

1. A New Rome?

The Roman Catholic Church is receiving much favourable coverage nowadays. To be hostile to the Roman Catholic system is considered outdated and behind the times. More and more, Rome is regarded by "evangelicals" not as an enemy, but as a partner for the task of evangelizing North America and the world for Jesus Christ. As early as 1963, it was possible for Billy Graham's crusades to include official participation by Roman Catholics. Roman Catholic churches were also invited to participate in Explo '72 (of which Billy Graham was honorary chairman). Explo'72 was a massive evangelistic crusade held in Dallas, Texas, in June 1972, and was primarily directed at students. Furthermore, Roman Catholics were also invited to participate in Key '73, a North America wide evangelism endeavour which claimed participation of 145 denominations of every shade and colour, but which was conceived and steered by conservative, Protestant "evangelicals." The message seems to be that Rome is not so far from us. We can work together to call people to Jesus Christ.

One may ask: How is this possible? What is happening? Has Rome really changed? Is polemic against Rome, as we have, for example, in our Heidelberg Catechism, outdated? There are not a few who claim that Rome has changed, and one can read emotional articles of how "warm" and "one" one can feel in worshipping and in studying the Scriptures together.

It is true that there are some outward changes in Roman Catholic worship. From 1962 to 1965, Rome had her famous Second Vatican Council, a gathering of representatives from the entire Roman Catholic world in Rome. The importance of this event is clear when one considers that this was only the third such council since the great Reformation of the sixteenth century. (There was the Council of Trent, 1545-1563, and the Vatican Council of 1869-1870.) A major objective of the Council was internal renewal. The Roman Church was to be modernized so that she could work in the twentieth century for the unity of all Christians. Among other things, this Council set the Bible free for reading by all, and it encouraged the use of the Bible in worship. You may have heard of priests giving substantial sermons or of Roman Catholic Bible study groups. As a result of this sort of development, the Roman Catholic Church appears much more friendly and attractive and less threatening to many sons and daughters of the great Reformation. Many say: Look, there are changes! They go back to the Bible again. Furthermore, one can say, is Rome not orthodox? In the rampant modernism of our day, does she not still confess

and believe that Jesus is the eternal Son of God? Does Rome not still believe the virgin birth and the physical resurrection of the Saviour? The Roman Church still accepts the Bible as the divinely inspired and infallible Word of God. All this is more than many Protestants do! Rome does not look so bad.

In view of the friendly ecumenical atmosphere, it must be stressed and emphasized that the Rome of today is still the same Rome as in the days of Luther and Calvin, in spite of some outward changes. Vatican II said many things, and the documents from that Council fill a book; but, not one vital element of Roman Catholic dogma or canon law has been changed or done away with in any form. Doctrinally Rome has not improved one iota. Indeed, one of the most important documents promulgated at Vatican II (the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) makes it very clear that the Roman Church has no intention of revising any of her basic doctrines. Rome is only updating her methods and techniques for more efficient administration and to present a more attractive appearance for those outside who may want to join her or come back to her. For when it comes to ecumenicity, there is for Rome only one possibility and that is that the "separated brethren" (as Vatican II calls them) come back to Rome. Rome still considers herself as the one true church, and the only ecumenical road is the road back to Rome. Rome will, for example, never become a member of the World Council of Churches. True ecumenical activity for Rome is that the "separated brethren" return to Rome, on Rome's terms.

Rome's boast, "semper eadem" ("always the same"), has much truth. We will notice that also when we now turn to take a look at the Roman system.

2. The Roman Catholic System

If we are to understand our Roman Catholic neighbour and appreciate the sorry situation he is in, we must try to have a clear conception of the Roman Catholic system.

Probably the key error or heresy of this system, and one that in a sense undergirds it all, is this: the Roman Catholic church, with her whole system and teaching, stands between Jesus Christ and the Roman Catholic. If one is to be saved according to Rome, then it is the church in the first place that must be listened to and obeyed, for it is only through the church that God's grace is received. It is therefore understandable that when a Roman Catholic recites the Apostle's Creed, he not only says: "I believe in God the Father . . . in the Holy Spirit," but also: "I believe *in* the holy catholic Church."¹ The Roman Catholic puts his trust in the church. When speaking about the church here, the reference is to the "teaching church." Roman Catholic dogma distinguishes between "the teaching church" (the clergy) and "the learning church". This is the "laity." The attributes of the church (holy, catholic, etc.) apply primarily to the teaching church, and only in a derivative way does the hearing church or the laity have part in these attributes. The laity is: totally dependent on the clergy (teaching church), for the clergy stands between God and the laity. Strictly speaking the teaching church (the clergy) constitutes the church. This total dependency of the Roman Catholic on the (teaching) church shows itself in several different ways. Let us take a look at some of them.

The Teaching Office of the Church

Rome alone is able to understand and to interpret the Scriptures. She alone knows what the truth is, and she alone can define it and interpret it. This fact helps us to appreciate why for many centuries the possession of a Bible was discouraged and in some areas even forbidden. Rome read the Bible for the people, so to speak, and instructed them in what was necessary for them to know. It has already been pointed out that Vatican II brought an important change here. For the first time in over a thousand

¹ This is also expressed by "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church . . ." Roman Catholic priests I spoke to readily admit that this rendition of the creed means "I believe in the holy catholic Church" — in line with their rendering of the Nicene Creed on this point ("We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church").

years, the availability of the Bible was urged for all. "Easy access to sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful" (*Documents of Vatican II*, 125 — hereafter abbreviated as *DV II*). This is probably the most important decision the Council made. Officially, encouragement is given that the Scriptures be read by the people as a whole. However, freedom to read the Bible does not mean or entail freedom to interpret it. This is forbidden to the Roman Catholic.

Only the church is able to interpret the Scriptures, and she alone knows the correct meaning. Why? Because, besides Scripture, the church has received a form of continuing revelation which needs to be taken into account. Not only the Bible is authoritative in the Roman Catholic system, but so is tradition. In using tradition Rome adds to the Scriptures, for tradition is considered to be of equal authority with the Scriptures. Vatican II stated that ". . . it is not from sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore both sacred tradition and sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of devotion and reverence. . . . Sacred tradition and sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the the word of God . . ." (*DV II*, 117).

There are therefore two sources of revelation, and only the church can interpret these sources. "The task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church. . ." (*DV II*, 117ff.). One can readily see that *the* teaching authority in the mind of the Roman Catholic is not the Word of God written (the Bible), but the church. After all, the church can add to the Bible by way of the continuous revelation she receives in the form of tradition, which is the word of God handed down, and the church alone can interpret both forms of revelation (see Articles 5 and 7, *Belgic Confession*). When speaking with a Roman Catholic we must remember that for them to hear someone quoting Scripture in great abundance makes very little impression. Although he has great respect for Scripture, it is but one source of authoritative revelation, and it is the church who decides what it all means.

It is therefore of utmost importance that, if one gets into a discussion with a Roman Catholic, one points out that the Scriptures explain themselves. They are self-explanatory. There is no need for an outside interpreter. There is the need to see the unity of the Scriptures which have the Holy Spirit as their one Author, and Who therefore illumines the meaning of one passage with others. If there is a passage of which the meaning seems unclear, it must be interpreted and examined in the light of other passages that speak more clearly on the subject (cf. II Peter 1:20ff.). One can also mention the example of the Bereans who took no one's word for what they heard, and who did not blindly follow or accept a church's interpretation, but were "examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so" (Acts 17:11). The promise of the guidance of the Holy Spirit stands (John 14:26; 16:13). He has the supreme teaching office and authority (I Corinthians 2:1ff.; I John 2:27).

Furthermore, one can point out, concerning tradition, that the Lord

Jesus condemned the tradition of the Pharisees and the scribes (Mark 7:5-13). When the Lord Jesus was resisting Satan in the wilderness, He did not use tradition to combat the evil one, but He used only the Scriptures ("It is written . . ." Matthew 4:4-10). The Book of Acts shows that the church was guided by the Scriptures and did not rely on any human authority or tradition (e.g. Acts 2:14-41; 15). The Scriptures are sufficient for all the needs of the Church (II Timothy 3:14-17).

The Roman Catholic does not live in the freedom of the Scriptures, but he is totally dependent on the interpretation of the teaching office of Rome who has set herself above the Scriptures and is not subservient to them. In effect, the Roman Church has therefore set herself between the God of the Scriptures and those who are to read them. This supremacy and totalitarian power of the church over the lives of the Roman Catholics is also seen in the doctrine of papal infallibility.

Papal infallibility

There is no Biblical basis for this doctrine which was officially defined and accepted in 1870 during the first Vatican Council. Vatican II reiterated this teaching. Basically, the doctrine of papal infallibility states that the Pope, when speaking from his papal throne as head of the church, is infallible and makes no error. Officially, no infallibility is claimed, for example, for the formal letters (called encyclicals) which the pope periodically sends to the bishops on various subjects. However, the average Roman Catholic does not see these fine distinctions, and he assumes that anything the Pope puts in writing relating to faith and morals as is infallible as if it had been uttered by Christ Himself. The doctrine of papal infallibility has served to strengthen the hold of Rome on Roman Catholics and subject them further under her total rule.

There is another area which shows how totally dependent a Roman Catholic is on his "church" and how Rome comes between Christ and the worshipper. It is the priesthood.

The priesthood

The power of the priest over the sincere Roman Catholic is immense. According to the Council of Trent, priests "are justly called not only angels, but also God, holding as they do among us the power and authority of the immortal God."

The priest holds the place of God.

The loyal Roman Catholic must listen to what the priest says. His word is not to be questioned, for he is for the average Roman Catholic the only interpreter of the truth. The priest is thus effectively put between God and the believer. All life long, the priest directs the consciences of his people, not in the first place by the Word of God, but by the word of the church. The priest, is he not of the teaching church? He therefore has tremendous teaching authority.

The priest stands between God and the believer. Sins are not forgiven unless confession is made to the priest. Even at the moment of death, the priest is needed as a mediator between God and man, for he must apply the sacrament of extreme unction which prepares the dying for eternity.

Even after death, however, the release of the soul from purgatory and its entrance into heavenly joy is still dependent on the priest and his prayers (which must be paid for by relatives or friends).

One searches the Scriptures in vain for the office of a special priesthood for today. That office has been abolished. The Bible does, however, clearly indicate that we all are priests to God (I Peter 2:9) and that we all have direct access to the throne of grace in the heavenly holy of holies for the forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 10:11-22). The keys of the kingdom were given to the Church; that is, the holy congregation of true Christian believers. We therefore all have the obligation and authority to forgive each other's sins and to seek each other's well-being (Matthew 6:12-15; 18:15-22).

Rome takes practically all authority and all sense of office and privilege away from the congregation, which is considered but "the hearing church" (the laity), and the priest is a virtual dictator. Especially in Roman Catholic countries, the fear and dread of the priest by devout Roman Catholics is very real. This fear becomes all the more understandable when we consider the priest's function at baptism and mass.

Baptism

When a priest is ordained, he is considered to be endowed with special powers by the bishop who ordains him. Rome claims that the one who is thus ordained is now able to change the water of baptism so that grace enters it. It is no longer simply water now (that is, it is not just a sign) but it is water charged with the grace of God, so that when a child is baptized it is changed by the very act of baptism. The child is now regenerated and all original sin and other past sins are automatically forgiven. In view of this, it is understandable that Rome teaches that baptism is necessary for salvation. Unless an infant be baptized, it cannot be saved, even if it be born of believing parents. Because of the great importance of baptism, Rome distinguishes between solemn and emergency baptism. An emergency baptism can be administered by anyone, even if the baptizer is not a Roman Catholic. Also a form of prenatal baptism has been invented to be used if considered necessary.

The effect of Rome's doctrine concerning baptism (especially its necessity for salvation) is predictable. Parents see to it that their children are baptized as soon as possible, and very few neglect this. In this way, Rome puts her stamp of ownership on every person possible. This is further seen in the fact that godparents or sponsors are required for valid conferral of the sacrament. They with the parents request baptism, and after baptism the godparent(s) see to it that the child is trained in the Roman faith, should the parents neglect this or be unable to do this.

Mass

Also in the mass, the priest is considered to have special powers. He has the power to change the bread and wine into the real body and the real blood of Christ. Christ is physically and completely present in each element of the sacrament and in each portion of the elements of bread and wine as

they are divided up. The high esteem that Roman Catholics have for their priests stems in part from the fact that Rome claims that the priest can bring Christ down from heaven and put Him on their altar. In this way, Christ is sacrificed again and again.

Rome, however, denies that the sacrificing of Christ in the mass is a repetition of the sacrifice on the cross. As Rome explains it, the sacrifice of the mass is not a different sacrifice from the one on the cross, but it is the same one (only without blood) since it is an application of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. However, as Calvin wrote in his day when he attacked this notion, "it is a mere quibble" (*Tracts and Treatises*, II, 184). For, in fact, it is a repetition of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross. Christ is pulled down from heaven and sacrificed on the altar in front of the congregation, and it is a sacrifice that must be repeated daily. This is in contradiction to God's Word which speaks of Christ's sacrifice on Golgotha as "the offering of the body of Jesus once for all" (Hebrews 10:10, 12, 14). The Heidelberg Catechism is therefore also to the point when it calls the mass "a denial of the one sacrifice and passion of Jesus Christ" (Answer 80).

The mass makes a tremendous impression on the Roman Catholic worshipper. This is understandable, for, as he has been told, there before him *Christ* is sacrificed! He is near. They see His body and His blood! He is really present! And, *they* may *eat* His body! (In very special rare cases, they may also partake of His blood.) This rite has tremendous mystical power, and, when speaking to a devout Roman Catholic, one will discover very quickly that the mass is very dear to him. "Do not speak ill of it" will be the unmistakable message. It is the nerve centre of his worship. The mass will be vigorously defended. The Roman Catholic will let go of it only with the greatest difficulty.

An additional factor that needs to be mentioned is that a Roman Catholic fears that without the mass and its sacrifice, he will lose his salvation. (Think of our Catechism: ". . . the mass teaches that the living and the dead have not the forgiveness of sins through the sufferings of Christ unless Christ is still daily offered for them by the priests. . . ," Answer 80.) The mass is also in this connection regarded much more seriously than most Protestants realize. To miss mass is to commit a mortal or deadly sin. To miss the visible re-enactment of the suffering and death of Christ is, therefore, to endanger one's salvation. As a result, the mass has become a powerful instrument in the hands of the clergy to supervise their people and to keep them within the Roman fold. Only in the Roman fold is Christ sacrificed daily, and not to be part of that is to jeopardize your salvation.

There is another doctrine that can be mentioned to show how the Roman Catholic is dependent on the church, and how the church stands between Christ and the members of the congregation. That is the place which has been given to Mary, the mother of Jesus, by the Roman church.

Mary

The Roman See has elevated Mary in an extraordinary way. This ele-

vation is a fairly recent phenomenon. In 1854 the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was promulgated. According to this doctrine, Mary was not conceived and born in sin. In 1950 the doctrine was pronounced that: "The Immaculate Mother of God, Mary ever virgin, after her life on earth, was assumed, body and soul, to the glory of heaven." This dogma is known as the Assumption of Mary. Mary is considered to be enthroned as Queen of Heaven, and much honour and devotion is given to her. For many Roman Catholics she has a greater place in their lives than the Lord Jesus Christ. Mary is regarded as an intercessor and mediator between the worshipper and the Son. Christ is looked upon as being so stern, so powerful and authoritative; but Mary is there, and she is understanding and loving, and, since she is the mother of Jesus Christ, she can influence the Son and intercede for us. Roman Catholics are therefore encouraged to pray to Mary. The rosary, which they are to recite daily, has ten prayers for Mary for every prayer for God.

By fostering the Mary cult, Rome has placed another obstacle between Christ and man. Scripture clearly teaches that ". . . there is *one* mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). Also the Lord Jesus knows our needs, and He is sympathetic to our trials (see Hebrews 2:17ff.; 4:15ff.). Mary is not needed. Furthermore, prayer can only be offered to God. Nowhere in the New Testament do we read of prayer being offered to Mary. Roman Catholic Mary devotion makes Mary so prominent that Christ Himself and the true gospel of His intercessory work is all but lost. This is also clearly seen from names such as "The Door of Paradise," "The Gate of Heaven," and "Our Life," which are attributed to Mary. Here, too, we see the clear fruits of the Roman Catholic system which, under the name of devotion, places obstacles between Christ and the sinner in need.

In order to get a further look at the Roman Catholic system from a somewhat different perspective and to see the terrible tyranny it exercises over the lives of countless numbers, we will now look at what Rome teaches concerning the forgiveness of sins and the assurance of salvation.

3. Forgiveness and Assurance

According to Scripture we are justified and made right with God by grace through faith alone. "For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law. . . ; the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law . . . ; the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. . . ; they are justified by His grace as a gift through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. . . ; we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law" (Romans 4:20-22, 24, 28).

Rome, however, denies that one is justified by faith alone. The Council of Trent officially stated:

Whosoever shall say that the wicked is justified by faith alone, in such a sense that nothing else is required in the way of co-operation to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is in no respect necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will, let him be accursed (6th Session, Canon XI).

As Calvin commented on this canon, the difference between Rome and us is that Rome expects something from man, while we maintain that it is all, including faith, the work of God. This, of course, does not mean that we do not believe with our heart and will, but that faith alone is the instrument in justification. Justifying faith is "the confidence with which we embrace the mercy of God as forgiving sin for Christ's sake" (*Tracts and Treatises*, III, 151-153). Christ's work can be relied on. Christ's work is complete and needs no addition. For Rome, however, salvation is never simply a matter of Christ alone. It is always Christ plus something else. So the full work and glory of the Christ is hidden by the false teaching and system of Rome. We see this, for example, in the Roman Catholic sacrament of penance.

Penance

To understand penance we must first think of baptism again. We saw that with baptism all original and any other sins are automatically forgiven. The baptismal water is charged with grace and accomplishes this. If the one baptized were to die at the moment of his baptism, he would go to glory and be with the Lord, for all sin has been removed, and, one can add, righteousness has been granted him by baptism. We saw how via the sacrament of baptism one is dependent on the church for salvation.

The question, however, arises: What about the sins that are committed after one's baptism? How are they done away with? Rome's answer is such that again one is made dependent on the church for salvation. Christ is not enough. It is Christ plus the church. For, a Roman Catholic cannot simply go to God and beg forgiveness of sins on the basis of the baptismal promises. No. One's baptism has nothing to do with the sins one

commits after baptism, according to Rome. One must now use the sacrament of penance and therefore go to the priest and confess there one's sins. Only via the sacrament of penance can sin committed after baptism be removed and done away with.

If one tries to put oneself in the shoes of a devout Roman Catholic and tries to think this through, then one can see that this is a very unsettling doctrine. Imagine if a mortal sin is forgotten by confessing to the priest. It is impressed on the Roman Catholic that only that which is confessed can be forgiven! Salvation therefore depends on one's ability to call to mind all one's sins and to confess them to the priest. The spiritual agony of fearing that some sins may have been forgotten and will have to be straightened out in purgatory is not rare among devout Roman Catholics.

If one remembers all one's sins and confesses them all to the priest, does that guarantee that all is now all right? No. One does not receive forgiveness (although the priest may call it that), for one is told how to pay for sins. Forgiveness means that the sin is done away with and forgotten, and that the punishment therefore does not go into effect. However, the priest only removes the eternal punishment for sin. The temporal punishment must be removed and suffered by the sinner. This can be done by doing good works or by sacrificing something, like money, by giving it to the church. Payment must be made so that purgatory be either avoided (which is extremely rare) or so that one's stay in purgatory be as short as possible.

The Roman Catholic, therefore, works to relieve the debt of temporal punishment for his sin. The question, however, will always linger in the mind of the serious Roman Catholic: Have I really done enough? Was it sufficient? Am I really now clean and right before God? In some cases the priest will plainly say that one will be unable to get rid of the debt owing. One is told to pray. To Christ? No. One is to pray to the saints. They have a superabundance of merit, and they perhaps may be able to give some of their credit to decrease your debt. If there is not enough forthcoming from them, then there is still purgatory that one can go to. While there, one's relatives and friends can pray and pay for you. Masses and candles and indulgences can all be offered. The more that is done and paid, the sooner the person in question will leave purgatory.

In a cruel way Rome has, with all these ideas, placed herself between Christ and the sinner, and has hidden the free grace and mercy of the Lord. Christ's words, "Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28), are drowned out by the incessant demands of Rome to do penance before the local priest and to merit your own peace and rest. In spite of all her claims, Rome does not point the sinner to Christ, but to herself. In practice, sin, in the Roman system, is not so much what one has done against the majesty of God, but what one has done against the rules of the church. For, one is constantly dealing with the church and never directly with Jesus Christ or God the Father for the remission of sins.

It is not surprising that one therefore actually sees in the Roman

Catholic system an undermining of the seriousness of sin. The legalism one finds there is one indication of that. For example, as long as one goes to Mass, one is free to do what he likes for the rest of the Sunday. In practice it does not matter whether one keeps the Sabbath day holy or not. One has done one's duty. One is covered. The church has been satisfied. But, whether God in heaven has been satisfied is not really considered in practice, for the church has virtually taken the place of God. Therefore the emphasis in the Roman church is not so much on holy living as it is on observing the rules and regulations of the church. Behind all this, that key heresy looms again. The church stands between God and man. One is not to know oneself dependent on God as much as one is to know oneself dependent on the church.

Assurance

This dependency on the church is clearly seen when one realizes that, officially, Rome has pronounced the curse on anyone who has the presumption (as they see it) to say that he is assured of his salvation (Council of Trent, 6th Session, Canon XV). Rome keeps her subjects in constant fear and insecurity. The personal assurance cannot be given. The only assurance one has is that salvation is found within the walls of Rome with her priesthood and sacraments. One is in the right place, and there is no need to go elsewhere; but, personal assurance cannot be given. Even at death, and after extreme unction has been administered, and even after thousands of rosary prayers have been said, the priest still can not give assurance of personal salvation. The person is never good enough, but must first serve in purgatory to suffer unknown torture for an unknown length of time. The only assurance he has is that the more that is done for him by his family, the sooner his suffering will be over.

The tragedy

This is not the gospel! With this gospel, if that is all that is believed, the Roman Catholic is lost, for Rome has not pointed him to the Savior and His finished work! He has not been shown the *only* name given under heaven among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12). All the Roman Catholic has seen is the teaching of men. All he has heard is the work of men and what man must do; but, he has not seen the Christ in all His saving glory — the Christ to Whom we can go directly with all our sins and get forgiveness (I John 1:7-9; 2:1; Hebrews 10:19-22). The Christ Who said, "He who believes in the Son *has* eternal life" (John 3:36). Those who are Christ's can never be snatched out of His hand or out of the hand of the Father (John 10:28ff.). Scripture is full of the joy of assurance that believers have (e.g., Romans 8, Ephesians 1). But Rome hides that comfort of assurance from those trapped in her system, for Rome stands between the Christ and the sinner with her doctrines and teachings. It is Christ plus everything else, and therefore assurance can indeed not be given. For Christ's work may be done, but when, when will man be sure his work has been finished?

Without knowing the true gospel of salvation, the Roman Catholic is lost. We must see this clearly, otherwise we also do not see the tragedy of

the modern ecumenical situation in which the Roman Church is often seen as a partner in spreading the gospel, so that even "evangelical" evangelistic endeavours send people back to the Roman fold or refer them there to find salvation. If they do find the Lord (and God has His children everywhere, also in the Roman church), it is in spite of the Roman system and not because of it.

When we see that the average Roman Catholic is a victim of Satanic lies, we see how urgently they need the message of salvation and the assurance which we by God's grace may have. When we think this through and over, our hearts will more and more be burdened with seeking to show our Roman Catholic neighbour the Christ! After all, we are true Church of the Lord, are we not, who seek to gather with Him? Let us now consider some practical guidelines for this task.

4. Some Practical Guidelines

Difficulty

Showing the Christ to the Roman Catholic is very, very difficult. All serious Roman Catholics live in constant fear of being lost. When a Roman Catholic commits a mortal sin and dies in that state, he is lost forever, in spite of what he has previously done. Not only is it a mortal sin to reject Rome's dogma for the true gospel, but it is also a mortal sin even to question or doubt the teachings of the church. Obviously, the fear produced by such a teaching presents a great stumbling block to reaching the Roman Catholic with the true gospel (which is, of course, Rome's purpose behind instilling such fear). For this reason, a devout Roman Catholic is extremely careful in exposing himself to what Rome considers heresy, and will refuse outright all literature not approved by Rome. We therefore often tend to dismiss Roman Catholics as hopeless cases. One cannot do anything with them, so it seems. However, it is God who changes the hearts, not we. God is also the One Who controls the times.

Opportune time

If there was ever an opportune time to confront the Roman Catholic with the gospel, it is now. The average Roman Catholic has always had his hope founded in an infallible church, but never before has the authority of Rome been challenged as much as now. Even prominent theologians are openly challenging such doctrines as the infallibility of the Pope. Also changes brought about by Vatican II unsettle many. For example, the general rule against eating meat (except for fish) on Friday has been abolished. What was only a short time ago considered a mortal sin has now become permissible. The average Roman Catholic therefore becomes more and more restless and uneasy.

The tremendous vacuum created by the virtual collapse of traditional Roman Catholic authority has led many to denounce the faith and seek something better. In France over ninety per cent of the Roman Catholics are so in name only. Since the 1970's the trend has become similar even in Quebec, once described by Pope Pius XII (pope from 1939 to 1958) as "the most Catholic country in the world." The word of the church is no longer blindly accepted. It can be noted that disillusioned Roman Catholics are prime targets for communism. Roman Catholics have always been accustomed to living under a strong authority, and they gladly exchange the authority that in many respects has failed them and let them down for a more promising one. In the theology of liberation, Marxist thought is even adopted by Roman Catholic leaders in an attempt to wed communism and Rome.

The Roman Catholic who has always had whatever security he had grounded in a church which could not err now has this assurance thoroughly shaken. It is no longer enough to say, "The church says. . . ." We must therefore show him the better way.

Objective

What is to be our prime concern and overriding objective in dealing with our Roman Catholic neighbour? It is to show him the reality of the living God, in Whom we can put all our hope, in Whom we can have full security and assurance for now and eternity, and Who speaks the truth to His people in His Word. The Roman Catholic must be confronted by the Lord, for it is precisely this that the Roman Catholic system has always sought to prevent, for that system has placed itself between God and man. We must therefore show him our God!

Probably the most effective way that this can be done is by letting our Roman Catholic neighbour see the reality of God in our life. In view of the peculiar situation of the Roman Catholic, he must see this reality especially in our joy and in the obvious surety and richness of our salvation. He must see that we have true security, irrespective of what the future may hold. He must see that, also now, we know that no one or nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Times of sickness and grief are especially effective here, but also our daily living must bear that stamp of joy and assurance. He must be made jealous for that peace which surpasses all understanding and for that reality of living with our God with no human intermediaries except for the Saviour. We are to be a living and readable letter of Jesus Christ and the joy of our salvation.

To mention one example: we are by now known as those Reformed people who give much money for church and school. You can be sure that it is natural for a Roman Catholic who sees us making these sacrifices to say in effect: "Look, they're in the same boat as we're in. They're working for their salvation, too. It is all part of a works-righteousness scheme just as we have it so that they too can set their hearts at ease and be right with God." Let us take every opportunity to show them that these are fruits of thankfulness for the complete and perfect salvation given to us!

Our thankfulness is so great because our *sins* have been forgiven and completely paid for and done away with by Jesus Christ; our sins which are so serious and great. For sin is not just a wrong done against the church, as the Roman Catholic system would suggest, but sin is, in the first place, rebellion against most holy God! And therefore a Roman Catholic must be placed in the presence of God and see something of His holiness, majesty, and wrath. Only then can the greatness of God's salvation and the greatness of what forgiveness is be truly seen.

One possible way of showing the seriousness of sin is to use the Ten Commandments, showing how Christ has interpreted them in the sermon on the mount. To hate a brother is already to be guilty of murder; to look lustfully at a woman is already to be guilty of adultery (Matthew 5:21, 22, 28). God is not concerned, in the first place, with externals, for God looks in the heart. *He* is grieved in the first place, and not the church. (Rome does

not take sins such as hatred and lust too seriously, for it involves no actions and is therefore considered only a venial sin and not a mortal one. After doing some good works it can be forgotten.)

The seriousness of the issue can also be emphasized by asking "How will you answer when you die and appear before holy God, if He should ask you why He should let you in His glory?" With that type of a question, one is confronted by the living God and all the complicated Roman Catholic views on justification and salvation are side-stepped and fall aside. The Roman Catholic must see his God.

The Roman Catholic must also know that he must turn to this God. There must be a radical change of heart and not just the paying of penalties and doing good works in connection with the sacrament of penance. It is very difficult for a Roman Catholic to know what repentance is, for Roman dogma always emphasizes what man must *do*. Repentance, however, means saying, "I can do nothing meritorious. I am undone!" Only then is the matter of salvation out of our hands and in the hands of God. Only then can it be a matter of grace alone, and only then is true assurance of salvation possible, for then it is all the work of God, and His work is perfect and does not fail.

In keeping our main objective in view, we must see to it that our Roman Catholic neighbour has a Bible. It is now possible! A Roman Catholic has been taught to respect the Bible. He must read it now. The Bible is the living Word of God, the sword of the Spirit, by which also a Roman Catholic heart can be opened and softened to receive the true gospel of God. No one seriously reading Scripture can be left untouched. Roman Catholics have been warned about Protestants, and if you have talked with Roman Catholics, especially if they are not personally known to you, then you will have detected great mistrust. We must therefore take great pains when speaking with Roman Catholics to let the Word of God speak, so that we can say; "I do not say this, but this is what the Bible says."

A Roman Catholic will easily get angry, for much of what he holds dear is condemned by Scripture and we must point him to Scripture. Of course, we should not simply pick on obvious abuses in the Roman Catholic church as such. (There are many things a Roman Catholic is not happy with either. He knows many of the abuses and is embarrassed by them.) However, speaking to a Roman Catholic can mean that we "break down" the man's faith in Rome by challenging him in love to debate and so to point him to the riches of God's Word and to expose the poverty of Rome. For he is lost unless he sees the Christ, the Christ of Scripture.

Rome's deceit

Our task is not easy, and before this introduction comes to an end, a warning should be sounded. One needs to be very well prepared. For the deceit of Rome is such that, in speaking to a Roman Catholic, one can say, "Well, he is orthodox, for he accepts Scripture as the Word of God, believes the virgin birth, etc. (and that is true), and he seems to know the Lord Jesus already." However, do not come to that conclusion too hastily. Many "evangelicals" have been led astray by this. Oh, the name of Christ

is well known and words like “grace,” “justification,” and “repentance” are familiar to them. But — and this cannot be emphasized enough — those words for a Roman Catholic have a meaning which is different from what Scripture gives.

For example, a Roman Catholic also says “I am saved by grace.” But by that he does not mean what Scripture means. As the Rev. W. Ewin, a missionary to Roman Catholics, has put it, salvation for Rome is comparable to a trip to some city. The city represents glory, so to speak, and the gates are wide open. Entrance is free because of the merits of Christ. By this Rome says that salvation is free. However, the Roman Catholic must see to it that he gets to that gate so that he can go through the open door. Man must work to come to this free entrance! Eternal life is free, but the Roman Catholic must arrive at the city in order to obtain it.

In the confusing ecumenical climate of today, we need to see that Roman Catholics are lost with that “gospel.” For *the* question is: “Who saves: man (or the church) or God?” We know the answer, but the average Roman Catholic doesn’t, and there, in a nutshell, lies our calling over against our Roman Catholic neighbour.

FOR FURTHER READING

Wilson Ewin. *YOU can lead Roman Catholics to Christ* (available from The Gospel Witness, 130 Gerrard Street East, Toronto, Ontario M5A 3T4. Revised edition published in 1974). This is a very useful and practical handbook written by a missionary to Roman Catholics in Quebec. It can be used with great profit.

Lorainne Boettner. *Roman Catholicism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1962, and revised since then). An informative book discussing all major aspects of the subject.

Although all of John Calvin’s work is permeated by setting forth the true doctrine over against the errors of Rome, especially noteworthy for our subject is Calvin’s prompt rebuttal to the Acts of the Council of Trent (the first seven sessions). Both the Acts and Calvin’s reply can be found in *Calvin’s Tracts and Treatises* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958) Volume III, pp. 17-188.

Two noteworthy articles are: D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, “Roman Catholicism” (available from P.O. Box 2453, Grand Rapids, Michigan). It was originally delivered as a sermon. J.C. Miller “Witnessing to Roman Catholics” (available from Westminster Theological Seminary, Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, PA. 19118).

References in the introduction to the documents of Vatican II were from W.M. Abbott (ed.). *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Guild Press, 1967). A handy, concise summary of Roman Catholic dogma can be found in J.S. Hardon, *The Catholic Catechism* (New York: Doubleday, 1975).