed salvation. And, if she needed salvation, then she also needed the only

Intercessor of salvation—Jesus Christ (Hebrews 7:25). Therefore, Mary's condition was no different from every human being before or after her. She sinned (Romans 3:23), and she needed the only Intercessor who could make peace between her and God (2 Corinthians 5:18-19; Colossians 1:20). Just as Jesus "interceded" on behalf of Mary before He died to make sure her physical needs were met (John 19:26-27), He interceded on her behalf to make sure her spiritual needs were met. Mary cannot intercede for any Christian since she, herself, needed intercession.

Finally, although Christians are commanded to pray for one another (1 Thessalonians 5:25; Hebrews 13:18; James 5:16), Jesus is our only Mediator in prayer. Through Him our prayers are answered.

THE ASSUMPTION OF MARY

The "Assumption of Mary" is one of Catholicism's newest dogmas. Proclaimed by Pope Pius XII in 1950, in the papal bull *Munificentissimus Deus*, it is one of the most ambiguous, changeable, and confusing teachings of Catholicism. In fact, nobody can say exactly what Mary's condition or circumstances were prior to her "assumption." Soon after the introduction of this new doctrine, serious disagreement arose between Mariologists and Pius XII over whether or not Mary died, was resurrected, and then ascended to heaven, or simply ascended to

heaven without dying. In spite of the Catholic claim that the pope speaks with “infallibility,” there is not yet consensus concerning the details of this dogma. Therefore, its advocates have taken the liberty of adjusting the details to better fit their developing ideas and traditions, and to make it more attractive to believers.

Although you may find many versions of Mary’s alleged assumption into heaven, one common idea, supported by Catholic tradition, is represented by the following description:

One day, when Mary, according to her custom, had gone to ‘the holy tomb of our Lord’ to burn incense and pray, the archangel Gabriel announces her approaching death, and informs her that, in answer to her request, she shall ‘go to the heavenly places to her Son, into the true and everlasting life.’ On her return home she prays, and all the Apostles—those who are already dead and those still alive—are gathered to her bedside at Bethlehem.... [T]he Apostles, carrying the couch on which ‘the Lady, the mother of God,’ lay, are borne on a cloud to Jerusalem. Here Christ appears to her, and in answer to her request, declares: ‘Rejoice and be glad, for all grace is given to thee by My Father in heaven, and by Me, and by the Holy Ghost.... Then, while the Apostles sing a hymn, Mary falls asleep. She is laid in a tomb in Gethsemane; for three days an angel-choir is heard glorifying God, and when they are silent, all know that ‘her spotless and precious body has been transferred to Paradise’ (Hastings, 1906, 1:683).

Many Catholics believe that Mary died before going to heaven (see “Did Mary Die?,” 1997, p. 11), but others consider her death an open question (see Mischewski, 2005). They have advocated that

Concerning Mary’s death the dogma is non-committal. It only says: “when the course of her earthly life was completed.”... As it stands now **both opinions are acceptable** and accepted: Mary’s death, resurrection and glorification as well as glorification at the end of her life without death (Roten, 2006, emp. added).

This doctrine is so “flexible” that it can work either way. However, this produces a dilemma since it is said that

the Apostolic Constitution of Pope Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus*, clearly and repeatedly refers to the death of the Virgin Mary. In no less than seven separate paragraphs this Apostolic Constitution refers, in one way or another, to the death of the Virgin Mary (Conte, 2006).

It is interesting that, according to some Catholics, the declaration of a supposedly infallible pope can be interpreted in two completely opposite ways. So, what are we to believe? Who has the final word concerning this and other religious topics? Who can say, with any degree of confidence, what we should believe?

The very fact that interpretations of this doctrine are so “flexible” makes it unreliable and incredible. In contrast, the Bible is very clear about those who left behind their earthly existence without experiencing death. Enoch “was taken away so that he did not see death” (Hebrews

11:5; cf. Genesis 5:24). Of Elijah, the Bible says that a “chariot of fire” took him without him seeing death (2 Kings 2:11). Equally clear details are given about Jesus’ death, burial, resurrection, and ascension (1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Acts 1:9). There is neither ambiguity nor the slightest hint that these historical facts are open to various interpretations.

A second reason why we should reject this Catholic dogma is its opposition to statements of Christ Himself. Speaking to Nicodemus, Jesus said: “**No one has ascended to heaven** but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man” (John 3:13, emp. added). This includes everyone who has died, as well as those who were taken by the Lord and did not taste death. Again, Jesus taught that those who die go to a place called hades—a place of waiting for the final Judgment (Revelation 20:13-15) that is independent from heaven and hell (Luke 16:19-23). In John 14:3, Jesus promised His disciples, “And if I go [to heaven] and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” When the time comes for His return, Jesus will keep His promise and open the doors of heaven for all those who have obeyed Him (cf. Matthew 25:31-46). But, since He has not yet returned, we conclude from the Scriptures that none of His disciples have been taken to heaven, not even Mary.

A third reason why we should reject the dogma of Mary's assumption is its opposition to other related biblical doctrines. Concerning the Second Coming of Christ, Paul wrote that the resurrection of the dead will occur "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and **we shall be changed**" (1 Corinthians 15:52, emp. added). In contrast, the doctrine of Mary's assumption into heaven implies that she has already undergone a transformation of her body into a glorious state. It should be obvious that it is impossible to reconcile the Catholic tradition of Mary's assumption with the biblical doctrine of resurrection.

A fourth reason to reject this doctrine is that the New Testament does not record the ascension of Mary. Some Catholics have proposed that it is implied by the Bible since Mary's death is not recorded. This reasoning fails to acknowledge that the Bible does not record the deaths of many people, including John, Mark, Paul, and even Pilate. Does this mean that these people (and many others whose deaths are not recorded in the Bible) ascended to heaven? To argue in this way is to argue from the silence of Scripture. To establish a historical, biblical truth, we should turn our attention from what the Bible writers did **not** record, to what they **did** record.

By the time the New Testament books were written, the alleged Assumption of Mary would have occurred.

However, not one New Testament writer gives even a hint of this event's occurrence. If this doctrine is so important (as Catholicism claims), why was it excluded from the New Testament? If Jesus promised that the apostles were going to be guided into **all** truth and were going to declare **all** of the truth of God (John 16:13), why did they not record this "significant truth" about Mary? If the Bible records the "ascensions" of Enoch and Elijah, why does it not also record Mary's? The simple answer is that the "Assumption of Mary" never occurred; it was created by minds focused on traditions, not truth.

The papal bull of 1950 further declared that "if anyone, which God forbid, should dare willfully to deny or to call into doubt that which we have defined [the "Assumption of Mary"—MP], let him know that **he has fallen away completely from the divine and Catholic Faith**" (*Munificentissimus Deus*, 45, emp. added). But if this dogma is so important—to the point that those who do not believe it are condemned—how do Catholic clergy and theologians explain the fact that most mainstream Catholics lived for approximately 1,400 years in ignorance of this dogma? Were the Catholics, including the popes, who lived before its declaration by Pius XII (1950), saved in their ignorance of the "Assumption"? If they did not need this "truth" for salvation prior to 1950, why do they need it now?

There is no doubt that Mary was a special woman, but just like every other human being, she lived in a world regulated by an established principle that affects all of us: “It is appointed for men **to die once**, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27, emp. added). Mary, at the end of her earthly journey, crossed the path from life to death and met all those who “sleep” in Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14). Like them, and us, she is waiting for the final Judgment, when the doors of heaven will open for all those who have done the will of the Father (Matthew 25:31-46).

Chapter 5

BAPTISM

It is distressing to see how the doctrine of baptism is distorted in modern-day Christendom. With the passing of time, baptism, as a necessity for salvation, has been replaced by a “prayer of faith,” abstract manifestations of conversion, and ecclesiastical ceremonies based on traditionalism. Today, many ignore the concept, implications, and importance of baptism. Jesus said: “[U]nless one is **born of water** and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5, emp. added). Paul wrote that there is “one Lord, one faith, **one baptism**” (Ephesians 4:5, emp. added). These New Testament passages and others make it clear that baptism is not merely a religious tradition or a commandment of men. Therefore, it is very important to understand it correctly.

THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

It is essential to know the meaning of “baptism.” Depending on the context in which it is mentioned, “baptism” may mean many different things. For example, in an evangelical context, it is regarded as just a “public profession of faith” (Rhodes, 1997, p. 178). In a Catholic context, the word “baptism” brings to mind a ceremony, godparents, elegant robes, emotional parents, an infant in white, a fountain, and a few drops of water (as well as a pre-paid fee for the ceremony and the actual “baptism”). However, when we consider the real meaning of the word “baptism,” many of these erroneous concepts disappear.

In his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, W.E. Vine defined “baptism” and other related words:

BAPTISMA, baptism, consisting of the processes of immersion, submersion and emergence (from *bapto*, to dip).

BAPTIZO, to baptize, primarily a frequentative form of *bapto*, to dip, was used among the Greeks to signify **the dyeing of a garment**, or the **drawing of water by dipping a vessel into another**, etc. (1966, 1:96-97, emp. added).

From the definition of the word, it is easy to see exactly what was involved in the act of baptism: “immersion, submersion and emergence.” Unfortunately, the word “baptism” has been passed from generation to generation

as a transliteration, i.e., a phonetic representation of a word in another language. [Note the similarity between the Greek *baptisma* and the English “baptism”]. A study of the Greek etymology of this word opens the door to its real meaning and also gives us a better picture of how it was carried out in New Testament times. Baptism was **not** sprinkling or pouring, as Catholicism teaches, but immersion. The Bible points out some important implications concerning baptism.

First, baptism requires enough water to immerse completely a believer. The gospel accounts inform us that John the baptizer baptized in the Jordan River (Matthew 3:4-6; Mark 1:4-5; Luke 3:2-3; John 1:28). The Jordan was the largest and most important river in Palestine, and it contained enough water for the innumerable baptisms (immersions) that took place there. For example, in this river, Naaman the leper immersed himself seven times (2 Kings 5:14). If baptism were an act of sprinkling, it would have been unnecessary to baptize in the Jordan; instead, a single container of water would have been sufficient. However, as the apostle John noted, John the baptizer also baptized in the Aenon, “because there was much water there” (John 3:23).

Second, baptism is immersion since one goes down into and comes up out of the water. This fact is seen clearly in the various baptisms in the gospel accounts and the book of Acts. The gospel writers recorded the

baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22). Matthew 3:16 and Mark 1:10 tell us specifically that Jesus “came up from the water.” Certainly the phrase “to come up from the water” would have been omitted if Jesus was only sprinkled.

Acts 8:26-39 records one of the most illustrative accounts of the procedure of baptism. Luke says that while an Ethiopian was on his return trip from Jerusalem, he heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ from the mouth of Philip (a servant of God). Then, “they came to some water. And the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?’” (Acts 8:36). Luke does not record the source or location of that water, but we can infer that it was sufficient for Philip to immerse the Ethiopian. Luke clarifies how baptism was performed when he notes that “both Philip and the eunuch **went down into** the water,” and “they **came up out** of the water” (Acts 8:38-39, emp. added). From this biblical narrative, it is illogical to conclude that the baptism of the Ethiopian was some form of sprinkling. It is impossible to “go down into” and “come up out of” a few drops of water! There is no doubt that the Ethiopian was immersed.

Third, baptism represents the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. It is not a random practice void of any logic pattern, or special meaning. God chose baptism as the perfect representation of the redemptive plan performed by His Son, Jesus Christ. In Romans 6:3-4,

Paul explained the symbolic meaning of baptism: “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” R.L. Whiteside noted about these verses:

In being buried in baptism there is a likeness of his death; so also there is a likeness of his resurrection in our being raised from baptism to a new life. Hence, in being baptized we are united with him in the likeness of this death and resurrection. We are therefore, partakers with him in death, and also in being raised to a new life. Jesus was buried and arose to a new life; we are buried in baptism and arise to a new life. These verses show the act of baptism, and also its spiritual value (1988, p. 132).

There is great spiritual value and meaning in the act of immersion. It not only re-enacts the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, but also unites the believer with Christ (Galatians 3:27). There is no other act of faith that is an effective (and biblical) substitute for being immersed into Christ. When a person is immersed, he is buried with Christ. Could sprinkling be described as a **burial**? When a person dies, do people sprinkle dirt on his head and declare him “buried”? Of course not! Rather, he is covered completely (immersed) with dirt. Similarly, to be “buried” with Christ, we must be cov-

ered completely (immersed) in water. Sprinkling falls far short of representing the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Both Paul and Peter, in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 and 1 Peter 3:21, added emphasis to the importance and significance of baptism.

Finally, it is important to note that the modern Catholic practice of “baptism,” i.e., sprinkling or pouring, is inconsistent with the Catholics’ own understanding of the meaning and method of biblical baptism. In the first chapter of the “Sacraments of the Christian Initiation,” the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* declares:

This sacrament is called *Baptism*, after the central rite by which it is carried out: to baptize (Greek *baptizein*) means to **“plunge”** or **“immerse”**; the **“plunge”** into the **water** symbolizes the catechumen’s burial into Christ’s death, from which he rises up by resurrection with him, as “a new creature” (1994, 1214, emp. added).

It appears that ignorance of the etymology and procedure of biblical “baptism” did not mislead Catholicism from the truth concerning baptism, but rather the emphasis that Catholicism places on tradition above biblical truth. Catholics also declare:

To facilitate the application of the new discipline, baptism by infusion—which consists in pouring water on the child’s head instead of immersing the whole child in a basin—gradually became common because it was easier; it became the almost universal practice in the fourteenth century. But although immersion fell into disuse, it still had its place in the rubrics (Cabié, 1988, 3:72).

It is declared (with shameless audacity) that the commandment for immersion given by the Lord (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16) was replaced by the traditional rite of sprinkling or pouring out of convenience. These words can find accurate parallel in the words of condemnation pronounced by Jesus against the Pharisees when He said:

Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men... All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition (Mark 7:6-9).

ARE CHILDREN BORN WITH SIN?

Have you ever seen the face of a newborn child, touched the soft skin of his rose-colored cheeks, and sensed his innocence when looking into his beautiful eyes? In stark contrast, Catholic teaching alleges that "small infants are sinful!" The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* declares:

Born with a fallen human nature and tainted by original sin, children also have need of the new birth in Baptism to be freed from the power of darkness and brought into the realm of the freedom of the children of God, to which all men are called (1994, 1250, emp. added).

As we observed earlier, children do not bear the sin of their parents (Exodus 32:32-33; Deuteronomy 24:16; 2 Kings 14:6; 2 Chronicles 25:4; Jeremiah 31:30; Ezekiel 18:20). However, Catholics are quick to point out that David declared: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5). To understand this passage, we must keep in mind that the subject of Psalm 51 is **David's** sin, not original sin. Consider the nouns and possessives David used to indicate that the sin which he was talking about was the sin **he** committed: "Blot out **my** transgression" (vs. 1); "Wash **me** thoroughly from **my** iniquity, and cleanse **me** from **my** sin" (vs. 2); "**I** acknowledge **my** transgressions, and **my** sin is always before **me**" (vs. 3); "Against You, You only, have **I** sinned" (vs. 4); etc. There is not even the slightest allusion to some kind of original sin in the psalmist's supplication. In fact, it was from his **own** sin and transgression that the psalmist desired to be freed.

But, why did he refer to the moment in which he was formed in the womb of his mother? The psalmist could have been using hyperbole (cf. Psalm 58:3; Colley, 2004), or emphasizing the condition in which his mother conceived him. In the latter case, although he was born without sin, he was born into a world that was covered, plagued, and influenced by sin. Consider also that the psalmist made these pleas for forgiveness as an adult.

He used present-tense verbs to plead for forgiveness: “**Have** mercy upon me...**blot out** my transgressions” (vs. 1); “**Wash** me thoroughly...**cleanse** me from my sin (vs. 2); “I **acknowledge** my transgressions” (vs. 3); “**Purge** me with hyssop...**wash** me” (vs. 7); “**Make** me hear joy and gladness” (vs. 8); “**Hide** Your face from my sins... **blot out** all my iniquities” (vs. 9); “**Create** in me a clean heart...**renew** a steadfast spirit within me” (vs. 10).

David’s pleas for forgiveness were due to a sin (or sins) that he committed long after his birth. The psalmist himself made this fact clear in a parallel passage, where he prayed: “Do not remember **the sins of my youth**, nor my transgressions” (Psalm 25:7, emp. added). If Psalm 51 is a plea to be freed from original sin, how do we explain that God anointed, blessed, and used David while he bore the sin of the first man?

Additionally, the psalmist declared that he was “shapen” and “conceived” in iniquity (51:5, KJV). This is not a reference to birth (as Catholicism claims), but to conception. To be consistent with the Catholic idea that Psalm 51 supports the dogma of original sin, we must conclude that original sin is transmitted at the moment of conception. If that is the case, the Catholic Church will have to rework its theology concerning baptism to include a way to “baptize” children **before** birth to save them from “the power of darkness” (*Cathecism...*, 1994, 1250).

To arrive at a correct interpretation of Psalm 51, we also must consider other biblical passages where similar expressions are used. For example, Isaiah declared: “The Lord has called me from the womb; from the matrix of my mother He has made mention of my name” (49:1). In Jeremiah 1:5, God told His prophet: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you.” If by the expression, “I was brought forth in iniquity” (Psalm 51:5), David alluded to the original sin he bore, how do we explain Isaiah and Jeremiah’s declarations of sanctity from the womb? Were these two prophets born without the contamination of original sin? According to Catholicism, only Jesus and Mary were born in a completely holy condition. These passages cannot be reconciled with the Catholic dogma of original sin (see Colley, 2004).

But, what about Romans 5:12, where the apostle Paul wrote that “through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned”? Does this verse teach that we bear Adam’s sin? No. As we observed (Chapter 4, pp. 97-98), this verse teaches that death—the consequence of sin—spread to all men, not because Adam sinned, but “because **all** sinned” (5:12; cf. Romans 3:23). Of course, this “all” cannot refer only to Adam. Nothing in the Bible teaches, indicates, or implies that children are born with sin.

Paul indicated that where there is no law, there is no sin (Romans 3:20; cf. John 15:22). And the apostle John declared that “sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4). If infants cannot know the Law of God or understand it, they cannot commit lawlessness.

Jesus Himself said: “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for **of such is the kingdom of God**” (Mark 10:14, emp. added). Paul declared that none who are unclean can enter into the kingdom of heaven (Ephesians 5:5). Jesus added: “[U]nless you are converted and **become as little children**, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3, emp. added). If children come to the world with a “fallen human nature and tainted by original sin” (to use the words of the *Catechism*), why would men have to become as little children, who are also “contaminated” with sin? The Bible is clear: sin is not inherited. No baby has ever been born bearing the guilt of Adam’s sin. No one bears the responsibility for Adam’s sin but Adam himself.

INFANT BAPTISM

Rooted in the idea that infants bear Adam’s sin (“original sin”) is the perceived need to baptize babies to free them from this “sinful nature” and “from the power of darkness” (*Catechism...*, 1994, 1250). It has also been declared that

[t]he sheer gratuitousness of the grace of salvation is particularly manifest in infant Baptism. The Church and the parents would deny a child the priceless grace of becoming a child of God were they not to confer Baptism shortly after birth (1250).

Some well-meaning people who disagree with infant baptism have opposed it strictly because they see it as an imposition of one's will on someone who is incapable of making his or her own decisions. While making one's own choices is critical in regard to salvation, the argument against imposing the wishes of others on someone else should not be the determining factor in whether or not infant baptism is practiced. The only determinant should be whether God **authorizes** or **requires** it. After all, if God has commanded us to baptize babies, we should obey His command, even if the world calls it an imposition. But, if there is no biblical reason to follow this common practice, we should not impose something purposeless on our children. With this understanding, the following parallel has been drawn:

If my newborn son is born with an illness, should I deny him medicine arguing that he is not consciously receiving it? Would I say that it would be better to wait until he has sufficient ability to reason? (Domínguez, 2006, emp. added).

Of course, infant baptism might be a necessity **if** original sin were passed down through the generations. However, children do not inherit the sins of their parents,

so, ultimately, no one can inherit the sin of Adam (cf. Exodus 32:32-33; Deuteronomy 24:16; 2 Kings 14:6; 2 Chronicles 25:4; Jeremiah 31:30; Ezekiel 18:20). Therefore, babies and little children do not have “sickly souls,” nor do they need baptism for spiritual healing. No one would give penicillin to a baby who is not sick and does not need it. No one would take his newborn son to the hospital so that he could undergo surgery to remove a nonexistent tumor. Similarly, no one should subject a baby to a baptism that is designed to forgive sins which he or she **cannot** commit (cf. Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21).

The Bible never gives a command, provides an example, or implies that infant baptism should be administered. There is not a single Bible verse that mentions it. Therefore, some Catholics have tried to find biblical support for infant baptism by arguing from the silence of Scripture. Using Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:15, where Jesus commissioned His disciples to preach and baptize, it has been suggested that the disciples would “consequently go forward in the practice of infant baptism, unless restrained and prohibited by a special interdict” (Hibbard, 1843, p. 95). This argument is fallacious because it suggests that where the Bible does not record a prohibition, everything is acceptable. The Bible does not prohibit “pet baptism.” So, should we proceed to “baptize” them?

Others have suggested that the word “creature” in Mark 16:15 may include babies. However, this word is limited by the context in which it appears. The Greek word for “creation” (*ktisis*) is used to designate the act of creation or the creative actions in progress. It also refers to the product of creation (see Vine, 1966, 1:254,255). In its general usage, this word includes not only babies, but also the totality of what was created, i.e., animals and plants, as well as everything inanimate. Fortunately, the context helps us to understand that baptism should be performed on “every creature” who is able to be taught the Gospel and believe it (Mark 16:15-16). This automatically excludes animals, plants, and inanimate things—as well as babies and little children who cannot yet understand or believe the Gospel.

In Matthew 28:19, Jesus told the apostles to “Go therefore and make **disciples** of all nations” (emp. added). A disciple is a person who learns at the feet of another. This certainly cannot include infants. In verse 20, Jesus told His apostles to teach the new disciples to “observe all things” that He commanded. The disciples were not only to learn, but also to observe or practice what they had learned. The truth is obvious: the Gospel was preached to, heard, and believed by people who were able to understand, believe, and obey.

But, what about the biblical accounts of entire families being baptized? Is it possible that babies were members

of those families, and that they were also baptized? The Catholic *Catechism* explores this “possibility” and states:

There is explicit testimony to this practice from the second century on, and **it is quite possible** that, from the beginning of the apostolic preaching, when whole “households” received baptism, infants may also have been baptized (1994, 1252, emp. added).

Some Catholic leaders have gone even further. In his book, *The Faith of our Fathers*, Archbishop James C. Gibbons declared:

The Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of St. Paul, although containing only a fragmentary account of the ministry of the Apostles, **plainly insinuate that the Apostles baptized children** as well as grown persons. We are told, for instance, that Lydia “was baptized, and her household,” by St. Paul; and that the jailer “was baptized, and all his family.” The same Apostle baptized also “the household of Stephanas” (1891, p. 308, emp. added).

Although at first glance this argument may seem valid, it is actually an assumption lacking biblical support. First, it is hasty to conclude that when the Bible writers referred to the “household” of someone, they always included every member of the family. Second, there is no biblical evidence that those households included babies or young children. Since there is no way to prove that there were babies in the households in question, nor that the

word “household” included babies, these passages do not endorse infant baptism.

In fact, the context of these passages in Acts speaks loudly against infant baptism. Concerning the Philippian jailer, Luke tells us exactly which members of “all his family” (Acts 16:33) were baptized. They were those who were taught the Word by Paul and Silas (16:32), and those who rejoiced with the jailer, having “believed in God” (16:34). Can babies be taught the Word and believe in God, understand the sacrifice of His Son, and immediately act upon faith? Can they rejoice as a result of their obedient faith? Concerning Lydia, Luke tells us that “the Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul” (Acts 16:14). Those who were baptized had hearts and minds that were open to the Word. Do babies have open hearts and discerning minds? The New Testament clearly teaches that baptism was performed on people who were taught the Word, who had open hearts, who carefully listened to and obeyed the Word, and who rejoiced because they made the conscious decision to follow Christ.

Using Colossians 2:11-12, another attempt to defend infant baptism has been based on the idea that baptism “replaces” circumcision. According to this argument, since “circumcision was done to infants,” then infant baptism is a biblical practice (“Infant Baptism,” n.d.). Although Paul used circumcision to illustrate the time when people

“put off” sin and become Christians (in baptism, Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:27), he never taught, promoted, or commanded infant baptism (cf. Lyons, 2003). Consider these points: (1) Paul made a comparison between circumcision and baptism, **not** infant baptism. The comparison was between the “cutting off” (of the flesh) in circumcision and the spiritual “cutting off” (of sin) which occurs at baptism. (2) Circumcision was commanded only for the descendants of Abraham, and proselytes (Genesis 17:12-13; Exodus 12:48), but baptism is for all nations (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16). (3) Circumcision was performed only on **male** babies (Genesis 17:10), but baptism is for men and women (Galatians 3:28). (4) Circumcision was performed on the male infant’s **eighth day** (Genesis 17:12), but baptism is to be performed when one believes and repents (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). (5) Many people were circumcised before becoming Christians (Philippians 3:5), and others were circumcised afterward even though it was optional (Acts 16:3; cf. 15:1-29). If baptism replaced circumcision, how could they both be in effect at the same time, among the same people, and under the same covenant (Brents, 1874, pp. 345-347)? (6) Paul declared that in Christ Jesus neither circumcision is worth anything, nor uncircumcision (Galatians 5:6). Colossians 2:11-12 does not justify nor advocate infant baptism.

If the Bible does not support infant baptism, when and how did this practice begin? Catholics acknowledge that “[i]n the course of the fourth century it became quite common for people to be born into Christian families, and by the next century, in the whole Mediterranean world, this was the common pattern. This means that the process of baptism changed considerably. Infant baptism became the general pattern” (Orlandis, 1993, p. 35; cf. Koch, 1997, p. 116). In A.D. 418, the Council of Carthage officially accepted this practice and enacted a condemnation for those who opposed it (see “Canons,” n.d., 2). This is one more piece of evidence that infant baptism is not commanded by God, but rather is a man-made tradition.

Finally, according to Catholicism, what happens to the babies who do not receive baptism soon after they are born? According to the Catholic *Catechism*, babies are born with sin, and should be baptized so they may be “freed from the power of darkness and brought into the realm of the freedom of the children of God” (1994, 1250). In other words, little babies are condemned in spiritual darkness and separated from any spiritual blessing. The provincial Council of Cologne even declared that “[f]aith teaches us that infants...are excluded from the kingdom of heaven if they die [unbaptized]” (quoted in “The Existence of Limbo...,” 2006). Nevertheless, it is also declared that

[a]s regards children who have died without Baptism, the Church can only entrust them to the mercy of God, as she does in her funeral rites for them. Indeed, the great mercy of God who desires that all men should be saved, and Jesus' tenderness toward children which caused him to say: "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them," allow us to hope that **there is a way of salvation for children who have died without Baptism** (*Catechism...*, 1994, 1261, emp. added).

On one hand, Catholicism asserts that little children, without baptism, are in spiritual bondage, while, on the other hand, it wants us to believe that "there is a way of salvation for those children who died without baptism." Does this mean that little children are contaminated with original sin at birth but are liberated from this sin at death? If there is a "way of salvation for those children who died without baptism," why should Catholics baptize their babies at all?

Such incongruity can only be the result of a doctrine that lacks biblical authority. Infants are gifts from God, pure and unblemished by the world (Psalm 127:3). As they grow, precious little ones can learn what sin is, and what its consequences are. Hopefully, as accountable persons they will realize their need for forgiveness from God. And, ultimately, they will choose between believing and being baptized to be saved (Mark 16:16), and disobeying and living eternally separated from God (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

WHO SHOULD BE BAPTIZED?

Today there is a lot of controversy about who is a “perfect” candidate for baptism. Unfortunately, many have chosen to respond to this question with their own opinions and have put aside the Word of God. In ignoring the Bible, some have turned their attention to what “scholars,” “synods,” “councils,” or “human traditions” say. But, the honest seeker of truth should acknowledge the Bible as the final authority in religious matters. Who should be baptized?

Those who have sinned

James wrote that “to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin” (4:17). Paul told the Romans that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (3:23). Everyone of accountable age sins, not only by doing wrong, but also by failing to do the good he knows he should do. Sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1-2). Peter told the Jews who had killed Jesus, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). Baptism is directly connected to forgiveness; God washes away our sins when we are baptized (1 Peter 3:21; Acts 22:16). Only those who understand what sin is, understand its consequences, realize their need for forgiveness from God, and are willing to repent, are true candidates for baptism.

Those who believe

Biblical baptism is connected to faith. Jesus said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16). Acts 2:37 informs us that those Jews who had heard Peter and the other apostles believed their preaching. Verse 41 reveals that “those who gladly received his word were baptized.” Acts 8:12 records that when those in Samaria “believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.” Acts 18:8 tells us that “many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.”

Those who were baptized during the apostolic age believed. Nobody in the church, in all of New Testament history, was baptized because of someone else’s faith, much less “the faith of the church,” as Catholicism teaches. The Hebrews writer conclusively stated: “[H]e who comes to God **must** believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (11:6, emp. added).

Those who repent

Only those who have the ability and desire to repent are candidates for baptism. John the baptizer urged the Pharisees to do the same as those who came to be baptized, i.e., “bear fruits worthy of repentance” (Matthew 3:8). Jesus also exhorted the people of His time to

repent and obey the Gospel (Mark 1:15). Peter encouraged the Jews at Pentecost to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). Paul told the Athenians that God has commanded “all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). Peter also declared that God desires that “all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

Repentance is not a six-month or year-long process before baptism. Instead, it is a change of mind and heart to avoid the wicked works of the past and follow Christ. In the New Testament, those who believed the Gospel committed themselves to this change and immediately were baptized. Only when Paul repented and stopped his persecution of the church of God, was he exhorted to be baptized (Acts 22:16). When the Jews who had sinned by crucifying Jesus heard Peter and repented, deciding to live for Jesus, they all were exhorted to be baptized (Acts 2:38-41). These, and many others (e.g., Acts 8:12-13; 10:47-48; 16:14-15,30-33), were baptized immediately following the time they believed and repented. Genuine repentance leads to obedience through baptism, without which God’s blessing of salvation from sin is unavailable (1 Peter 3:21).

Those who commit to live for Christ

Those who do not intend to change the sinful direction of their lives, and those who do not intend to keep God’s commandments, are not candidates for baptism. When Jesus commissioned His disciples to make more

disciples by means of baptism, He added: “[T]eaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20). Luke reveals that continuing in the faith is essential for all those who have been baptized into Christ (Acts 2:42). And, in His message to the church in Smyrna, the resurrected Jesus proclaimed: “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).

The biblical truths are simple: The Gospel of God should be preached (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15), heard (Romans 10:14,17), believed (Mark 1:15), and obeyed (Romans 10:16). All who have the ability to believe the Gospel and are conscious of their lost condition, separated from God, should be baptized.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing major problems with Catholic theology, and arriving at the conclusion that many Catholic doctrines lack biblical foundation, another question remains: **Why** do Catholics accept dogmas that not only lack biblical basis, but often are in direct opposition to biblical teachings? The answer may be summarized in one word: tradition.

The American Heritage Dictionary offers several definitions for the word “tradition,” including the following: “The passing down of elements of a culture from generation to generation, especially by oral communication” (2000, p. 1829). Tradition is not inherently evil; in many respects, tradition has positive effects on future generations. However, in the field of Christian theology,

tradition must be subjected to the “litmus test” of the inspired Word of God. If we elevate mere human tradition to the level of apostolic tradition recorded in the inspired Scriptures, we may accept any innovation as a product of divine will. Sadly, Catholicism has been at that point for centuries.

The *Catechism* declares that “[a]s a result the [Catholic—MP] Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, ‘does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence’” (1994, 82). Other Catholic authorities have declared: “It is an article of faith from a decree of the Vatican Council that Tradition is a source of theological teaching distinct from Scripture, and that it is infallible. It is therefore to be received with the same internal assent as Scripture for it is the word of God” (Attwater, 1961, p. 41).

Placing tradition on an equal level with Scripture or making it superior to Scripture inevitably undermines of the Bible’s authority and inspiration. Over the hundreds of years of abusing and misusing God’s Word, Catholicism has adopted this deplorable practice. Catholics allege that “[w]hereas much of the teaching of Scripture could not be determined without Tradition, Tradition would suffice without Scripture; it is the safeguard of Scrip-

ture” (Attwater, p. 42). Moreover, “Catholic theologians maintain that as a source of truth, tradition is superior to Scripture. Scripture is, after all, incomplete; it not only requires interpretation, but it required tradition in order that it might be recognized and established.... Scripture is not a textbook; in a sense, it is a dead word which must be brought to life in the living voice of tradition” (Brantl, 1961, p. 162).

In order to prioritize human tradition above biblical revelation, someone first must discredit, undervalue, and disrespect the Bible. Calling the Scripture “a dead word” is a blatant affront to Christ, Who firmly stated that His words, which are recorded in Scripture, “are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63).

The traditions that make up the Catholic Church’s *depositum fidei* (deposit of faith) include the Apocrypha, the teaching of the “church fathers,” and the records of universal belief of Catholicism (*Catechism...*, 74-141; Brantl, p. 163). Although Catholics use these sources extensively in defending their dogmas, these writings cannot take the place of biblical inspiration.

The Catholic canon of the Old Testament has 46 books instead of 39. The Council of Trent (1546) recognized as canonical seven books that originally were rejected as part of the Old Testament. These seven, among other apocryphal books, do not bear the signs of divine inspiration, i.e., they lack prophetic authority, harmonization

with revealed truth, early Christian acceptance, scriptural confirmation, and/or any direct claim of divine inspiration (see Jackson, 1999; Geisler and Nix, 1968, pp. 264-275; McDowell, 1972, pp. 33-40). As Geisler and Nix noted, “The overwhelming arguments in favor of rejecting the Apocrypha as part of the canon provide convincing evidence that the books are not God-breathed” (p. 270). Therefore, these books should not be considered as the Word of God.

For centuries, the Catholic Church also has treated many of the writings of the “church fathers” as being inspired—even though the fathers never claimed their documents were inspired. Catholic apologists and leaders around the world have promoted these writings by claiming that they prove, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that Catholic tradition is linked to apostolic doctrines. This point of view overlooks the reality of early apostasy. Only Christ’s apostles and New Testament prophets were guided into all truth (John 16:13). Although the “church fathers” made a great effort to maintain the purity of the New Testament, they were not inspired to speak and/or write infallibly. In many cases, their writings reflect ideologies completely foreign to the divine pattern. Jesus warned His disciples of the coming of ungodly men who would deceive, “if possible, even the elect” (Matthew 24:24). Since there is a possibility that even the “church fathers” could have been deceived and believed false teachings

(cf. 1 John 4:1), no Bible student should consider their writings as part of the “deposit of faith.” Although the writings of these men are valuable in studies of church history and other disciplines, one should keep in mind that the fathers were fallible men who were subject to error and apostasy (1 Timothy 4:1-3).

Finally, Catholicism alleges that the pope, the universal body of bishops, and the church possess infallibility in matters of faith and morals (see “First Dogmatic...,” 1870, 4.1-9). Therefore, any doctrines they adopt become part of the Catholic “deposit of faith.” But we have seen that many of the teachings of the popes, the episcopal councils, and the Catholic Church in general are far from infallible. In many cases, they are self-contradictory.

Man’s tendency to exalt his traditions above the Word of God is nothing new. Jesus Himself had to confront this irreverent spirit so prevalent among the Jewish elite of His day. He accused the Pharisees of transgressing the commandment of God to keep their own traditions (Matthew 15:3-9; Mark 7:6-13), traditions that transgressed (Matthew 15:3), contradicted (Matthew 15:5-6; Mark 7:11-12), invalidated (Matthew 15:6; Mark 7:9,13), and profaned (Matthew 15:8-9; Mark 7:6-7) the commandments of God. Catholic traditions also transgress, contradict, invalidate, and profane the pure truth of the Word of God (cf. Matthew 15:9).

It is my desire that you, as a student of the Bible, will hear what the Bible says, study what the Bible says, believe what the Bible says, and keep yourself from believing another gospel (Galatians 1:6-10). The traditions of men should not supersede the commandments of God, for the Word of God endures forever (1 Peter 1:25). Hearing and obeying the Word of God should be our ultimate goal. Jesus said, “[H]e who hears **My word** and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life” (John 5:24, emp. added). He also added, “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (John 12:48, emp. added).

One day, when we stand before the divine throne to be judged, a Book will be opened. This book will not be the writings of a man, it will not be the traditions of our fathers, nor will it be the book of “human conscience.” The Bible, which has been criticized, mutilated, and altered by many, will be opened. And, when the voices of many other books fall absolutely silent, we will hear the words of the Bible, and God will pronounce His final judgment. We should obey the Gospel of Christ that we may have eternal life in heaven after that judgment (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10).

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