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The Roman Road to Salvation Comparing Catholic Soteriology with the Word of God

by J. Greg Sheryl

In Protestant evangelicism, the expression "The Roman Road" is sometimes used to describe a presentation of God's plan of salvation using verses from the book of Romans.¹ However, there is another "Roman Road," the Roman Catholic Church's teaching on salvation.

Soteriology is the study of the doctrine of salvation. Former professor of systematic theology at Dallas Theological Seminary, Robert Lightner, has written:

"What must I do to be saved?" the jailer at Philippi asked Paul and Silas (Acts 16:30). When you are lost, proper directions are very important. How terrible to give wrong directions to someone transporting a dying person to the hospital! How much more terrible to give sinners the wrong directions to heaven!"²



Although the sale of indulgences was the spark that lit the fire of the Protestant Reformation, the Reformers focused on two issues: the formal cause, "Scripture alone" or *sola Scriptura*; and the material cause, "justification by faith alone" or *sola fide*.

CATHOLICISM'S PERSPECTIVE ON SALVATION

Catholic doctrine is complex. Former Catholic Mike Gendron, founder of Catholics Proclaiming the Gospel,³ once said that Catholicism is so complicated "it would take a Philadelphia lawyer" to unravel it. The writer of the Fore-
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Editorials

THE WHYS OF RELIGIOUS CONFUSION IN OUR WORLD

Paul Little wrote a book a number of years ago called *Know What You Believe*. However, there is so much error and confusion today that many people do not know what to believe.

We live in a troubling time. Fanaticism, extremism, wild claims, paranoia, and kookiness are all equated with spiritual authority and spiritual authenticity. Good is being called evil and evil good (Isaiah 5:20).

Religious and doctrinal confusion proliferates at an alarming rate. The Internet is helping blanket the world with aberrant teaching. Mysteries and mystical insights are a dime a dozen. People are quick to circulate urban legends.

Date-setters and date-suggesters run wild. Those who believe their mission is to prepare believers for the end times profit from the fear they produce by selling overpriced dry foods, generators, and other survival paraphernalia.

Cults grow and charlatans claim inside information from dreams and visions. People who claim to have visited heaven or hell give reports that contradict the ones preceding theirs. Scholars tout late-arriving Gnostic

“gospels” as valid while ignoring Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

God’s wrath is wished upon those who will not use one stipulated version of Scripture. Some dive into Talmudic studies confusing law and grace while never knowing or acknowledging that modern Judaism is split into dozens of factions. Word-Faith and prosperity teachers dominate “Christian” television. Teachers claim to have opened the sealed book of Daniel 12:4, a verse that speaks of the fulfillment of prophecy, not personal insight (Revelation 5:8-9).

The explosion of Islam adds to the confusion. The Bible warns of being carried away “with every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14). And the winds are blowing — very hard and very heavy.

But with some thought and the Bible before us, we can understand the religious insanity around us.

1. Doctrine is denigrated and rejected. Today the defense of the faith and its doctrines (apologetics) is being censured as divisive and not cool. Paul Crouch, the late founder of the Trinity Broadcasting Network, called doctrine “doo-doo.” We hear the cry, “No creed but Christ,” but that statement says nothing of what they believe about Christ.

The Apostle Paul warned that if people would not endure sound doctrine and instead turned away from the

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News Updates

WATCHTOWER SAID TO HAVE FISCAL SHORTFALLS

Jehovah's Witnesses have long prided themselves on their organization's reserve in the soliciting of donations from members. Not long ago the Watchtower Society openly and frequently rebuked the churches of "Christendom" for taking up collections during worship services or requiring members to tithe. But the boasts and criticisms have waned as the Watchtower has found itself having to make detailed appeals for money from its own members along with the general solicitation of donations from the public in its door-to-door proselytizing efforts.

Now, according to one former member of Jehovah's Witnesses, the organization appears to be experiencing a significant income/expenditure shortfall. Lloyd Evans, who writes under the pen name John Cedars and operates JWsurvey.org, a website that allows current members to anonymously post their opinions of the religious group's teachings and practices, says that confidential Watchtower documents as well as a public statement from a Governing Body leader all point to "the organization being in a financially precarious situation."

The May installment of *JW Broadcasting*, which was posted on one of the Watchtower Society's online TV streaming channels, featured Governing Body member Stephen Lett saying there would be a shortfall between the organization's projected income and expenses for the forthcoming fiscal period. Lett, in his video discourse, urged the Jehovah's Witness faithful to donate to help offset the deficit.

Immediately following the posting of Lett's online lecture, Cedars wrote and published on his JWsurvey.org, "This website has long pointed to a number of omens that not all is well for [the] Watchtower financially — chief among these being the slashing of branch offices and a whopping 39% reduction in monthly magazine printing. But this is the first time, at least to my knowledge, that the organization has come clean about being in financial difficulties — albeit with a notable lack of transparency about the actual figures involved." Cedars indicated that the "Watchtower had up to 116 branch offices in operation (in 2010) compared to only 90 today."

Commenting further as to the Watchtower's "lack of transparency," Cedars wrote, "Nowhere in Lett's rather patronizing, condescending comments is a single figure cited regarding the projected amounts of income and

expenditure and the shortfall between the two. Everything is left to the imagination (or, more accurately, *gullibility*) of the viewer."

Apparently for the Watchtower, what goes around now comes around, as they find themselves receiving — rather than giving — rebuke for soliciting funds and donations. Cedars also maintains, "Like many cults, [the] Watchtower is less than open when it comes to divulging how much money it spends on various projects to those it holds responsible for picking up the tab. ... If the Governing Body is spending more money than they are receiving from the kindness and generosity of Witnesses, who are already hard-pressed as a result of the insane and immoral prohibition on higher education, then by no stretch of the imagination can they be thought of as either faithful or discreet."

It's possible that the Watchtower's financial woes may be attributed in part to various civil court cases which are being brought against the organization involving the sexual abuse of children by its leaders. In June, the BBC reported that a sex abuse victim was awarded £275,000 (\$435,000) in compensation. As more of the victims are successful in their lawsuits, Cedars says that it will "surely [pave] the way for more legal proceedings against the embattled organization."

Currently the Watchtower is moving its World Headquarters from Brooklyn, N.Y. to Warwick, N.Y. Sources indicate that the organization is poised to make hundreds of millions of dollars on the sale of its Brooklyn properties. Additionally, nearly every aspect of the Watchtower's business functions and religious activities are carried out through the voluntary unpaid labor of its members.

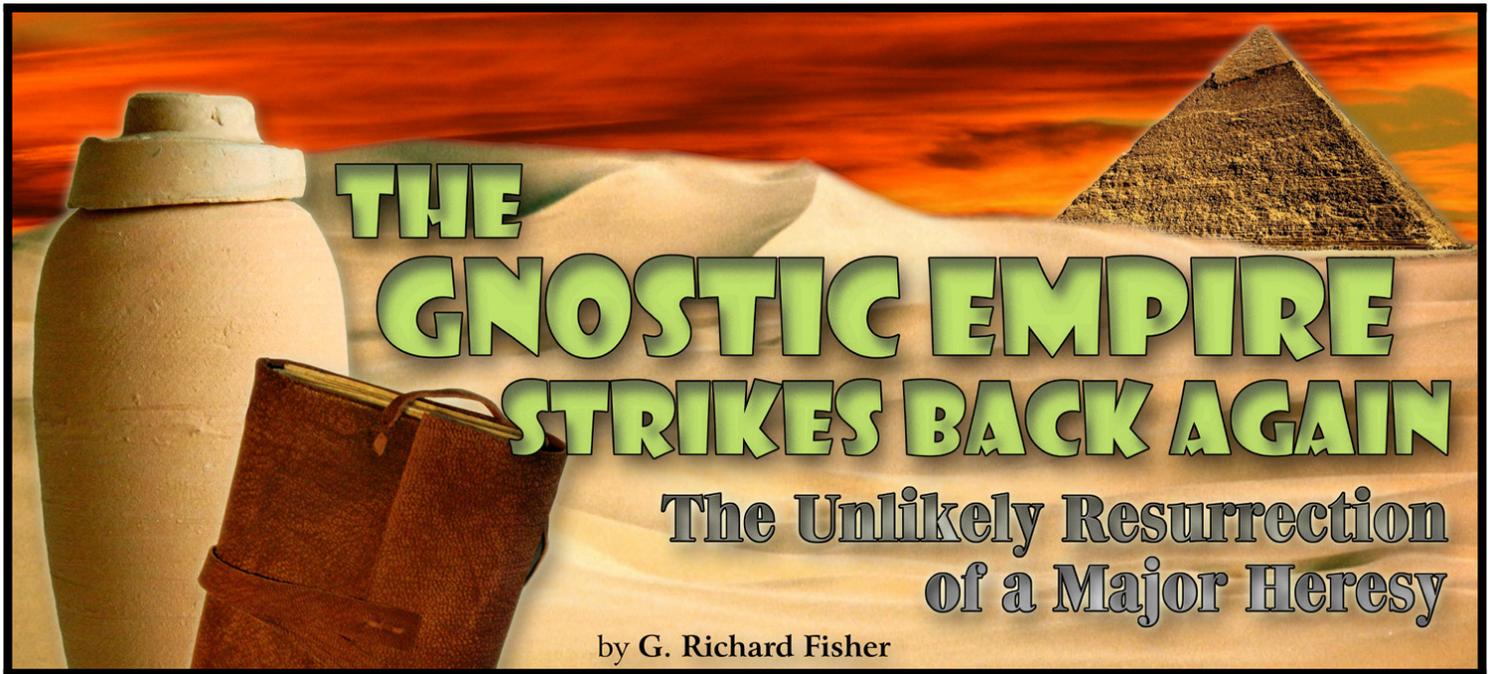
—MKG

WEDDING BELLS RING AGAIN FOR PAULA WHITE

Charismatic icon Paula White is hoping the saying, "Third time's a charm," works for her. White said "I do" for the third time in late April. Her latest husband is rock musician Jonathan Cain, who at age 65 is 16 years her senior.

White married Dean Knight when she was teenager. The marriage lasted a year. In 1989, she married Randy White. Together they rose to prominence as co-pastors of the Without Walls International Church in Tampa, Fla.

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When the Apostle Paul wrote to the churches in the region of Galatia, he warned them:

“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8-9).

In 1992, New Testament professor Peter Jones advised us in his book, *The Gnostic Empire Strikes Back*,¹ that the heresy of self-deification is reasserting itself today. In the years since Jones first called believers to vigilance, the Gnostic (pronounced *nos-tik*) empire which he warned us against is striking once again.

Lord Byron wrote in his satiric poem *Don Juan*: “Tis strange — but true; for truth is always strange; Stranger than fiction.”²

An ancient heresy long thought dead has come back to life. An obscure philosophy that passed away more than 1400 years ago has found new appeal among scientifically minded, sophisticated, and educated Americans.

People again are drawing near to a god who is impersonal and distant and believing that salvation comes when we realize we are divine. Some see literary license and some think it truth that William Paul Young presented God as a female in his 2007 book, *The Shack*.

Some churches and clergymen accept these heretical ideas more readily than they do historic, orthodox Christianity, giving these Gnostic writings more credence than the Bible. Many buzz over these late “gospels” — Dan Brown in his *The DaVinci Code* says more than 80 — but not over the Bible’s four eyewitness Gospels.

Each year, as we approach Easter and again as we approach Christmas, someone identified as a scholar unveils a manuscript discovery that may have the word “gospel” attached to it. When a television documentary is made about the manuscript, it appears trendy and exciting. In most cases, the manuscript is written in Coptic (the Egyptian language written with Greek letters) and was composed a few hundred years after both the resurrection of Jesus and the writing of the four New Testament Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

The scholar represents that the documents were written by an early

Christian group. However, along the way it comes out that the newly discovered work is the product of the early Gnostics. The word “Gnostic” comes from the Greek word *gnosis*, meaning knowledge — more specifically, their particular form of knowledge.

Because the average person and many professed Christians have little or no awareness of Church history, they tend to think Gnosticism is something really new and exciting. They do not realize that it is a worn out system of heresy. They don’t know that the early Church fought Gnosticism vigorously and that it has been reintroduced in our day. Paul’s words to Timothy are relevant:

“Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge — by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith” (1 Timothy 6:20-21).

A JUMBLE OF ERRORS

Most Gnostics had a few ideas in common. One of the core beliefs was dualism: the belief that matter was evil and worthless and that only spirit was good. The particular view of how to treat matter — especially the physi-

cal body — often exposed the distinctives of each group.

James spoke of a wisdom that was “earthly, sensual, demonic” (James 3:15). Gnosticism produced in its followers egotism, elitism, and “a morbid pride of wisdom, an arrogant, self-conceited, ambitious knowledge, which puffs up, instead of edifying, [and which] runs into idle subtleties and disputes.”³

Additionally, Gnostics thought they possessed “a higher knowledge; [and] fancied themselves the sole possessors of an esoteric, philosophical religion, which made them genuine, spiritual men, and looked down with contempt upon the mere men of the soul and of the body. They constituted the intellectual aristocracy, a higher caste in the church. They, moreover, adulterated Christianity with sundry elements entirely foreign, and thus quite obscured the true essence of the gospel.”⁴

JUST WHAT DO YOU CALL HIM/HER?

The Gnostics rejected the Creator God of the Bible. They could not conceive of a caring and compassionate God who stoops to His people and is called Shepherd (Psalm 23:1). Without a true concept and understanding of God there can be no true worship. John MacArthur tells us:

“Acceptable worship demands that God be known — worship cannot occur where the true God is not believed in, adored, and obeyed. The object of our worship must be right if our worship is to be acceptable.”⁵

The Gnostics could not even agree on what to call God. Some called Him “Monad” (meaning “the one”). Others called Him “Bythos” (depth or abyss), and still others called Him “He Arche” (the beginning). There were other names as well.

The Gnostics taught that God was both masculine and feminine. They called the feminine side “Barbelo.” The Barbelo Gnostics produced what they called *The Gospel of Judas*. However, this document is not a Gospel

and has no good news. In this “gospel” they tried to cast Judas in a different light and rehabilitate the fallen disciple. In their “gospel,” Jesus conspires with Judas to get Himself crucified because He could not wait to shed His body and get back to the spirit world.

Other Gnostic writings re-characterize some of the Bible’s most notorious villains. In one Gnostic writing, Cain is rebranded as a righteous individual and the men of Sodom are given a new image.

Irenaeus, a Church Father from the second century, declared, “Valentinus adapted the principles of the heresy known as ‘Gnostic’ to the distinctive character of his own school.”⁶ Irenaeus also wrote:

“Others of them employ outward marks, branding their disciples inside the lobe of the right ear. From among these ones, there also arose Marcellina, who came to Rome under [the episcopate of] Anicetus. Holding these doctrines, she led multitudes astray. They call themselves Gnostics.”⁷

A GOD WHO CANNOT BE KNOWN

The Gnostics taught that God was unknowable and hidden. This, of course, raises the question of how the Gnostics knew so much about Him. The website of the Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance describes the Gnostic view of God:

“**Deity:** The *Supreme Father God* or *Supreme God of Truth* is remote from human affairs; he is unknowable and undetectable by human senses. She/he created a series of supernatural but finite beings called *Aeons*. One of these was Sophia, a virgin, who in turn gave birth to an [sic] defective, inferior Creator-God, also known as *the Demiurge*. (Demiurge means ‘public craftsman’ in Greek.) This lower God is sometimes called Yaldabaoth or Ialdabaoth Jaldabaoth — from Aramaic words meaning ‘begetter of the Heavens.’ This is Jehovah, the

God of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). He is portrayed as the creator of the earth and its life forms. He is viewed by Gnostics as fundamentally evil, jealous, rigid, lacking in compassion, and prone to genocide. The Demiurge ‘*thinks that he is supreme. His pride and incompetence have resulted in the sorry state of the world as we know it, and in the blind and ignorant condition of most of mankind.*’⁸

Irenaeus addressed the question of creation in this way:

“This [Father] is the maker of heaven and earth, as is shown from his words. He is not the false Father who has been invented by Marcion, Valentinus, Basilides, Carpocrates, Simon, or the rest of the falsely called Gnostics.”⁹

GET RID OF THE BODY

Other Gnostics put forth the teaching that material things, including our human bodies, were saturated with sins and weaknesses, were beyond hope, and were unredeemable. They were right about sin and weakness, but wrong about the body being unredeemable.

If all matter was evil and unredeemable it would follow that Jesus did not come in the flesh and was not truly human. The crucifixion was therefore a grand illusion. It also follows that there could be no resurrection because all that mattered was spirit. This led to extreme forms of licentiousness on one hand, and a fierce asceticism on the other.¹⁰ Gnosticism could never create a foundation for morals and ethics and the Gnostics were indifferent toward objective, historical truth.

Some Gnostics believed that each person would enjoy astral immortality, living on his own star. Some expressed this same belief after the death of Princess Diana, as there were those who proposed the idea that she had gone off to her own star.¹¹

While Gnostics ruled out any resurrection, the Apostle Paul spent all of 1 Corinthians 15 defending the case

for the physical resurrection body. Christ's bodily resurrection is the first fruits or a guarantee of the physical resurrection of every true believer.¹² If Christ was not raised bodily, Paul contended, we are yet in our sins and as a result are worshiping a dead man (1 Corinthians 15:12-18). Paul offered not a star, but rather heaven and Jesus Himself (2 Corinthians 5:1-8; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

The apostles warned believers about early Gnostic ideas long before they grew into a false religion. The Apostle John was very clear when he wrote:

"For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist" (2 John 7).

In the same letter, John went on to say that we are not to welcome and receive those who reject the true humanity of Jesus (vv. 9-11). First John 1:1 uses verbs to express the humanity of Jesus. John stresses the physical senses and the impact of the human Jesus on the apostles. As John says, we heard Him with our ears (He had a human voice), we saw Him with our eyes (He had a physical and visible human body), we looked upon him (observed His humanity), and we even touched Him. None of this could be said of a spirit being. Jesus was and is in every way human (Luke 24:39; Hebrews 2:14-18). So even now as our glorified Mediator He is called "the *man* Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5, emphasis added).

Hebrews stresses that if Jesus had not really experienced all the facets of humanity (temptation, hunger, thirst, sorrow, weakness, tears, pain, and death), He would not be qualified to be our Mediator and sympathetic High Priest (Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:15-16; 5:2, 7-9). The Apostle John identifies those who are truly of God:

"By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit

of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world" (1 John 4:2-3).

A number of crucial doctrines rely upon the true humanity of Jesus. The errors John addressed grew out of Greek philosophy and which later became Gnosticism.

B.K. Kuiper wrote that the Apostles Creed came out of the Church's struggle with Gnosticism and Montanism.¹³

The creed says that Jesus was "born of a virgin." Mary did not give birth to a spirit. Jesus was a real baby "wrapped in swaddling clothes," which could not be said of a spirit being. Luke 2:52 tells us, "Jesus increased [or grew] in wisdom and stature." The Greek word for stature is *helekia*. It means physical growth and height.¹⁴ Spirits cannot be measured. Jesus grew up and matured as a normal child.

I am reminded of an event many years ago when I was invited to the home of a lady who bought into and avidly followed Christian Science. (The founder of Christian Science, Mary Baker Eddy, was a neo-Gnostic who taught that all matter really did not exist, but rather was an illusion and an error of the mortal mind.¹⁵)

As I was discussing these things with my hostess I noticed the photograph of a young girl on her mantle. I inquired as to who she was and was told that she was my hostess' daughter. I then asked the question, "How is it possible because matter does not exist and is an illusion of the mortal mind that you were able to give birth to an illusion — a non-existent baby?" There was only a very long silence. The lady finally replied, "I am not really that far along in my faith." That answer as far as I was concerned, made no sense at all, but it showed how Gnostic views are not logical, explainable, or understandable.

KNOWING OUR WAY TO SALVATION

Gnostics believed themselves to be "in the know." They taught that their

knowledge was the only way to salvation and that they were the only ones who understood Jesus' coded speech. They made room for female goddesses and angel mediators who were referred to as aeons or emanations. To them, Jesus was just another aeon.

The combination of the unknowable God and the aeons was referred to as the *pleroma* or fullness. It is interesting that the Apostle Paul wrote of Jesus that, "in Him dwells all the fullness [*pleroma*] of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him" (Colossians 2:9-10).

Charles Ryrie in his comments on Colossians 2:9 observed:

"In Jesus Christ, deity (the divine attributes and nature) dwelt in His earthly body — a strong statement of the deity and humanity of the God-man."¹⁶

Another way of saying it is: Jesus is the fullness of deity in *bodily* form. While dabbling in mysteries, the Gnostics missed the greatest one of all stated in 1 Timothy 3:16: "Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the *flesh*" (emphasis added).

Gnostics often attached the name of a Bible character to their writings and called it a "gospel" to give them the air of spirituality and credibility as with the *Gospel of Thomas* or the *Gospel of Philip*. Bart D. Ehrman, Elaine Pagels, and Karen L. King today teach that Gnosticism is just an alternative Christianity that lost out to the more powerful, dominant, mean-spirited Church Fathers who edited Gnostic writings out of the Bible.

As these authors try to create a more sympathetic picture of the Gnostics, they are saying that we can now give Gnosticism its rightful place: an equal standing that it deserves with what is called historical orthodoxy. In their minds Gnosticism becomes a Cinderella figure who was rejected by her wicked (historical orthodox) step-sisters. In this story, Ehrman and friends are Prince Charming elevating Cinderella to her rightful place. The title of one of Ehrman's books says it

all: *Lost Christianities: The Battle for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*.¹⁷

Three things kept the true Church intact and on track from the very beginning. 1) The apostles' doctrine; the true faith (Acts 2:42). 2) The New Testament with its various books written between A.D. 45 and 80 (long before the Gnostic writings). 3) The writings of the early apologists who embraced and relied upon numbers one and two. Irenaeus refuted the Gnostics in his *Adversus haereses* (*Against Heresies*), which he wrote about A.D. 180.

There was no confusing Gnosticism with orthodox Christianity. The water of the Word could not be absorbed into the oil of heresy. Regarding the four Gospels being written much earlier than the Gnostic gospels, we are told:

"[It] is almost universally recognized that the four Gospels were penned in the first century and that all others came in the second century or thereafter. ... Thus the authenticity of Jesus' statements in the noncanonical Gospels should be judged by what we see in the canonical Gospels, not vice versa."¹⁸

MANUSCRIPTS AND HERESY HUNTERS

Most of the Gnostic writings were lost and lay hidden until 1945. It was then when a discovery of a trove of Gnostic writings written in the 200s A.D. and buried about A.D. 400 was unearthed:

"The Nag Hammadi library is a collection of Gnostic texts discovered near the Upper Egyptian town of Nag Hammadi in 1945. Twelve leather-bound papyrus codices buried in a sealed jar were found by a local farmer named Muhammed al-Samman. The writings in these codices comprised fifty-two mostly Gnostic treatises, but they also include three works belonging to the *Corpus Hermeticum* and a partial translation/alteration of Plato's *Republic*."¹⁹

James M. Robinson is the general editor of the English translation of the Nag Hammadi Library. Robinson holds the Gnostic library in high esteem and refers to the early Church Fathers as "heresy hunters."

It may have been Robinson who coined that term in the 1970s and which is today often applied by Charismatics to Bereans, apologists, and defenders of the faith. Robinson is forced to admit, however, that single copies of the Gnostic works with their many errors and missing pieces cannot compare to the thousands of complete Bible manuscripts that are readily available. He writes:

"The number of unintentional errors is hard to estimate, since such a thing as a clean control copy does not exist; nor does one have, as in the case of the Bible, a quantity of manuscripts of the same text that tend to correct each other when compared."²⁰

The problem is more than just small, unintentional errors and single copies from Nag Hammadi. It is far worse than Robinson acknowledges. The so-called *Gospel of Mary* is only three pages. It is missing four pages!²¹

The so-called *Gospel of Judas* also had 18 missing pages from the original 31.²² The remaining pages have large holes from age and deterioration and thus are missing words.

It is claimed now that most of the missing pages in the *Gospel of Judas* have turned up in the hands of a private collector and that the *Gospel of Judas* is now 90-95% intact. The newly added text appeared to be a tirade against the other apostles, presenting them as tyrannical, oppressive, prideful, and generally evil men. Unlike the Gnostic revisionism that made Cain into a sympathetic character, here we see good men portrayed as evil.

Like these manuscripts, the idea of Gnosticism as a form of Christianity is full of holes.

A sampling of some of the titles in the Gnostic library of Robinson are as follows: the *Apocryphon of John*, the

Gospel of Thomas, the *Gospel of Philip*, *On the Origin of the World*, the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, *Dialogue of the Savior*, *Apocalypse of Paul*, *First Apocalypse of James*, *Acts of Peter*, *Paraphrase of Shem*, *Second Treatise of the Great Seth*, *Apocalypse of Peter*, the *Letter of Peter to Philip*, *Melchizedek*, *Allogenes*, the *Sentences of Sextus*, and the *Gospel of Mary*. One of the strangest reworkings of a Bible character is Mary Magdalene. In the Gnostic retelling, she is cast as the supreme leader of the apostles and married to Jesus.

DID THE JEWS DO IT?

Some have proposed that Gnosticism originated in Judaism. Nothing could be further from the truth:

"In recent years there has been a strong emphasis on the Jewish element, although the suggestion of a Jewish *origin* has been opposed, among others, by Hans Jonas, author of one of the most influential works in this field in the 20th century, *The Gnostic Religion* (1958). A modified English presentation was published. Certainly a large place is given in Gnostic texts to reinterpretation of the OT, but this was also done by Christians and affords no proof that the originators of the movement were necessarily Jews."²³

Though the Gnostics may have borrowed some elements of Judaism and the Old Testament, they also borrowed from Christianity, Greek thought and philosophy, esoteric trends, oriental speculation, and occult paganism as well. When they referred to Jesus, it was only as a teacher or an aeon emissary. He certainly was not seen as Messiah and Lord of all.

Judaism and Gnosticism are incompatible. The Jews believed in the one true God as revealed in their Scriptures. He was knowable and revealed Himself in His names, His works, and His word. In Genesis 1 and 2, God created all matter and a real material world. The Bible says God declared that material world "good" (Genesis 1:31). God as infallible and righteous

judge holds people accountable for their sins (Ezekiel 18). God also gave His people promises of a future bodily resurrection (Job 19:25-27; Psalm 16:9-11; Daniel 12:2).

The Gnostic *Gospel of Truth* reveals the real face of Gnosticism:

"... the *Gospel of Truth* presents the typical gnostic scheme of human redemption through *gnosis*. The homily summons the reader to introspection so that one may discover himself and return to himself, thus finding *gnosis* and finding God. It posits the thesis that man's difficulty is due to his ignorance, also described as emptiness, illusion, forgetfulness. Salvation consists in 'waking up.'"²⁴

Of course the "waking up" is waking up to Gnosticism and the occult mysteries. The Bible says the opposite. We are to come out of the sleep of error, apathy, and waywardness and wake up to Christ and truth (Romans 13:11; 1 Corinthians 15:34; Ephesians 5:14).

GOING UNDERGROUND

The early Church Fathers and apologists tackled head on the Gnostic invasion and as a result the Gnostics faded away. Their heretical teachings stayed buried for centuries. Many thought it was buried for good — but not so. Those in what was called the Enlightenment (c. 1650-1800) started to paint a more sympathetic picture of the Gnostics from what little information they had.

There was an attempt at resuscitation of a handful of Gnostics writings in the 1800s, but the world was still too Bible-oriented and conservative to take the bait.

Fringe cults such as Aleister Crowley's Order of the Golden Dawn and the Theosophical Society embraced the Gnostics as their forerunners. Theosophist leader Madame Blavatsky promoted the Gnostics and Gnosticism in her book, *Isis Unveiled*. She also attributed redemption to Satan, as did the Naassene Gnostics. In the early 1900s, psychologist Carl Jung

claimed to have a spirit guide as he embraced Gnostic ideas and self-deification.²⁵

All of this would be followed by a proliferation of false gospels with an array of speculation and fantasy regarding the early years of Jesus. Some took Him to India while others had Him sojourn to Egypt or other parts of the world. The main point of these myths and fantasies is that Jesus was schooled in occult mysteries and so was in some sense a Gnostic practitioner.

Peter Jones in *The Gnostic Empire Strikes Back* recounts the return of ancient Gnosticism. Not many at the time took the return seriously. The world had not yet heard of Dan Brown and *The DaVinci Code*. Jones saw a parallel between Gnosticism and New Age thought:

"... the New Age brings you supermarketing for the mind. Pick up any New Age local advertiser. The list is mind-boggling: soul memory kinesiology; life enrichment; contact with extraterrestrial multidimensional masters; a doctor of divinity degree from the Religious Science Center; shamanic awakening; astrological counseling; channeling by Narena; nonhypnotic past-life regression; hypnotic past-life regression; breast enlargement by visualization; Jin Shin Jyutsu; deep tissue, meditative, polarity and reflexology massage. And the list goes on. How could anyone hope to understand the New Age? Take heart. It was just the same with Gnosticism. There is nothing new under the sun, including the New Age. ... While the early church fathers found proof of the Gnostics' fraudulent theology in their manifold contradictory systems and opposing doctrines, the Gnostics congratulated themselves on the great richness of their diversity and their tolerance of many approaches to truth."²⁶

REARRANGING THE STAGE

The last five decades have set the stage for the second coming of Gnos-

ticism. This is now supposed to be a brand new age in which the Bible is no longer seen as relevant. People are open to a supernatural worldview, but not a biblical one. Samuel Dresner understands the spirit of our age:

"The Bible has become atomized and desanctified, a curious ancient text lying inert much as a cadaver about to be dismembered — except that once the living God was thought to dwell therein. ... More recently, literary deconstructionists have attempted to persuade us that no text can have any fully determinable meaning at all."²⁷

Our culture has become feeling and emotion driven rather than fact and evidence driven. Our society has become politically correct and any idea and lifestyle — except Christianity — is to be not only accepted but endorsed and embraced. The prevailing point of view is that if it is legal, it is therefore right. In some cases, even if it isn't legal it is right and the minority can work to legislate change to accommodate their view and behavior. Everyone's point of view should be accepted (or at least tolerated), unless of course it is a Christian's point of view.

Morality is no longer defined by the Bible, but by the individual. Every lifestyle is to be seen as good or at least acceptable if it makes one feel good. Even within the Church, thanks to the prosperity gospel and self-esteem advocates and ministers, we are told that God wants us happy, wealthy, and wise. However, it is more biblically true to say that God wants us holy. The path to holiness is sometimes hard and not happy. It may involve difficult disciplines.

Many today love the idea that we do not have to be freed from sin, only from ignorance. Extreme feminism is drawn to the idea of female deities. With the Bible and Christianity being rejected, there is a need to develop a religion for the new age.

The Apostle Paul warned that when we reject truth we do not live in a vacuum, but rather "turn to fables" to

fill the void (2 Timothy 4:3-4). From a religious, political, and sociological standpoint the stage has been set for the Gnostic drama. The masses love to hear that they possess deity within themselves. As gods we make all the choices.

We are all too eager to employ the “theology” of Frank Sinatra: I did it my way. Or Burger King: Have it your way. We can be ascetics or libertines or somewhere in the middle. Gnosticism allows people to live as they wish.

What a draw it is to hear that one can become perfect without changing lifestyle or behavior. Some Gnostics taught that with the right knowledge, perfection as they defined it could be achieved in this life. Clement of Alexandria (c. 195) thought otherwise:

“I wonder how some dare to call themselves ‘perfect’ and ‘Gnostics.’ They are inflated and boastful, viewing themselves above the apostle. For Paul himself acknowledged about himself: ‘Not that I have already attained or am already perfect [Phil. 3:15].”²⁸

The proof of the modern growth of ancient Gnosticism is the number of Gnostic churches that have sprung up. Nearly a century ago, William Pelley initiated what is now known as Soulcraft:

“In 1928, Pelley said he had a near-death experience, detailed in an article for *American Magazine* called ‘My Seven Minutes in Eternity.’ In later writings, Pelley described the experience as ‘hypo-dimensional.’ He wrote that during this event, he met with God and Jesus Christ, who instructed him to undertake the spiritual transformation of America. He later claimed that the experience gave him the ability to levitate, see through walls, and have out-of-body experiences at will. His metaphysical writings greatly boosted Pelley’s public visibility. Some of the original members of the original Ascended Master Teachings reli-

gion, the ‘I AM’ Activity, were recruited from the ranks of Pelley’s organization, the Silver Legion.”²⁹

Pelley also taught that every human being was said to be spirit-soul and connected to the Godhead.

In the 1930s, Alice Bailey formed the Arcane School in New York. Those in it believe they are radiating positive energy into the world. For all their efforts the world does not seem to be getting more positive.

Another such “church” is called Novus Spiritus. It was founded in 1986 in California by the late psychic Sylvia Browne. This church teaches that there is no sin, no hell, and no sacrificial atonement by Jesus, but rather reincarnation, God as masculine and feminine, and salvation through knowledge.

In *The Encyclopedia of American Religions*, J. Gordon Melton devoted 50 pages to what he calls the Ancient Wisdom Family. He details various specifics of 87 different Gnostic-like occult groups.³⁰ In his list of Gnostic groups and churches he includes the Gnostic Association of Cultural and Anthropological Studies.³¹

There is within the Protestant and Evangelical church a kind of quasi-Gnosticism (we could call it a soft-Gnosticism) with claims of personal divine revelation, revelation knowledge, and insider messages from God Himself (as in “the Lord told me” or “the Lord said to me”).

Modern-day prophet Rick Joyner claims that Jesus swims with him, but he is not quite sure if the Lord is walking on the water or actually swimming.³² The old mystical hymn says, “He walks with me and He talks with me” but now — if we are to believe Joyner — we have to add, “and He swims with me.” Beth Moore and Henry Blackaby are just two of the best-selling authors who use “the Lord told me” or “the Lord said to me” practice.

Music and lyrics are also claimed to be directly from the throne room of the Most High. In some cases God

seems to be a poor musician and composer.³³ Computers and pens are moved along by the Holy Spirit or Jesus Himself, we are told. Voices, visions, and dreams bring a new *gnosis* that seems more immediate and exciting than Bible study.

Angelic visits are sought after. This mystical, self-centered, elitist spirituality divides Christians into spiritual classes. The elite have an inside track and the followers must wait on them for fresh information, imagined insights, and new knowledge. Professor of systematic theology Louis Berkhof wrote:

“At this point Gnosticism became more and more a system of religious mysteries. Men are divided into three classes: the pneumatic who constitute the elite of the Church, the psychic consisting of the ordinary Church members, and the hylic or Gentiles. Only the first class is really capable of higher knowledge (*epignosis*) and thus obtain the highest blessedness.”³⁴

Alleged trips to heaven or hell are certainly Gnostic. Pastor Mark Hitchcock writes:

“A common thread in the heaven-and-back books is the Gnostic error of claiming that some people can acquire secret knowledge that’s inaccessible to the rest of us. This knowledge can come from visions, angelic messengers, dreams, or mystical experiences.”³⁵

Celestial travelers claim to know much more than anyone else. Yet a careful study of their claims show them to be less than biblical and contradictory of each other.³⁶

WHEN IS A GOSPEL NOT A GOSPEL?

The latest “discovery” was unveiled in early 2015 in time for the Lenten season. It was a 160-page Coptic codex dated from the fifth or sixth century A.D. It bore as its title *The Gospel of the Lots of Mary*. The Mary referred to is Mary the mother of Jesus.

While advertised as “newfound,” it isn’t. Its origin is unknown and it was in the hands of a private collector and then donated to Harvard University in 1984.

The story has been covered by numerous news websites and online magazines including *Live Science*, the Biblical Archaeological Society, World Net Daily, *The Christian Post*, NBC News, and the *Daily Mail* in the United Kingdom. The text was translated and released in a paperback book and is available from Amazon.com with the hefty price of \$99.75. Its title is *Forbidden Oracles*?

The Gospel of the Lots of Mary is neither a gospel nor Christian in its content. It has nothing to do with either Jesus or Mary.

The title “Lots” has to do with the drawing of lots. In ancient times priests in the Temple would cast lots to determine practical things like who would serve what duties on any given day. There were lots cast or drawn for the burning of the incense in the Temple. A lot was cast or drawn for lamp lighting and another for the call to worship. Bible scholars are not certain what the lots themselves were. The Jews believed that if the lots were cast in dependence on Yahweh, He would reveal His will through the process (Proverbs 16:33).

In the first chapter of the book of Acts lots were used to select a successor to Judas. Lots are not mentioned after Acts 1 because we now have the Word of God to direct us and the Holy Spirit to guide us. The Word of God is sufficient for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16).

The Gospel of the Lots of Mary is a tool for occult divination. It contains 37 vague oracles to answer questions about the future and give directions for impending decisions. A person may use this “gospel” to seek an answer for a concern, a business deal, an illness, or a choice that he or she must make. They want to know how the future will turn out. In effect, they want to control the future and be omniscient like God.

Those utilizing this “gospel” turn to a random page and read the statement on that page. The oracle might say something like: “Yes, it will happen, go forward immediately, do not hesitate to proceed” or something else very general and that becomes the direction even if the direction is quite unbiblical. The online news magazine *Live Science* reveals:

“The 37 oracles are all written vaguely; for instance, oracle seven says, ‘You know, o human, that you did your utmost again. You did not gain anything but loss, dispute, and war. But if you are patient a little, the matter will prosper through the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.’”³⁷

This sort of divination text is like the Magic 8-Ball (the novelty toy developed in the 1950s), newspaper astrology, or a fortune cookie. Getting any real direction from it is a gamble. Perhaps a more appropriate title would be *The Slots of Mary*.

The warning of the Apostle Paul is still relevant:

“For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted — you may well put up with it!” (2 Corinthians 11:4).

THE BIBLE SAYS: NO WAY!

Divination is a pagan practice condemned by the Bible (Deuteronomy 18:10-14; 2 Kings 17:16-17; Ezekiel 13:6-7). It is the idea of using oracles, tea leaves, cards, or other objects to predict the future. In some cases they even looked into the innards of dead animals for guidance (Ezekiel 21:21). The practice of divination seeks knowledge of what might lie ahead through the use of omens of various sorts. It is playing God.

All that we *need* to know about the future is in God’s Word and we can trust Him for those things we do not know. Trying to obtain secret knowledge of the future not sanctioned by the Bible is clearly wrong.³⁸

THE NOT SO NEW, NEW AGE

Peter Jones sees a direct connection between the Gnostics and the New Age movement:

“This is the bottom line. History, albeit diabolical history, is repeating itself before our very eyes. We can therefore begin to understand the changes taking place in our contemporary culture. The Earth Summit, homosexuality, feminism, mandated cultural and ethnic diversity, etc., are not unrelated phenomena associated with the chaotic transmutation of our modern, unstable society. As various hues of the same rainbow, they are all deeply related aspects of a coherent religious agenda whose goal is the creation of a new humanity made in the image of the god of this world. This bottom line should convince you to take the New Age Movement with utmost seriousness. Every Christian should be involved in understanding the nature of this redoubtable adversary, in order to both avoid being trapped by one or more of the programs on offer, and to rethink one’s own faith and witness in the light of this pernicious heresy.”³⁹

The resurrection of Gnosticism should not surprise us. The Apostle Peter wrote of those “false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies” (2 Peter 2:1, emphasis added). Luke records in Acts 20:29 Paul’s directive to the Ephesian elders telling them about savage wolves who would devour the flock.

We should be wary of anyone who claims to have knowledge that no one else has. Those who claim to unlock mysteries and have insights into the spiritual world are modern-day Gnostics, or at least Gnostic-like. Dave Breese, in his book *Know the Marks of Cults*,⁴⁰ called the claim of special discoveries a mark of a cult.

In John 18:20 Jesus said, “I spoke openly to the world ... and in secret I have said nothing.” The public minis-

try of Jesus was just that — public. Even when Jesus taught His disciples privately, they preached publicly the truth given to them and in many cases committed the teaching to writing. This is why we possess a New Testament and are blessed with all we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3).

There is no doubt that some of Gnosticism's draw is its novelty. Things presented as new and mysterious are compelling. And ignorance of the past leaves people vulnerable to repeating past mistakes. Philip Jenkins speaks well to this point:

“Diligent exploration of the very large literature of New Testament scholarship over the last century or so might suggest that the ‘new’ insight is nothing of the kind, however conveniently the work of past generations will be overlooked. As we have seen, a kind of historical amnesia is a necessary feature of the whole myth of concealment and discovery. It is pleasing to think of scholars of the mid-twenty-first century boasting that their own daring speculations would have been inconceivable to any previous generation of Biblical researchers, naive fundamentalists that they all were. Who knows, perhaps they will also believe themselves to be the first generation since antiquity to have re-discovered Gnosticism.”⁴¹

The true Gospel is no secret. Salvation from sin is no mystery and the Bible with all the promises of God is readily available to all who truly want it. Sin, however, causes many to not seek after God (Romans 3:9-18).

However, there is a bright side to all of this for the believer. When your neighbor or co-worker tells you about the latest Gnostic “gospel” that’s been unearthed and then extolled in the daily newspaper, on television, or on the Internet, it opens the opportunity to share the truth about the Gnostics and, more importantly, to explain the biblical facts about God, Jesus, and true salvation through the death and resurrection of the only Savior.

Endnotes:

1. Peter Jones, *The Gnostic Empire Strikes Back*. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 1992.
2. See “Don Juan (Byron)” from Wikipedia. Document accessed at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Don_Juan_\(Byron\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Don_Juan_(Byron)).
3. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1992, Vol. II, pg. 445.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 445-446.
5. John MacArthur, Jr., *The Ultimate Priority*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1983, pg. 35.
6. David Bercot, editor, *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998, pg. 306.
7. *Ibid.*, brackets in original.
8. B.A. Robinson, “Gnosticism: Ancient and modern: Beliefs & practices,” Religious Tolerance website, updated July 27, 2007, bold and italics in original. Document accessed at: <http://www.religioustolerance.org/gnostic2.htm>.
9. *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, op. cit., pg. 307, brackets in original.
10. Asceticism is the practice of self-denial and/or self-mortification; licentiousness is a lack of moral or sexual restraint and a freethinking in religious matters. Those who practiced licentiousness were known as libertines.
11. N.T. Wright, *Judas and the Gospel of Jesus*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2006, pg. 57.
12. For an excellent study of the resurrection body, see J.A. Schep, *The Nature of the Resurrection Body*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1964.
13. B.K. Kuiper, *The Church in History*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1973, pg. 18.
14. In Matthew 6:27, we are told that you cannot add to your height (*helekia*) by worrying.
15. See further the pamphlet, *Christianity, Cults & Religions*. Torrance, Calif.: Rose Publishing, 2010, pg. 4.
16. Charles Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1978, pg. 1800.
17. Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battle for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
18. Philip W. Comfort and Jason Driesbach, *The Many Gospels of Jesus*. Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2008, pg. xii.
19. “Nag Hammadi library” from Wikipedia, bold and italics in original. Document accessed at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nag_Hammadi_library.
20. James M. Robinson, general editor, *The Nag Hammadi Library*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1978, pg. 2.
21. Karen L. King, George W. MacRae, R. McL. Wilson, and Douglas M. Parrott in *ibid.*, pg. 523.
22. “Gospel of Judas” from Wikipedia.

Document accessed at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_of_Judas.

23. R. McL. Wilson in J.D. Douglas, editor, *New 20th-Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1991, pg. 359.
24. Charles Pfeiffer, editor, *The Biblical World*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1966, pg. 405.
25. See Richard Noll, *The Aryan Christ: The Secret Life of Carl Jung*. New York: Random House, 1997.
26. *The Gnostic Empire Strikes Back*, op. cit., pp. 19-20.
27. Samuel H. Dresner, *Rachel*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1994, pg. xiii.
28. *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, op. cit., pg. 307.
29. “William Dudley Pelley” from Wikipedia. Document accessed at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Dudley_Pelley.
30. J. Gordon Melton, editor, *The Encyclopedia of American Religions*. Tarrytown, N.Y.: Triumph Books, 1991, Vol. 3, pp. 55-104.
31. *Ibid.*, pg. 63.
32. Rick Joyner, “Wanted: A Friend for God,” from *Sid Roth’s It’s Supernatural*, Feb. 15, 2015. Video accessed on YouTube at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVLJ4LgRTFI.
33. For an example of this claim, see the evaluation of Robin Mark and his song “Days of Elijah” in Gary E. Gilley and M. Kurt Goedelman, “I’d Like to Teach the Church to Sing - Discerning the Theological and Cultural Dynamics of Worship Music,” *The Quarterly Journal*, July-September 2015, pp. 14-15.
34. Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines*. London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1969, pg. 48, italic in original.
35. Mark Hitchcock, *Visits to Heaven and Back — Are They Real?* Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2015, pg. 79.
36. See further, G. Richard Fisher, “Heaven Is For Real, But the Stories Are Not,” *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 2011, pp. 2, 22.
37. Owen Jarus, “Newfound ‘Gospel of the Lots of Mary’ Discovered in Ancient Text,” *Live Science* website, Feb. 3, 2015. Document accessed at: www.livescience.com/49673-newfound-ancient-gospel-deciphered.html.
38. See further, Merrill Unger, *Biblical Demonology*. Wheaton, Ill.: Scripture Press, 1952, Chapter 7, “Biblical Demonology and Divination.”
39. *The Gnostic Empire Strikes Back*, op. cit., pg. 72.
40. Dave Breese, *Know the Marks of Cults*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1975.
41. Philip Jenkins, *Hidden Gospels*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, pg. 216.



word to a Catholic encyclopedia admitted, “No one, not even a scholar who has been a lifelong Catholic, knows everything there is to know about Catholicism.”⁴ However, as Catholic apologist Gary Michuta has stated, “The real question is not whether Catholicism (or Protestantism, for that matter) is complex, but whether it is true.”⁵

But Jimmy Akin of the Catholic apologetics ministry Catholic Answers⁶ maintains that the Catholic doctrine of salvation is not complicated at all. In his book, *The Drama of Salvation*, he wrote:

“[T]he key things the New Testament presents to us as what we need to do in order to be saved [are]: We need to repent, believe, and be baptized. If we fall into mortal [grave] sin, we need to repent, believe, and go to confession. It’s that simple — at least when we keep it on the level of the basics.”⁷

Later, he stated:

“There are also many questions about the Christian life that flows from these initial elements: the living of a moral life [sic], doing ‘good works’ under the impulse of God’s grace, receiving the other sacraments — particularly the Eucharist [the Lord’s Supper] — and growing in God’s grace. However, the basic elements needed to enter a state of grace (salvation) under ordinary circumstances are repentance, faith, and baptism. Those needed to reenter it after a fall into mortal sin are repentance, faith, and confession.”⁸

Akin admitted in an e-mail correspondence that his description was “a top-level, practical summary that does not flesh things out in detail.” Then, he added, “(that’s what the rest of the book is for).”⁹

Akin knows his Catholicism and is an intelligent and articulate apologist. Some of what he said in his book and

in his e-mail correspondence was helpful. However, in his ecumenical zeal, he minimized significant differences between the Catholic and evangelical views on salvation.

Perhaps a more typical presentation of the Catholic view of salvation is expressed by priest William J. Cogan who answered the question, “What is necessary to be saved?” this way:

“You have to be baptized, belong to the Church established by Jesus Christ [i.e., the Catholic Church], obey the Ten Commandments, receive the Sacraments, pray, do good works and die with Sanctifying Grace in your soul.”¹⁰

The Catholic Church teaches that “sanctifying grace” is grace given by God, which “inheres” in the soul, and which is necessary for a person to go to heaven.

Catholicism teaches that there are seven sacraments: Baptism, Penance, Holy Eucharist, Confirmation, Matrimony, Holy Orders, and Anointing of the Sick. These are believed to convey God’s grace to the recipient all through one’s life, from the womb to the tomb. As one evangelical work has noted, by virtue of its sacramental system, “*The Roman Catholic Church is an institution of salvation.*”¹¹

AKIN ELABORATES ON SALVATION

Akin answered more questions about the Roman Catholic view of salvation, which are quoted below:

“1) The Church does teach that it is important to partake in the sacraments. That’s why baptism and confession are mentioned in the summary statement. They are the two most relevant sacraments as they are meant to take a person who is not in a state of grace and put the person in a state of grace. The other sacraments, under ordinary circumstances, help one grow in grace, and this plays a practical role in helping one remain close to God and remain in a state of grace. However, the other sacraments

are not intended, under ordinary circumstances, to place a person in a state of grace. It also is not necessary, properly speaking, to receive them. You can get hit by a bus right after being baptized or going to confession, and you’ll go to heaven. The state of grace is the key thing, and these two sacraments both result in that. 2) Regarding persevering to the end, yes, it is necessary to persevere in a state of grace until the end. That’s why there’s the second sentence in the summary: ‘If you commit mortal sin, you need to repent, have faith, and go to confession.’ That will put you back into a state of grace. Being in a state of grace/divine friendship at the end of one’s life is *the* thing that determines one’s eternal destiny.”¹²

And Akin further noted that:

“It is necessary to cooperate with grace and perform such actions [i.e., good works] in order to grow in righteousness/justification. However, that growth is not, properly speaking, necessary. You could be hit by a bus right after being baptized, going to confession, or otherwise entering a state of grace, and you would go to heaven. You might have less of a reward in heaven since you didn’t have time to do any of the actions God has promised to reward, but you would still go to heaven. As always, it’s the state of grace that is the essential thing.”¹³

One Catholic dictionary defines a “state of grace” this way:

“[The] Condition of a person who is free from mortal sin and pleasing to God. It is the state of being in God’s friendship and the necessary condition of the soul at death in order to attain heaven.”¹⁴

EXAMINING THE DETAILS OF THE CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE ON SALVATION

Jesus told Nicodemus, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born

of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

Based upon its understanding of this Scripture, Roman Catholicism teaches that a person is born again through being baptized and that baptism is required for salvation. One primary Catholic source instructs:

"The Lord himself affirms that Baptism is necessary for salvation. ... Baptism is necessary for salvation for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament."¹⁵

While Catholicism teaches that baptism is essential to salvation, it does allow an exception for those otherwise righteous people who are unaware of this requirement. The Catholic Church assumes that such would have desired baptism, had they known it was a requirement for them.¹⁶ Thus, infants are expected to be baptized to ensure their salvation. For infants who cannot be baptized, the Church hopes for God's mercy.¹⁷ There is a speculative and unofficial Catholic teaching about "Limbo" for unbaptized infants to which many Catholics subscribe.¹⁸ Former Roman Catholic James McCarthy explains:

"Some of the Church's theologians have proposed that there must be a place for unbaptized infants somewhere between heaven and hell. They call it *limbo*, literally meaning *on the border*. They describe it as a place of natural happiness, but something short of heaven, for God is not there."¹⁹

One Catholic dictionary says:

"Regarding the limbo of infants, it is an article of the Catholic faith that those who die without baptism, and for whom the want of baptism has not been supplied in some other way, cannot enter heaven. This is the teaching of the ecumenical councils of Florence and Trent."²⁰

However, more recently the belief in Limbo for Catholics appears to

have been abandoned as "an article of the Catholic faith." In April 2007, a report released by the Vatican's Theological Commission said that Limbo reflected an "unduly restrictive view of salvation." Pope Benedict XVI, who led the Catholic Church at the time, sanctioned the report. Prior to becoming pope, he claimed, "Limbo was never a defined truth of faith." And that, "Personally ... I would abandon it, since it was only a theological hypothesis."²¹ Yet despite removing Limbo, the Commission's report encouraged parents to have their babies baptized as the normal means of salvation.

Returning to the Catholic dictionary, it later states, "[It is] the revealed doctrine that heaven is a sheer gift of divine goodness and that baptism of water or desire is necessary to enter heaven."²²

And the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* mandates that, "God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism."²³

In addition to baptism by water, Catholicism teaches — as alluded to in the above-cited dictionary — that one may go to heaven if one desires to be baptized even if for some reason such a person is unable to receive baptism or is confined in such a way as to be unable to receive baptism. There is also a third way: suffering martyrdom for the Christian faith prior to one's baptism. This is called the "Baptism of blood."²⁴

THE CATHOLIC VIEW OF ADULT SALVATION CONTRASTED WITH THE PROTESTANT VIEW

The Catholic Council of Trent (1545-1563) declared:

"[W]e are therefore said to be justified gratuitously, because none of those things that precedes justification, whether faith or works, merit the grace of justification."²⁵

Trent appears to agree with the Bible that salvation is a free gift. However, it agrees that salvation is a free gift only at the beginning. That is, God forgives all of a person's past

sins. After water baptism, a person has a clean slate before God. Thereafter the adult who receives God's gift of justification in baptism must do works.

One volume of Catholic theology teaches this regarding good works:

"What do we mean by *good works*? For a work to be meritorious it must be based on faith, hope, and love because these virtues focus our activity upon God. Good works are the observance of God's commandments and the precepts of the Church.²⁶ This frequently requires great sacrifice on our part, which is also a good work. Prayer is a good work, whether it is done privately or in union with other people, as participating in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Then there is the reception of the sacraments and sacramentals."²⁷

Later it says, "Through these and similar works we can actually merit heaven *as our reward*. ... Heaven must be fought for; we have to earn heaven."²⁸

Again, it states:

"The Catholic Church was right in maintaining against Luther, at the Council of Trent, that heaven is merited by our good works, because this is the clear teaching of revelation."²⁹

Concerning Catholicism teaching that works, in addition to faith, are necessary for salvation, consider also these words written by the late Pope John Paul II:

"But the truth is that man is actually called to salvation; that a good life is the condition of salvation; and that salvation cannot be attained without the help of grace. *Ultimately, only God can save man, but He expects man to cooperate*. The fact that man can cooperate with God determines his authentic greatness."³⁰

Rome certainly teaches that faith plus works are required for salvation, citing James 2:17, 20. James 2:17 states that, "faith by itself, if it does not

have works, is dead." James 2:20 and James 2:26 states, "faith without works is dead." Sometimes Catholic apologists will also cite James 2:24, which says, "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone" (James 2:24, NASB).

Concerning this use of verses from James chapter 2, evangelical theologian R.C. Sproul wrote:

"James' concept is not contrary to Paul's. But once you assume the Roman Catholic interpretation, there is no conceivable manner under the sun that James can be harmonized with Paul. Unfortunately, the manner in which the Roman Catholic Church has dealt with this is to avoid Paul like the plague. They have made serious attempts at harmonization, but I believe it has been a miserable failure every time it is tried."³¹

The Precepts — or Commandments — of the Roman Catholic Church are defined as:

"Obligations imposed on Catholics by the law of the Church; traditionally, six are listed: (1) to participate in Mass on all Sundays and holy days of obligation; (2) to fast and abstain on days designated by the Church; (3) to confess one's sins once a year; (4) to receive Holy Communion during Eastertide; (5) to contribute to the support of the Church; (6) to observe the laws of the Church governing marriage. In 1977 the National Catechetical Directory for Catholics of the United States added two other precepts, namely: 'To study Catholic teaching in preparation for the sacrament of confirmation, to be confirmed, and then to continue to study and advance the cause of Christ' and 'to join in the missionary spirit and apostolate of the Church.'"³²

Catholicism teaches that people actually merit eternal life by the works they do, although Catholics are careful to maintain that a person's good works are done by God's grace.

Catholicism further teaches that for adults the requirements for salvation include both faith and baptism. The Protestant Reformers taught that a person is justified — declared to be in right standing with God — by grace alone (*sola gratia*), through faith alone (*sola fide*), in Christ alone (*solus Christos*).

Catholicism would agree that we are justified by Christ alone and could agree that we are justified by grace alone, although it would understand this phrase in a different sense than Evangelicals do. Catholicism would understand "grace alone" to mean that the good works that a person does are done by God's grace whereas Evangelicals would mean that we are justified apart from our works of righteousness but solely due to Christ's righteousness being given (or imputed) to us as a gift.

Furthermore, Rome cannot honestly agree that we are justified by faith alone. For while Catholics agree that faith is necessary for salvation — for adults and those capable of having faith — they cannot agree that it is sufficient for justification. Catholicism teaches that works are necessary to attain heaven — unless a person would happen to immediately die after being baptized.

Sproul explains, "Far from excluding faith as a necessary condition for justification, Rome declares that faith is a necessary ingredient."³³ He further states, "For Rome, faith plays a necessary role in justification, serving as its initiation, foundation, and root."³⁴ However, Rome does not believe that justification is by faith in the same sense as the sense that Evangelicals believe justification is by faith. For Rome, the "by faith" means that faith is the beginning and foundation of our justification — nothing precedes it in our justification and it is the foundation of our justification. By contrast, when the Reformers said that our justification is "by faith," they meant that faith is the *instrumental cause* of our salvation.

An illustration of an instrumental cause is that in sipping drink through a straw, the straw is the instrumental cause of our receiving the drink.³⁵ By

contrast, Catholicism teaches that the instrumental cause of justification is initially baptism and then, for those who lose salvation through committing mortal sin and need to be "re-justified," the sacrament of penance.³⁶

Catholicism does teach that a person is saved by faith and that a person is saved by grace. But although Catholics might use these same phrases that Evangelicals use, they do not mean the same things by them. Nor do they believe that a person is justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, as the Reformers taught.

Lightner said:

"To be sure, there are many other differences between evangelicalism and Roman Catholicism, but they all relate in one way or another to one or both of these two pillars. Rome never has believed that salvation was by faith alone in Christ alone or that the Bible alone is divinely authoritative in matters of faith and practice. These are the two most basic reasons for the Protestant Reformation."³⁷

The difference between the Protestant and the Catholic teachings in a number of areas is the difference of a single word: "alone."

WATER BAPTISM AND SALVATION

Concerning the issue of water baptism, Lightner wrote:

"Many people depend on ritual baptism, received either as infants or as adults, for their salvation. This is an entirely false hope. All the water in the world could not take away even one sin. Nowhere does Scripture make water baptism a condition for salvation."³⁸

The reason that Lightner says Scripture nowhere makes water baptism a condition for salvation is that he believes the Catholic Church has not correctly understood and interpreted John 3:5, on which it bases its belief in the necessity of baptism and its regenerative effects.

It should be mentioned that not all evangelical Protestants would agree with Lightner that baptism does not in some sense bring salvation. Lutherans, for example, would disagree with this statement.

However, when Paul set forth the contents of the Gospel he preached (1 Corinthians 15:1-8), he didn't include baptism. Although the New Testament is replete with instances of new Christians being baptized, thereby demonstrating its importance for the believer, it is not a part of the saving message of the Gospel. That baptism doesn't in any way bring about a person's salvation is clearly evidenced earlier in 1 Corinthians, where the Apostle Paul stated, "Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel" (1 Corinthians 1:17). If baptism were an essential part of the saving message of the Gospel, it seems unthinkable that the one who so clearly preached the Gospel would omit baptizing people as part of his task of preaching the Gospel.³⁹

REGAINING SALVATION

Catholicism teaches that a person who has been justified can lose his salvation through the commission of mortal sin. Catholicism recognizes two categories of sins: venial and mortal. Venial sins are small, everyday ones that do not affect one's salvation. However, mortal sins are so serious that they are believed to cause a person to lose his salvation. And if a person who committed a mortal sin were to die without having received the sacrament of penance (see explanation below), he would go to hell. There isn't a definitive list of mortal sins and there is some ambiguity about whether certain sins are mortal or venial.

One Catholic dictionary gives this definition and explanation of mortal sin:

"The deliberate, conscious, free transgression of a moral law that involves serious matter, resulting in separation from God. Three requirements are necessary for a mortal sin: (1) grave matter (e.g.,

contraception, armed robbery, adultery); (2) sufficient reflection; (3) full consent of the will. Certain factors like habit, ignorance, and fear, can make the sin venial instead of mortal. ... Mortal sin is forgiven through the Sacrament of Penance and a perfect act of contrition. To die in unrepentant mortal sin merits eternity in hell."⁴⁰

Notice that Catholicism includes contraception as a mortal sin. For a Catholic to deliberately miss Sunday Mass, unless there is a good reason for doing so — such as personal illness, caring for a sick child, etc. — is another example of a mortal sin, provided that the person who does so realizes that the Catholic Church considers this to be a mortal sin.

Catholics don't rebaptize. Their remedy for mortal sin is the sacrament of penance. Through this sacrament a person becomes rejustified. Penance is the name applied to both the sacrament itself and to the particular work required for forgiveness. The sacrament consists of confession of one's sin(s) to a priest, the formal prayer known as the "Act of Contrition," receiving priestly absolution (the words of forgiveness pronounced by the priest on behalf of Christ based on the belief that this is what Jesus was referring to in John 20:22-23) and the penitent performing the work(s) of satisfaction: the penance prescribed by the priest.

Penance clearly involves necessary works in the form of *works of satisfaction*. Thus Catholicism again clearly teaches the *necessity* of *works* in addition to *faith*, provided a person has committed a mortal sin, for a person's salvation.⁴¹

Protestants believe that a person is saved at a point in time and then, ideally, becomes more Christlike over time even though there might be lapses along the way. Protestants refer to the initial moment of trusting in Christ as one's Savior as being "justified." The process of becoming more Christlike over the course of one's lifetime is referred to as "sanctification." In the words of one writer,

"Justification is a once-and-for-all act. Sanctification is an ongoing process."⁴²

Catholicism teaches that God actually *makes* a person righteous when he is baptized and that the person then *grows* in that righteousness thereafter. In the words of Protestant apologist Ron Rhodes, "Roman Catholicism confuses and merges justification and sanctification."⁴³ He continues:

"Catholics believe that someone's increasing level of righteousness eventually enables the person to gain final justification. The goal of the individual Roman Catholic is to continue to cooperate with God's grace and grow in sanctification (righteousness) and good works, and participate in the various Roman Catholic sacraments, with a view to attaining final justification before God. What all this means is that in Roman Catholicism, *good works precede final justification*. Justification is conditioned upon good works."⁴⁴

Rhodes also states:

"Scripture indicates that following the single, instantaneous act of justification, a moral transformation begins at that point in the life of the believer — a process we call sanctification. ... In Protestantism, sanctification flows from justification, whereas in Roman Catholicism, justification flows from sanctification (righteousness). Catholicism has it backward."⁴⁵

Protestants believe in an imputed righteousness: that the righteousness of Jesus, the sinless Son of God, is credited to the sinner when that person places his faith in Jesus as Savior and Substitute (see Romans 4:1-9, 22-25). Just as the sins of everyone were imputed to Christ's account on the Cross, so the spotless righteousness of Christ is imputed to everyone who believes in Him as their Savior and sin-bearing Substitute. The righteousness of the person thus justified is a real and actual righteousness, but it is not the person's own righteousness. Rather it

is the perfect, unimprovable righteousness of Christ (see Philip-
pians 3:5-9).⁴⁶

Once a person receives the free gift of Christ's righteousness, thereby becoming a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ, he or she begins a new life in Christ, in which the Lord, by His Holy Spirit, makes the believer more and more like Jesus, conforming us to His image (see Romans 8:29; cf. Romans 6:19), as we cooperate with His working in our lives. This is what the Scripture means when it tells Christians to "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13).

Rome misconstrues the apostle's instruction above, apparently believing that he is here exhorting the believer to work to attain final salvation, which is not at all what the passage is teaching.

Thus, evangelical Protestantism teaches that God declares a person to be just before He actually makes them just. Catholicism, however, teaches that when the sinner believes in Christ and is baptized, God actually makes the sinner righteous within: the person is not simply declared righteous by God but actually becomes righteous at that moment. Catholics consider the Protestant understanding of justification to be a "legal fiction" — that God would simply declare a sinner to be righteous, without actually making the person righteous, somehow would malign God's integrity. Rome, therefore, teaches that God only declares a person to be just when the person actually is just. Evangelical authors John Ankerberg and John Weldon explain:

"From the Catholic viewpoint, because of His righteous character, God cannot declare an ash-tray to be a rose, but He will call a true rose a rose. In other words, God only calls a person righteous when that person really is righteous."⁴⁷

Sproul takes issue with Rome's denial of Christ's righteousness being imputed to the sinner. He writes:

"Rome cannot tolerate Luther's *simul justus et peccator* [the idea that a Christian is "simultaneously just and a sinner"]. A person is either just or sinner; one cannot be both at the same time. The only kind of righteousness or justness [in the Catholic view] is that which is inherent [in the person]. This objection by Rome misses the heart of the biblical Gospel and betrays her rejection of it. If her argument were sound, it would prove too much. It would annihilate the atonement since the atonement also rests upon imputation and would also have to be considered a legal fiction. In the atonement God counts our sin and guilt against Christ. If this were not so, there could be neither substitution nor satisfaction in the cross for us. Each individual would have to atone for his or her own sins."⁴⁸

Elsewhere Sproul says:

"[Protestant Reformer John] Calvin cites as an example of justification by faith the case of the publican who went to his house 'justified' (Luke 18:14): '... it cannot be held that he obtained this justification by any merit of works. All that is said is, that after obtaining the pardon of sins he was regarded in the sight of God as righteous. He was justified, therefore, not by any approval of works, but by gratuitous acquittal on the part of God.'"⁴⁹

In regard to the imputed righteousness of Christ, Sproul tells us, "The biblical doctrine of justification is not a legal fiction. It is a legal reality."⁵⁰

PURGATORY: A STATE OF SUFFERING

Similar to evangelical Protestantism, Catholicism teaches that one of two eternal destinies awaits a person after death. Catholicism says that the unsaved (a person who does not die in a state of grace, due to having unforgiven mortal sin) will be in hell for eternity; while the saved Catholic (one

who dies in a state of grace, without having unforgiven mortal sin) will spend eternity with God in heaven.

However, for the saved Catholic, death may not immediately end the time of suffering, because Rome teaches the doctrine of purgatory for those saved souls who are not yet perfected enough to enter heaven. Only the saved will go to purgatory and only those who aren't yet purified enough to make it straight to heaven. While Catholicism has never pronounced on how many of the saved will have to pass through purgatorial cleansing first, the way purgatory is presented in Catholic teaching it is a good bet that most Catholics believe they will make a stop there on their way to heaven.

So why doesn't a saved Catholic go straight to heaven? It is because Catholicism teaches that sin has two consequences: The guilt of sin and its temporal punishment. When a person is baptized in water God forgives both the guilt and the temporal punishment due to their sins up to that point. Thereafter, however, even when a person receives God's forgiveness for the guilt of their sin(s) — for instance, through the sacrament of penance — they might still have temporal punishment due to their sins, even after performing the works of satisfaction. As one Catholic priest explained to me, "The sin would be forgiven but temporal punishment could remain."⁵¹

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states:

"[I]t is necessary to understand that sin has a *double consequence*. Grave [mortal] sin deprives us of communion with God and therefore makes us incapable of eternal life, the privation of which is called the 'eternal punishment' of sin. On the other hand every sin, even venial, entails an unhealthy attachment to creatures, which must be purified either here on earth, or after death in the state called Purgatory. This purification frees one from what is called the 'temporal punishment' of sin."⁵²

INDULGE ME

The same paragraph goes on to say that the eternal punishment and temporal punishment of sin should be thought of as proceeding from the nature of sin itself, and not as punishments externally inflicted on the person by a vengeful God. Additionally, it states that it is possible for the person who has sinned to so completely repent that neither eternal nor temporal punishment remains to be borne.⁵³ The next paragraph states:

“The forgiveness of sin and restoration of communion with God entail the remission of the eternal punishment of sin, but temporal punishment of sin remains.”⁵⁴

As biblical support for the teaching of temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, Catholicism points to the incident in King David’s life when he committed adultery with Bathsheba. It points out that although God forgave David’s sin when he repented, God caused David to go through various kinds of suffering as a direct result of his sin. (For example, the first child Bathsheba bore to David died and the prophet Nathan said that the sword would never depart from his house. See 2 Samuel 12:9-14.)

Other biblical examples that Catholics have used to illustrate that God may forgive the eternal consequences of sin, yet still cause there to be temporal consequences borne, include the Israelites refusing to enter the Promised Land and as a result having to wander for 40 years in the wilderness (Numbers 14:20-35), or Moses striking the rock instead of speaking to it and not being allowed to enter the Promised Land as a result (Numbers 20:7-12). Scripture certainly teaches that God disciplines all of His children (Hebrews 12:5-13). However, this is a far cry from teaching that God demands some sort of payment from His children for their sins, as the Catholic teaching would seem to imply. Neither does Scripture state that God will continue to demand payment from His children for their sins both in this life and the next, as the Catholic belief in a double consequence for sin appears to teach.

The Catholic doctrine on indulgences is related to the teaching on the sacrament of Penance.⁵⁵ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says:

“An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions through the action of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints. An indulgence is partial or plenary according as it removes either part or all of the temporal punishment due to sin.’ Indulgences may be applied to the living or the dead.”⁵⁶

The Catholic doctrines on purgatory and indulgences are at odds with the teaching of the sufficiency of Christ’s atonement on the Cross for *all* our sins. Paul wrote to the “faithful brethren” in Colossae that:

“When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions” (Colossians 2:13, NASB).

God is omniscient, so when Scripture says, “having forgiven us *all* our transgressions” (emphasis added), this includes transgressions that are still in the future, because He knows about them in advance. When Jesus died on the Cross, all of our transgressions were in the future.⁵⁷

There is no sound scriptural basis for the dogma of purgatory not simply because the word “purgatory” isn’t found in the Bible — a straw man that Catholic apologists sometimes erect and then tear down — but because it militates against the very atonement of Christ itself.

One Catholic booklet explaining the dogma of purgatory admits that the primary basis for the doctrine is not

the Bible, stating, “In the last analysis, however, the Catholic doctrine does not rest on any direct Scriptural proof but on tradition, increasingly clear and unmistakable.”⁵⁸ The “reasonableness” of the doctrine is also appealed to.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, Catholicism has attempted to muster scriptural support for it by using passages, all of which are based on inferences from which Rome attempts to glean the doctrine, such as: 2 Maccabees 12:39-46 (a book not in Protestant Bibles⁶⁰); Matthew 5:25-26; 12:32; 1 Corinthians 3:12-15; Revelation 21:27. However, the Catholic dogma of purgatory flies in the face of Christ’s triumphant final declaration from the Cross, “*Tetelestai!*” (John 19:30): “It is finished!” One study Bible reveals, “Receipts for taxes found in the papyri have written across them this single Greek word, which means ‘paid in full.’”⁶¹

Yes, Christ’s death was the *full* payment not just a *partial* payment for *all* of our sins — past, present, and future. Two Scriptures which clearly refute the Catholic teaching on purgatory are 2 Corinthians 5:6-8 and Philippians 1:21-23.

CATHOLICISM AND ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

Catholicism teaches that one cannot have full assurance of salvation. For a person to have full assurance of salvation is considered sinful presumptuousness. Because Catholicism partially grounds salvation in the works of the weak, sinful recipient of God’s salvation, it would seem to make such assurance logically impossible, unless a person really was arrogant and/or presumptuous. One reason Catholics cannot have complete assurance of salvation is that Rome teaches one is not actually saved until judgment after the end of one’s earthly life.⁶²

One theologian summarizes the Catholic position on assurance of salvation this way:

“The reason for the uncertainty of the state of grace lies in this that without a special revelation nobody can with certainty of

faith know whether or not he has fulfilled all the conditions which are necessary for the achieving of justification. The impossibility of the certainty of faith, however, by no means excludes a high moral certainty supported by the testimony of conscience."⁶³

In his work, *Catholicism and Fundamentalism*, Catholic apologist Karl Keating explains:

"For Catholics, salvation [going to heaven] depends on the state of the soul at death. ... [Christ] did his part, and now we have to cooperate by doing ours. If we are to pass through those [heavenly] gates, we have to be in the right spiritual state. We have to be spiritually alive. ... [If the soul] has sanctifying grace, then heaven is guaranteed even if a detour through purgatorial purification is required first. The Church teaches that only souls that are objectively good and objectively pleasing to God merit heaven, and such souls are ones filled with sanctifying grace. The saint who never committed a mortal sin and the lifelong sinner who did not stop sinning until he repented on his deathbed will each gain heaven, although the one will have to be cleansed in the anteroom of purgatory. ... As Catholics see it, anyone can achieve heaven, and anyone can lose it. The lifelong sinner can remain that to the very end — and he then becomes an eternally lost sinner. The apparent saint can throw away salvation at the last moment and end up no better off than the man who never did a good deed in his life. It all depends on how one enters death, which is why dying is by far one's most important act."⁶⁴

Evangelical scholars Norman Geisler and Ralph Mackenzie state, "Catholic dogma excludes Catholics from claiming that they can know with assurance that, if they were to die, they would have eternal life."⁶⁵

By contrast, those Protestants who believe in the biblical teaching of

eternal security — the teaching that the believer cannot lose the gift of salvation, because salvation is based completely on the work of the perfect Redeemer, Christ Jesus, and on His keeping power and not at all on the faithfulness of the fallible recipient of that salvation — believe that Christ is able to keep those whom the Father has entrusted to His keeping, as Jesus Himself stated, for example, in John 6:39-40, 44; 10:27-30; 17:12 (see also Romans 8:29-39; Hebrews 7:25; 1 Peter 2:25).

As Geisler and MacKenzie state:

"Protestantism teaches that we can know with assurance right now that we have eternal life. This is true of Calvinists (and even Armenians, who believe they could later commit a serious sin and lose the gift of eternal life). But this is not true for a Catholic that cannot know with confidence that he possesses eternal life right now."⁶⁶

God actually has given a "special revelation" (to use the Catholic phrase) that those who believe in Jesus as their Savior possess eternal salvation. That special revelation is in His Word and the revelation is by His Holy Spirit. Scripture states:

"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13).

Regarding the special revelation by the Holy Spirit, Scripture says:

"And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'" (Galatians 4:6; see also Romans 8:15-17).

Therefore, believers can know with complete assurance that they are saved; not due to any merit on their part, but solely because God's Word declares it to be so based upon Christ's work on our behalf and because of His infinite keeping power over our lives. As Erwin Lutzer, former pastor of Moody Memorial Church in Chicago, wrote:

"[W]hat would you think of a shepherd who was given one hundred sheep in the morning and returned in the evening with ninety-two? He would be ridiculed for his carelessness, weakness, and failure to carry out his basic responsibilities. ... Do we think that the Good Shepherd is unable to keep the sheep entrusted to him? It is unthinkable that some of these sheep that are a gift from the Father to the Son will not be in the fold at nightfall. As Christ said elsewhere, 'And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day' (John 6:39)."⁶⁷

SUMMARY: ROME'S GOSPEL

R.C. Sproul has thus summarized for us the Catholic teaching on salvation:

"The gospel according to Rome is the 'good news' that a sinner may be justified if he or she receives the sacraments, has faith, and cooperates with grace to the point of becoming inherently righteous. That justification is effective as long as the believer refrains from mortal sin. If the person loses justification by mortal sin, he or she may be restored to justification by the sacrament of penance. If the person dies not in mortal sin but with impurities, he or she can get to heaven after being cleansed in purgatory. Some believers become so righteous that they ... bypass purgatory and go directly to heaven at death."⁶⁸

Concerning the matter of receiving God's free gift of eternal life (Romans 6:23) and right standing with God, Catholicism teaches that justification is by faith *plus* works. Without question, however, Scripture teaches that believers are saved by faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:4-7). Such faith will naturally issue forth in works, just as a living fruit tree naturally bears fruit. Thus it is *not* the fruit of works that saves, but faith. Works certainly contribute to a

believer's sanctification, but not to his or her salvation. Works are not a requirement for salvation, but rather are a result of salvation.

THE BIBLICAL "ROMAN ROAD" TO SALVATION

Sometimes, in trying to defend the belief in justification by faith plus works, Catholic apologists will appeal to Romans 2:5-16ff., which they say indicates that God will judge people based on their deeds. In harmony with this teaching, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* appeals to Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler, related in all three of the synoptic Gospels (see Matthew 19:16-22ff.) wherein when Jesus was questioned by the young man about what good thing he had to do to obtain eternal life, the Lord told him to keep the 10 Commandments.⁶⁹ The *Catechism* states, in part:

"[F]ollowing Jesus Christ involves keeping the Commandments. The Law has not been abolished, but rather man is invited to rediscover it in the person of his Master who is its perfect fulfillment. In the three synoptic Gospels, Jesus' call to the rich young man to follow him, in the obedience of a disciple and in the observance of the Commandments, is joined to the call to poverty and chastity."⁷⁰

Aside from the last clause above, which is clearly false — Jesus called the man to give his proceeds to the poor, but didn't tell him to become poor himself and Jesus said nothing to the man about chastity — the Catholic Church has misconstrued both the Romans 2 passage and the story of the rich young ruler. The ruler replied to Jesus that, "All these things [those of the 10 Commandments that Jesus had mentioned to him] I have kept from my youth" (Matthew 19:20). Whether or not the young man actually believed he had done so or not, he was wrong.

TWO WAYS OF SALVATION

The rich young ruler was not the only person in the New Testament who had asked Jesus about how to

obtain eternal life and whom Jesus pointed to the Law. There was an expert in the Mosaic Law who asked Jesus the same question that the rich young ruler did and Jesus, likewise, pointed him to the Mosaic Law to obtain eternal life (see Luke 10:25-37). Additionally, in Romans 2, we read:

"...for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified" (Romans 2:13).

In order to make sense of the Romans 2:5-16ff. passage, the story of the rich young ruler, and the story of the lawyer who tested Jesus about how to obtain eternal life, we must realize that the Bible actually describes two ways of salvation: A theoretical (or hypothetical) way and an actual way.

The theoretical way of salvation is this: If a person could perfectly keep the Law of Moses, then God would give such a person eternal life. Such a person would actually have earned or, in Catholic terminology, "merited" eternal life. The problem is that there is only one person who actually merited eternal life by perfectly keeping God's Law: Jesus. The Scripture clearly states that it is impossible for a person to be justified in this way:

"Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20).

In Galatians we read the following truths:

"[We know] that a man is not justified by the works of the law ... for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified" (2:16).

"I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly" (2:21, NASB).

"For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law" (3:21).

It is likely that Jesus told the young man to keep the commandments to

convict him of sin, in keeping with Romans 3:20 and Galatians 2:16. When the young man protested that he had kept the commandments (which testimony contradicts the Scriptures cited above), Jesus responded with more radical demands to convict him of sin.

In that God knew that because of our sinful nature we could not possibly earn salvation by keeping the Law, through Jesus He made it possible for us to receive His salvation as a gift. Our sins were imputed to Christ on the Cross and His righteousness, earned by perfectly keeping all of God's Law, is credited to our account. Here is some of what the Scripture says about this actual way of salvation:

"But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:21-24).

A few verses later, Paul wrote, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law" (Romans 3:28).

Notice that the above Scripture states that, although the way of righteousness that God provided is apart from the Law, it is in accord with the Law and the Prophets. Thus, it states, "Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law" (Romans 3:31).

Following this, the apostle proceeds to show what he means about establishing the Law by citing two great figures from the Old Testament that illustrate the principle of being justified by faith, rather than by the works of the Law: Abraham and David. About these men, he states:

"For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For

what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: 'Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin'" (Romans 4:2-8).

Toward the end of this chapter, Paul again writes about how Abraham believed God and "it was accounted to him for righteousness" (Romans 4:22, emphasis added) and he then states:

"Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification" (Romans 4:23-25).

Paul goes on:

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:1-2).

Rome errs, however, in combining the theoretical and the actual ways of salvation. Paul, in Romans 7, shows that this cannot be done and uses the illustration of marriage to explain why. There it shows that we cannot simultaneously be under the Law and under Christ any more than a married woman can be the wife of two men without being guilty of adultery. There the Scripture shows that in Christ we have died to the Law so that we might belong instead to

Christ, in order "that we should bear fruit to God" (Romans 7:1-4).

The Catholic teaching of justification by faith plus works is also shown to be in error by other Scriptures (Ephesians 2:8-10 and Titus 3:5ff.), which deny that our works in any way obtain our salvation.

Those who have not trusted in Christ as their Savior will indeed be judged on the basis of their works, just as Romans 2 teaches. We also know from Romans 3 and 4 that no one will be justified in this way. Rather, they will all be shown to fall short of God's glory, and thus will perish (Romans 2:12-13). It appears from certain Scriptures that there are "levels" (or degrees) of rewards in heaven and punishment in hell (Luke 10:12, 14; 12:35-48; 20:47; John 19:11). If so, then the unsaved whose works were better or not as bad presumably would suffer less in hell than those whose deeds were worse.

Additionally, it is also clear that all Christians — though they will all be saved — will be judged according to their works (Romans 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 4:5; 2 Corinthians 5:9-11; Revelation 22:12), and that they will be rewarded accordingly. So while Christians will also be judged by their works, this judgment will be in regard to their rewards not their salvation (1 Corinthians 3:10-15; John 3:16-18; 5:24; Romans 8:1; see also Revelation 20:11-15).

THE SCRIPTURES AND SALVATION

Lightner has written:

"Personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone as Savior is the one and only condition for human salvation. Over one hundred times in the New Testament, faith in Christ, for those who are capable of exercising it, is made the one human requirement for receiving eternal life."⁷¹

In the same vein, James Bjornstad wrote:

"The Bible is very clear in its teachings regarding salvation. Personal faith, belief, or trust in

Jesus Christ as one's Savior is both *necessary* (if one does not have this, one is not saved)⁷² and *sufficient* (if one has this, one is saved).⁷³ Paul's response to the Philippian jailer's question, 'What must I do to be saved?' is to the point: 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved.'⁷⁴

Geisler and MacKenzie concur:

"In the Gospel of John only one condition is laid down for obtaining eternal life: belief (e.g., John 3:16, 36; 5:24; 20:31). If salvation were not by faith alone then John's whole message would be misleading, since it states that there is only one condition for salvation when actually there are two: faith plus works. Indeed, John states explicitly that the only 'work' necessary for salvation is to believe. When asked, 'What can we do to accomplish the works of God?' Jesus replied, 'This is the work of God, that you *believe* in the one he sent' (John 6:29, emphasis added). There simply is nothing else we may do in exchange for our salvation. Jesus did it all (John 19:30; Heb. 10:14).'⁷⁵

Endnotes:

1. For example, see the back page of PFO's tract "A Gospel Test for Jehovah's Witnesses." The verses often included in the "Roman Road" presentation of the Gospel include: Romans 3:23; 6:23; 5:8; 10:9-10, 13.
2. Robert P. Lightner, *Sin, the Savior, and Salvation: The Theology of Everlasting Life*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1991, pg. 158.
3. The Proclaiming the Gospel website is located at: www.pro-gospel.org/.
4. Theodore M. Hesburgh in Richard P. McBrien, General Editor, *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995, Foreword, pg. xvii.
5. Gary G. Michuta, *The Gospel According to James McCarthy*. Port Huron, Mich.: The Grotto Press, 2003, pg. 8.
6. The Catholic Answers website is located at: www.catholic.com.
7. Jimmy Akin, *The Drama of Salvation: How God Rescues Us from Our Sins and Brings Us to Eternal Life*. El Cajon, Calif.: Catholic Answers Press, 2015, pg. 22. This

book is a revision of Akin's earlier work *The Salvation Controversy* (El Cajon, Calif.: Catholic Answers Press, 2001).

8. *Ibid.*

9. From an e-mail correspondence from Jimmy (James) Akin to author, dated 5/18/15. Copy on file.

10. Fr. William J. Cogan, *A Brief Catechism for Adults: A Complete Handbook On How To Be a Good Catholic*. Rockford, Ill.: TAN Books and Publishers, Inc., 1993, pg. 49.

11. Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1995, pg. 242, italics in original.

12. Akin e-mail, dated 5/18/15, op. cit., asterisks in original.

13. *Ibid.*

14. John A. Hardon, *Pocket Catholic Dictionary*. New York: Doubleday, 1985, "State of Grace," pg. 418.

15. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. New York: Doubleday, 1994, Section 1257, pg. 352.

16. *Ibid.*, Section 1260, pg. 353.

17. *Ibid.*, Section 1261, pg. 353.

18. James G. McCarthy, *The Gospel According to Rome*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1995, pp. 26-27.

19. *Ibid.*, italics in original.

20. *Pocket Catholic Dictionary*, op. cit., "Limbo," pg. 229.

21. See further, M. Kurt Goedelman, "No More Limbo," *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 2007, pg. 23.

22. *Pocket Catholic Dictionary*, op. cit., "Limbo," pg. 229.

23. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, op. cit., Section 1257, pg. 352, italics in original.

24. *Ibid.*, Section 1258, pg. 352, italics in original.

25. H.J. Schroeder, Translator, *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*. Rockford, Ill.: TAN Books and Publishers, Inc., Sixth Session, Chapter VIII, pg. 35.

26. The "Precepts of the Church" will be defined later in this article.

27. Matthias Premm, *Dogmatic Theology for the Laity*. Rockford, Ill.: TAN Books and Publishers, Inc., 1977, pg. 262, italics in original.

28. *Ibid.*, italics in original.

29. *Ibid.*, pg. 263.

30. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994, pg. 194, italics in original.

31. R.C. Sproul cited in John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Protestants & Catholics: Do They Now Agree?* Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1995, pg. 38. Ankerberg and Weldon cite Sproul from a transcript of his lecture, "Justification by Faith."

32. *The Essential Catholic Handbook*. Ligouri, Mo.: Ligouri Publications, 1997, pp. 229-230.

33. R.C. Sproul, *Justified by Faith Alone*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1999, pg.

16. Dr. Sproul is an expert on Catholicism and has written several excellent works dealing with it. This booklet may be his shortest and most succinct treatment contrasting the Catholic and Protestant views of salvation. I highly recommend it. For a more thorough examination of these contrasting views of salvation, see R.C. Sproul, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1995). A penetrating Protestant analysis and critique of six doctrinal differences between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism (including justification) can be found in R.C. Sproul, *Are We Together?: A Protestant Analyzes Roman Catholicism* (Sanford, Fla.: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2012).

34. *Justified by Faith Alone*, op. cit., pg. 17.

35. My thanks to Dr. Robert Lightner for this illustration of how faith relates to our salvation.

36. Much of the material in this paragraph is taken from *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification*, op. cit., pp. 121-125.

37. Robert P. Lightner, *A Biblical Case for Total Inerrancy*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1978, pg. 174.

38. *Sin, the Savior, and Salvation*, op. cit., pg. 162.

39. My thanks to the late Pastor Bill Rodenberg of Scofield Memorial Church in Dallas, Texas, for these two Scripture citations regarding the relationship between baptism and salvation.

40. Peter M.J. Stravinskias, editor, *Catholic Dictionary*. Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 2002, "Mortal Sin," pg. 521.

41. *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification*, op. cit., pp. 144-151.

42. John H. Armstrong, *The Catholic Mystery*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1999, pg. 64, italics in original.

43. Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures With Catholics*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 2000, pg. 126.

44. *Ibid.*, italics in original.

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 136-137.

46. My thanks to Lutheran pastor Ken Larson for this Scripture citation.

47. *Protestants & Catholics: Do They Now Agree?*, op. cit., pg. 24.

48. *Justified by Faith Alone*, op. cit., pg. 38, italics in original.

49. *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification*, op. cit., pg. 102. Sproul's citation of Calvin is from John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, translated by Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964, 2:39, 3.11.3).

50. *Justified by Faith Alone*, op. cit., pg. 38.

51. From an e-mail correspondence from the Rev. Peter M.J. Stravinskias to author, dated 6/26/15. Copy on file. In a different e-mail (also dated 6/26/15 and on file), he explained that whether or not the temporal punishment remained would depend

upon whether or not the penitent had the correct inner disposition regarding his or her sin.

52. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, op. cit., Section 1472, pg. 411, italics in original.

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.*, Section 1473, pg. 411.

55. *Ibid.*, Section 1471, pg. 411.

56. *Ibid.*

57. Juan Carlos Ortiz, *Living With Jesus Today*. Altamonte Springs, Fla.: Creation House, 1982, pp. 161-163. Although I don't recommend this book, I am indebted to it for the Scripture (Colossians 2:13) and the insights on this verse that it provided.

58. Joseph A. Kenney, *Purgatory: Doctrine of Comfort and Hope*. New Haven, Conn.: Catholic Information Service, Knights of Columbus, n.d., pg. 5. Because Catholicism teaches that purgatory is a state of suffering, note the incongruous description of the Catholic dogma of purgatory given in the title.

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2, 10-11.

60. See further, J. Greg Sheryl, "Is the Bible Too Thin? - Weighing the Evidence for the Apocrypha," *The Quarterly Journal*, January-March 2015, pp. 1, 10-20.

61. Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible* (NASB). Chicago: Moody Press, 1995, from the study note on John 19:30, pg. 1719.

62. My thanks to Dr. Stephen R. Spencer for this insight.

63. Dr. Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*. Rockford, Ill.: TAN Books and Publishers, Inc., 1974, pg. 262.

64. Karl Keating, *Catholicism and Fundamentalism: The Attack on "Romanism" by "Bible Christians"*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988, pg. 166.

65. *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals*, op. cit., pg. 231.

66. *Ibid.*, footnote 51.

67. Erwin Lutzer, *The Doctrines That Divide*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1998, pg. 234.

68. *Justified by Faith Alone*, op. cit., pg. 27.

69. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, op. cit., Sections 2052-2053, pg. 553.

70. *Ibid.*, Section 2053, pg. 553.

71. *Sin, the Savior, and Salvation*, op. cit., pg. 159.

72. James Bjornstad here references, in an endnote, the following Scripture verses: John 3:18; 8:24; Hebrews 4:2; 11:6.

73. James Bjornstad here references, in an endnote, the following Scripture verses: John 3:14-15; 5:24; 6:40, 47; 20:30-31; Acts 10:43; 16:31; Romans 1:16-17; 1 John 5:1, 13.

74. James Bjornstad, "At What Price Success? The Boston (Church of Christ) Movement," *Christian Research Journal*, Winter 1993, pg. 28, italics in original.

75. *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals*, op. cit., pg. 231, italic in original.

truth that they would “be turned aside to fables” (2 Timothy 4:4). To not have a doctrinal base and foundation is like trying to read without knowing the alphabet. Without doctrine there is a spiritual vacuum. Jesus spoke of an empty house that is taken over by demonic spirits. Something must (and will) fill the void created by doctrinal ignorance.

2. Experience is exalted over truth. In our present day, every person’s experience, no matter how bizarre, is given credence. However, experience can be tainted by sin, imagination, emotion, bias, and motive.

Each experience must be tested by the truth of the Word of God, not naively accepted. When Peter wrote of his experience on the Mount of Transfiguration (seeing the gloried Christ) he was quick to add that “we have the prophetic *word* confirmed” (2 Peter 1:19, emphasis added). Peter then wrote of the inspired, unchangeable Scriptures given by God through the Holy Spirit (vv. 20-21). Anyone can make claims, but for the believer Scripture must be the final arbiter.

Paul reminded us that, “God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints” (1 Corinthians 14:33). Paul then spoke of his inspired pronouncements as the way out of the confusion, “If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord” (v. 37).

Crouch often said, “The man with an experience is never at the mercy of a man with an argument.” But truth must trump experience every time. People make up stories for attention, notoriety, or financial gain. Marjoe Gortner, Peter Popoff, James Hydrick, John Todd, Lauren Stratford, Roberts Liardon, Ron Wyatt, Eddie Long are just a few cases in point.

These con artists know that Christians are naive and trusting of those using religious language. They pray and then prey. The Bible warns that there will be “trickery of men in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting” (Ephesians 4:14). We have a responsibility to be cautious and even suspicious of wild claims. It is providential that Personal Freedom Outreach is based in the “Show Me State.”

3. People no longer study or know of the history of the Church or of the history of Christian doctrine. There are no new heresies, just old ones reintroduced. Louis Berkhof touches on this problem:

“The checks and the roadsigns of the past were not taken into consideration, and ancient heresies, long since condemned by the Church, are constantly repeated and represented as new discoveries. The lessons of the past are greatly neglected, and many seem to feel that they should strike out entirely on

their own, as if very little had been accomplished in the past. Surely, a theologian must take account of the present situation in the religious world, and ever study the truth anew, but he cannot neglect the lessons of the past with impunity” (*The History of Christian Doctrines*, pg. 5).

We can begin to combat this problem by studying and knowing doctrine. Paul said we are to heed doctrine (1 Timothy 4:16). The Greek word for “heed” means to lay hold of and give attention to. *The Great Doctrines of the Bible* by William Evans is a good book in which to find a systematic study of the doctrines of Scripture. That volume may be more than a hundred years old, but it is still viable. And there are many others, such as *Lectures in Systematic Theology* by Henry Theissen and Herbert Lockyer’s *All the Doctrines of the Bible*. A more recent publication, *Christianity According to the Bible* by Ron Rhodes, is a reader-friendly course in systematic theology. While many of these works are out of print, a search on the Internet can help locate them and they often can be purchased at a fraction of their original cost.

We should be Bereans and check against the Scripture anything we hear by way of religious claims (Acts 17:11). If we are going to love God with all of our mind we must take doctrine seriously. We need to immerse ourselves in it.

Take, as an example, the doctrine of God. When we hear a New Age “prophet” say God is a “force” in everything, we know he is wrong. That is Pantheism. A force does not create, love, save, or speak, nor is it called “He.” We call God our Father, not our force. The Bible is clear that the Creator and the created are distinct.

In 1 Timothy, Paul urged sound doctrine (1:9-10). The Greek root for “sound” is *hugiaino*. Sound doctrine can be translated with the words “healthy doctrine.” Healthy doctrine keeps us spiritually healthy. Paul further wrote of good doctrine (4:6). He also said that there was wholesome words and doctrine, which accords to godliness (6:3). The *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* tells us that:

“Christianity is a way of life founded on doctrine. Some disparage doctrine in favor of the spiritual life. Paul, however, taught that spiritual growth in Christ is dependent on faithfulness to sound doctrine, for its truth provides the means of growth (Col. 2:6)” (pg. 185).

The root meaning of the word “doctrine” is the concept of teaching or instruction. It is the content of what Jesus and the apostles taught and what Scripture teaches. Jesus in John 17:14 said, “I have given them Your word.” It is so important that Paul wrote, “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you have learned, and avoid them” (Romans 16:17). Abandoning sound doctrine can only bring deception (v. 18) and religious confusion.

—GRF

After much personal and ministerial hardship they divorced in 2007.

Cain was born Jonathan Leonard Friga. His marriage to White is also his third. He is known for his work with a variety of rock bands including The Babys, Journey, and Bad English. He co-authored the 1981 hit song, "Don't Stop Believin'," which became the anthem of Journey. More recently, the song has been reintroduced into pop culture via television programs such as *The Sopranos* and *Glee*, as well as by several professional sports teams.

In addition to her roles as pastor, author, and motivational speaker, White is described as "a renowned life coach," yet her own life appears to taint that calling. Beyond her previous two failed marriages, she was a target of the Senate Finance Committee headed by Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, had foreclosure proceedings filed against her Without Walls church, and had her moral integrity questioned when, in 2010, a supermarket tabloid published photos of her emerging from a hotel in Rome hand-in-hand with faith healer Benny Hinn.

Following her divorce from Randy White, she became sole senior pastor of Without Walls church. In 2011, she resigned that role giving the leadership position back to Randy as she became senior pastor at New Destiny Christian Center in Apopka, Fla., on Dec. 31. New Destiny was founded in 1996 by the late Zachery Tims.

—MKG

FILM PRODUCTION OF "THE SHACK" BEGINS

Lionsgate, a Canadian-American entertainment company, has started the film adaptation of William Paul Young's novel, *The Shack*. The book was first published in 2007 and reportedly sold more than 18 million copies.

Personal Freedom Outreach has cautioned against Young's novel because it undermines Scripture, presents a mutilated Gospel, and misrepresents the biblical teaching of the Godhead. In the book, Young depicts God the Father as a large black woman known as "Papa." Other apologists and theologians have also been outspoken in their disapproval of the unbiblical content of Young's fictional narrative.

Academy Award winning actress Octavia Spencer was cast as God in the film. Spencer won the Oscar for her best supporting actress role in the 2011 film *The Help*, and has appeared in numerous movies and television shows. Israeli actor Aviv Alush will play Jesus. Alush is reported to be "one of the most outstanding television actors in Israel."

The Shack appeared on *The New York Times* Best Seller list for more than 180 straight weeks, and was number one for 52 weeks.

Principal photography on the motion picture began on June 8, 2015, in Vancouver, Canada. However, no release date for the film has been announced.

—MKG

PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH — STATEMENT OF BELIEF

- I. THE BIBLE AS THE DIVINELY INSPIRED, INERRANT WORD OF GOD: IT IS IN ITS ENTIRETY THE SOLE AUTHORITY FOR ALL MATTERS OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF AND PRACTICE.
- II. THE ONE TRUE GOD. IN THE ONE TRUE GOD THERE EXIST THREE PERSONS, BEING: THE FATHER, THE SON JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.
- III. JESUS CHRIST: HIS DEITY, HUMANITY, VIRGIN BIRTH, SINLESSNESS, DEATH AND BODILY RESURRECTION; WHO WILL PERSONALLY AND VISIBLY RETURN AGAIN TO EARTH.
- IV. THE PERSONALITY AND DEITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.
- V. THE EXISTENCE AND PERSONALITY OF SATAN, HIS TOTAL OPPOSITION TO GOD, AND HIS POWER OVER THE UNREGENERATE.
- VI. THE COMPLETE AND TOTAL DEPRAVITY OF ALL MEN WHICH MAKES THEM HOPELESSLY LOST WITHOUT THE NEW BIRTH OBTAINABLE THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.
- VII. THE FINAL ESTATE OF MAN: FOR THE SAVED, EVERLASTING LIFE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND FOR THE UNSAVED, EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT BECAUSE OF THEIR UNBELIEF.
- VIII. THE GOSPEL, BY WHICH WE ARE SAVED BEING SUMMED IN THE DEATH, BURIAL, AND RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.
- IX. THE CHURCH BEING THE BODY OF CHRIST, UNITED IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, CONSISTING OF THOSE WHO HAVE RECEIVED JESUS CHRIST AS SAVIOR. A LOCAL CHURCH IS AN ORGANIZED ASSEMBLY OF BELIEVERS UNITED FOR THE PURPOSE OF CARRYING OUT THE GREAT COMMISSION OF CHRIST.
- X. THE GREAT COMMISSION OF CHRIST BEING TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO ALL MEN, BAPTIZING AND DISCIPLING THOSE WHO HAVE BELIEVED.



Books in Review

GOD'S SUPER-APOSTLES

by R. Douglas Geivett and Holly Pivec

Weaver Book Company, 159 pages, \$12.99

Many within evangelical and mainstream churches know very little, if anything, about the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) movement. However, this group of authority-wielding and self-appointed apostles, prophets, miracle workers, and demon busters warrants our attention because, "The path of a new religious movement led by apostles and prophets is strewn with confused people, divided churches, and strained families as people are forced to make painful choices between those they love and what they believe to be the truth of God's Word" (pg. 2).

God's Super-Apostles is a well-written inventory of the critical teachings and key participants of the movement.

The NAR is no insignificant coterie. "Today, about three million people in the United States attend churches that openly embrace NAR apostles and prophets. And that number doesn't include the many Pentecostal and charismatic churches that have not openly embraced these leaders, yet have been influenced by their teachings in varying degrees" (pp. 3-4). And one can add to that number the many in Africa, Latin America, and Asia who have fallen under the movement's influence.

The main topics are presented in a point/counterpoint style. One chapter details what the NAR says about a subject; the next chapter presents what the Bible has to say about it. The authors examine apostles, prophets, spiritual warfare, and miracles. While the chapters are a quick read, there is no shortage of content. Readers are provided with the particulars on the Manifest Sons of God, Joel's Army, spiritual mapping, prayer walking, territorial spirits, fivefold ministry, Seven Mountain Mandate, apostolic unity, and more.

The volume also contains numerous panels set within the chapters that incorporate lists and facts to supplement the subject matter being discussed. There is an abundance of footnotes to document the claims and unbiblical statements made by NAR leaders. Names are named so that there is no confusion or ambiguity about who is being addressed.

The book demonstrates the confusion and inconsistencies of the NAR movement. While members of this group assert themselves as spiritual elite with divine authority, they don't see eye-to-eye on even basic teachings. For example, "Apostle Peter Wagner believes that a personal appearance from Christ should not serve as a litmus test for determining whether a person is truly an apostle," while Rick Joyner believes "an appearance from Christ is a non-negotiable requirement for being an apostle" (pg. 34). Likewise, "Wagner believes that working miraculous signs and wonders is not required of NAR apostles," whereas Bill Hamon and others "do believe that miracles are required of all today's apostles" (pg. 36).

The book also identifies media outlets that help promote the NAR agenda. For example, Stephen Strang and others within his *Charisma* publishing syndicate present themselves as the champions of discernment. Yet Strang and *Charisma* have association with the International Coalition of Apostolic Leaders. And *Charisma*, or one of its affiliates, is publisher for NAR leaders Mike Bickle, John Dawson, and Johnny Enlow.

Geivett and Pivec establish just how bizarre this movement is. In the chapter, "A Miracle-Working Army," they write, "Adults aren't the only ones who must learn to work miracles. Children, too, are trained to work miracles. Some NAR churches do this by holding weekly PowerClubs, founded by the organization Kids in Ministry International. Unlike more traditional church clubs, such as Awana, where children study the Bible, PowerClubs teach children to work miracles, like prophesying and healing people. Many NAR churches train children to work miracles in their Sunday school classes. At Bethel Church [in Redding, Calif.], children are encouraged to talk with angels, interpret each other's dreams, and practice raising the dead by wrapping each other in toilet paper like mummies" (pp. 105-106).

Three appendices round out the volume and provide counsel (for parents and pastors) to interact with those influenced by the NAR, as well as some thoughts on how you can know if your church is associated with the NAR. The book's value is enhanced with an extensive glossary — even though the authors do an admirable job of defining their terms within the chapters — along with separate indexes of names, subjects, and Scripture verses.

All of this and more is why Geivett and Pivec's *God's Super-Apostles* is urgently needed and so important.

—MKG

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