

them that I was a teacher and would like to know their doctrine to teach my pupils better what Protestantism was. I was surprised that they were polite with me, and astonished to see that they knew the Bible better than I did. And it made me ashamed when I heard them speaking to me about Christ with a conviction that I, priest that I was, never felt.

They answered some of my questions and invited me to speak with their Baptist pastor. I met with him the next day, but my first words were: “Do not try to convince me because you will waste your time. I believe that the Roman Catholic Church is the only true one. I would only like to know why you are not a Roman Catholic.” He invited me to meet every week and to study the New Testament, discussing in a friendly way our different points of view. We did so.

The pastor answered all my questions with texts from the New Testament. My arguments were always the sayings of the Popes and the definitions of the councils. Although I did not accept his arguments externally, in my own heart I knew that the words of the Gospels had more value than the decisions of the councils, and that what Peter and Paul said was of more authority than the teachings of the Popes.

My Faith is Shaken by God's Word

As a result of our conversations I began reading the New Testament diligently in order to find some arguments against the Protestant doctrine. I wanted not only to show that the pastor was mistaken, but even to win him for the Roman Catholic Church. But after each one of our interviews, I came back to my school knowing that he had defeated me in argument.

For a long time I was very concerned, reading the Bible and praying that God would increase my faith and dispel my doubts. But the more of the New Testament I read the more confused I became. My faith was shaken by God's Word. Could it be possible that the Roman Catholic Church might not be the true Church of Jesus Christ? Could I be wrong in my faith? If so, what was I to do?

I heard that other priests and monks became Protestants by studying the Bible, but I could not imagine myself doing the same. Be a Protestant? Be a heretic? Be an apostate from my faith? Never! What would my par-

ents, my pupils, and my friends say? My eleven years of study would be declared invalid. What would I do for a living?

These thoughts disturbed me greatly. I preferred not to change my faith. I wished I had never spoken with that pastor. I tried to convince myself that he was mistaken. I read the New Testament more and more, seeking for an answer to confirm my position as a Roman Catholic priest. The more I read, the clearer I saw how wrong I was, but I was so afraid of leaving the Roman Catholic Church that I decided to continue as a priest even though I could no longer believe in Roman Catholic doctrine.

A Persistent Nun

One Sunday, Sister Dolores said to me, “Father, you didn't preach against the Protestants as you promised. They continue growing every day and are winning many people for their church.” “Sister,” I said to her, “I have been studying the Protestant doctrine during all this time, but I have discovered that they are not as bad as we think. They base their doctrine on the Bible, and we cannot preach against the Word of God.”

“You are quite mistaken, Father,” answered the nun. “They are very bad. They are wolves in sheep's clothing. They are enemies of our country. They hate Mary. They are undermining our faith in the Pope. We must start a campaign against them.”

I told her how some priests who wanted to preach against the Protestants had been converted and had become Protestants when they studied their doctrine without prejudice and in the light of the Scriptures. The nun interrupted me. “Don't tell me this, Father. They were not converted, but perverted. They went over to Protestantism either because they were demented or because they wanted to get married. You can study this doctrine without fear,” she continued, “and I am sure you will never go to Protestantism. You are not demented; neither would you sell Christ for a woman.”

“I am thinking the same, Sister,” I replied. “I promise you that I will study this question seriously. If I come to a conviction that the Protestants are wrong, I will start a campaign against them. If I discover that they are right, I shall become one of them.” “Don't worry, Father,” said the nun, smiling, quite satisfied

with my decision. “You will never be a Protestant.” I read my New Testament again and again, and I prayed to God with all my heart, asking for wisdom and guidance to arrive at a clear and right understanding of his Word. I knew I would never be happy or have peace otherwise.

Salvation — Through Faith in Christ

Three months later I left the Roman Catholic Church. Through the Scriptures the Lord Jesus became real to my heart. I saw that salvation was not *in a church*, but rather *in the person* of him who died at Calvary, for Christ says: “*Come unto me*, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (*Mat 11:28*). God's Word teaches that sinful men are “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is *in Christ Jesus*” (*Rom 3:24*). There is but one place of refuge, and it's not in the Catholic Church—“If any man be *in Christ*, he is a new creature” (*2 Cor 5:17*).

Salvation is not earned by good works and religious deeds; it's God's free gift given through faith in Christ, for the Bible teaches: “For by grace are ye saved *through faith*; and that not of your- selves: *it is the gift of God: not of works*, lest any man should boast” (*Eph 2:8,9*). “Therefore being justified *by faith*, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (*Rom 5:1*). “*Not by works of righteousness which we have done*, but according to his mercy he saved us” (*Titus 3:5*).

Trusting in Jesus alone is the key to life: “He that *believeth on him* is not condemned” (*John 3:18*). “He that *believeth on the Son* hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (*John 3:36*). “Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that *cometh to me* shall never hunger; and he that *believeth on me* shall never thirst” (*John 6:35*).

It's not enough to be a good Roman Catholic. Eternal life, the joy of the Lord, and peace with God are in Jesus Christ. He not only liberated me from my sins, but also from the heavy load I had to carry being in a monastic order. The very same Lord Jesus that transformed the religious Saul of Tarsus into Paul the apostle on the road to Damascus transformed the life of Father Borrás in the cell of a monastery. And this same Lord Jesus is able to transform your life, too. □

Simon Kottoor

Serving a Religious System

For twenty-five years as a Roman Catholic priest, I strictly followed the rituals of a system which kept me in a prison of darkness. I served this religious system in complete ignorance of God's written Word. My education for the Roman Catholic priesthood took place in Rome. I took my doctorate in theology in 1954 and afterwards did post-graduate studies in economics in Canada. For eight years I was professor of economics at BCM College, Kottayam, India. I was also principal of St. Stephen's College, Uzhovoor, for nine years. These were high positions which gave me regard in society and material prosperity.

All Those Years — No Peace Within

During twenty-five years as a priest, I did not have spiritual joy or peace of soul even when performing the various rituals. There was an increasing sense of emptiness growing inside until I felt that there was no meaning whatsoever to infant baptism, confession of sins, the “real presence of Christ” in the Mass, or in any of the other rituals. I had no idea what to do. So I turned to smoking, drinking, gluttony, theater attendance and other secular activities in an effort to gain happiness and peace. But none of this could give me what I needed deep down inside. I needed to be saved. Those were years of agony and spiritual unrest. I was in need of “the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (*2 Tim 2:10*).

The Word of God

It was during this time of my deepest depression that the Lord mercifully brought into my life several Christian men who had a real love and reverence for the Word of God. I was affected by their reverence and awe of the Bible. It became contagious and I began to see the Word of God for what it really is—*the Word of God!* This is something I never got from all those years in Roman Catholicism—a genuine love and respect for the Scriptures. “Heaven and earth shall pass away: but *my words shall not pass away*” (*Mark 13:31*). “*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God*, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good

works" (2 Tim 3:16,17). These verses began to mean something to me now! I had always obtained my doctrine from church tradition and the Pope. I was guilty of fulfilling these words of Christ: "Making the Word of God of none effect through your tradition" (Mark 7:13). Jesus always elevated the Scriptures *above* tradition: "Jesus said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing *the Scriptures*, nor the power of God" (Matt 22:29). My heart was broken over exalting the words of men above the Word of God. I had kept all of the Catholic precepts and traditions all those years, yet this voice of Jesus still came as a solemn rebuke: "Yeather, blessed are they that *hear the Word of God, and keep it*" (Luke 11:28).

God's Word Comes in Power

It was during this solemn time of studying the Bible that God spoke powerfully to my soul, as it is written: "For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also *in power*, and in the Holy Ghost...Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing *by the Word of God*...When ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, *the Word of God*, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1 Thess 1:5; 2:13; Rom 10:17). God mysteriously worked in my soul; his love and mercy drew me and I became a true believer and faithful follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. "*Being born again*, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, *by the Word of God*, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Peter 1:23).

Infant Baptism Cannot Change a Heart

One of the first great truths God taught me through his Word was the spiritual emptiness of infant baptism. I had believed and preached that by baptism infants were "born again," made "new creatures in Christ," and "adopted as sons of God." But such a teaching is nowhere in God's Word. *Faith in Christ* must precede baptism; for Philip said to the Eunuch who desired to be baptized, "*If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest*" (Acts 8:37). Philip would never have baptized an unbeliever; and infants certainly cannot believe, nor can they experience conviction, confess sin, or commit themselves to Christ. Salvation is in Christ, and in our reception of him by faith, not in a religious ceremony: "But as many as *received him*, to them gave

he power to *become the sons of God*, even to them that *believe on his name*" (John 1:12).

Only God Can Forgive Sin

Through studying God's Word, I also came face to face with the truth that we are not to seek forgiveness of our sins through a priest. Catholicism teaches that *it* has the power and authority to forgive sins. As a priest, I heard many confessions and "absolved" many people from their sins, being ignorant of the biblical teaching that "only God" can forgive sin: "*Who can forgive sins but God only?*" (Mark 2:7). The Bible says, "If we confess our sins, *he [God]* is faithful and just to *forgive us our sins*, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

We don't need a priest to forgive us, for Paul said, "*God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you*" (Eph 4:32). We as sinners are to go directly to God through Christ: "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb 4:16). "I acknowledged my sin *unto thee*, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions *unto the Lord*; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (Psalm 32:5). It's not against a priest that we've sinned, but against God. David said, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight" (Psalm 51:4). God's children go directly to their heavenly Father for forgiveness: "Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and *forgive all my sins*" (Psalm 25:18). "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: *who forgiveth all thine iniquities*" (Psalm 103:2,3).

The Catholic & Purgatory

God continued to open my eyes to his truths. I was very sincere in praying for the dead in purgatory, but the Bible mentions no such place of expiation where souls are released through suffering and the prayers of those living on earth. I knew that the doctrine of purgatory afforded Catholics a way of compensating for an easy, self-indulgent life. Those who know there is a way to compensate for the pleasures of sin are more likely to indulge and enjoy. When the danger of hell is removed by confession to a priest and only a temporal punishment for sin remains, immediate pleasure is the frequent choice over distant suffering. Sin loses much of its fear when

there is a way to make compensation by penance in this life or purgation in the next life.

Roman Catholic priests love the doctrine of purgatory, too, for it increases their importance. Without priests offering sacrifices for souls suffering in purgatory, Catholics would have no hope. Since the work of priests can only produce partial forgiveness, the Catholic religious system is said to save sinners only from hell, but not purgatory. When a Catholic dies he is given hope that sin and punishment can be expiated through the power of the priest. But such is a man-made doctrine, for the Bible says: "The blood of Jesus Christ *cleanseth us from all sin*" (1 John 1:7); and God's promise to his children is: "*Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more*" (Heb 10:17).

Jesus is a Complete Savior

Catholics teach that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ only makes sinners savable. They say that by his death the gates of heaven were opened. Accordingly, the work of salvation has been entrusted to the Catholic Church and its priests. But Roman Catholic priests would be out of a job if the atonement of Jesus Christ were ever taught as the once-offered, perfect sacrifice for sin that saves completely—"But this man, after he had offered *one sacrifice for sins for ever*, sat down on the right hand of God...But now *once* in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself...By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ *once for all*...Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in *once* into the holy place, *having obtained eternal redemption for us*" (Heb 9:12,26; 10:10,12).

Roman Catholic priests know that if this great truth were taught they would have to find another career, because they would know "there is *no more offering for sin*." "*By one offering* he hath *perfected for ever* them that are sanctified" (Heb 10:14,18). Many Catholics call Jesus their Savior, but they do not know what a Savior does. A Savior saves! He cannot save sinners and yet leave sinners unsaved, or half-saved, or just savable. Jesus Christ "*is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him*" (Heb 7:25). □

from the Monastery to the Ministry

José Borrás

"Would You like to Burn their Bible?"

Sister Dolores cried, "Father, you must start a campaign against the Protestants! They are growing more and more!" She was a faithful nun in a cloister where I went on Sundays to say Mass and preach. I was a young priest and teacher in a school in Spain when the nun asked me Sunday after Sunday to do something against the Protestants. She said, "They are deceiving the simple people, and with material gifts they are winning many good persons for their heretical group."

Willing to defend the gospel of Christ, I decided to fight against the Protestants. The only thing I knew about them was that they were bad and their doctrine was full of errors and heresies. A few days later a pupil came to my class with a thick book in his hands. "Father," he said to me, "this is a Protestant Bible. A woman gave it to my mother, but she is afraid of keeping it because she thinks it would be a sin to do so. Would you like to burn it?" "Oh yes. I will destroy it," was my answer. "We must finish with all the Protestant propaganda."

The Heretics & Their Bible

After I had torn out some of the first pages I changed my mind, thinking that since I needed to preach against the Protestants and did not know their errors, I could read their Bible to find out their main heresies. I read portions of the New Testament comparing it with my Roman Catholic Bible. When I discovered that both Bibles were almost the same, I became very confused and wondered how there could be such great differences between Roman Catholics and Protestants when they both apparently had the same Bible. My conclusion was that the Protestants did not read their Bible, or, if they did, surely they did not practice its teachings.

Thinking that the best way of knowing who the Protestants were would be to observe them, I went to visit a Protestant family. I told