

Mary Ann Pakiz

### ***God's Word Needs No Authority Other Than Itself***

God's Word needs no authority other than itself. When I comprehended that principle, I was free--free to search the Scriptures for truth! In them, I found the way to God. Man gets to God, God's way, through Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Bible. *"I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me"* (John 14:6).

#### **The Authority Issue**

For many years, I had been led to believe that the Catholic Church was the final authority of my faith, and that I had no right to question its teaching. The Roman Catholic system teaches that all authority comes from God, but that God has appointed the Catholic system to be the guardian of His authority. Therefore, everything has to be weighed in the light of Catholic tradition and teaching, as theirs is held to be the only system in which truth is deposited. A Catholic cannot believe in the Scriptures without the authority of the Church to accredit the Scriptures! The Roman Catholic Church declares that God's authority is not sufficient to oblige men to believe and bow to it; it seeks to place church authority above God's authority. **True faith is faith in what God has said because God has said it!** Faith in God is belief in God's Word, the Bible, without any authority other than itself. *"Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve"* (Luke 4:8).

#### **Catholic Baptism**

I came under Catholic authority in 1948 when I was re-baptized and converted to Catholicism. I was born in 1930 to Finnish immigrant parents of a Lutheran persuasion. Our neighbors, who were immigrants from Yugoslavia and Italy, had a strong influence on my formative years. As exemplary Catholics, who witnessed to us about their faith, and who lived lives of good works and good deeds, of which we often were the recipients, they were committed to bringing the neighborhood under the headship of Rome. They reached out to us with what

they thought was the truth. They were sincere, but sincerely wrong. It is important to remember that individual Catholics are not our enemies; rather, they are precious souls whom God loves and for whom He commands us to reach with the Gospel of His Grace. Salvation is by grace. Grace is unmerited favor. We cannot earn grace, nor do we deserve grace. *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”* (Ephesians 2:8-9).

### **Faith's Object**

The Roman Catholic believes that salvation is based on water and works. Baptismal regeneration is the cornerstone of the Catholic system. The Church teaches that no one can enter the kingdom of heaven unless he or she is baptized. The source of Catholic faith is the Church. Its object is loyalty to the Church. Therefore, Catholic faith is in itself. The Christian, however, knows that salvation is based on Christ's work alone, a finished work to which nothing can be added. The source of Christian faith is the Bible. Its object is Jesus Christ. Therefore, true faith is in a Person. In order for faith to be operative, it must be anchored to the person of Jesus Christ.

### **Blind Acceptance**

Rather than searching the Scriptures for truth to find out if Catholic teaching was in line with God's Word, I blindly accepted everything the priest told me during my instructions to become a Catholic, except for one request. He asked me to bring my King James version of the Bible to the rectory which he said had to be burned because it was not the official Catholic version. Instead, I gave it to my mother.

During my instructions, the stress was on papal supremacy and infallibility. I was told that Christ made Peter the first pope to head the Church on earth with infallible authority. The Pope, as Christ's representative on earth, guided all people, Catholic or not, into all truth (Vatican Council, 1870). Presently, as I reflect on this Church tenet, I do not find any evidence from Scripture that Christ actually gave any such authority to Peter or even that the apostles considered Peter to have a special position of authority. Furthermore, Peter would have known that he was a pope and certainly would have said something about it. If he had known it, how is it that he did not act as pope?

### **Becoming a “Bride of Christ”**

In 1950, I took another step to come further under Catholic authority by entering the Order of St. Benedict to become a sister. I had been working as a nurse's aide at a local hospital run by the Benedictine Sisters, and, as I was so impressed with their gracious service to the patients and staff, I decided that I, too, wanted to spend my life serving others.

My first year in the convent, as a postulant, was one of the happiest years of my life. Our postulant mistress was a kind, fair, and understanding woman. There were eighteen girls of various ages and backgrounds in our group. They were eager and excited to serve the Catholic Church and to live by the rule of St. Benedict. We shared many happy times together. There were more serious moments for me, too, when I prayed in the chapel and gazed up at the crucifix wondering why Jesus had to die on Calvary's Cross.

Before we became novices, we marched down the church aisle in bridal attire to become “brides of Christ”. Nothing much was said about Jesus as we prepared for this event. Rather, our emotions were at high pitch over the changes in our names. I went from Miss Mary Ann to Sr. M. Laurian, O.S.B. I was a bride of Christ, and I knew little about Him other than He was the Son of God.



Mary Ann was eager to serve as a nun. She was on the extreme right

### **A Stockpile of Good Works**

During the five year preparation period for our final vows, we studied the Rule of Saint Benedict, canon law, church history, a bit about Jesuit casuistry (the end justifies the means), and the lives of the saints. The emphasis was on self-denial and submission of one’s will to the authority figure under whose charge we were. St. Therese, the Little Flower, was held up before us as a role model so we would emulate her way to God. It was a way based on “offering up” the daily vexations of life to make up for our sins or the sins of others. We were busy trying to build a

stockpile of good works by which we could make ourselves more acceptable to God. We were offering our self-made sacrifices to God because we did not know that we could get to God because of the offering Jesus Christ made of Himself in our behalf at Calvary. When Jesus said to God, *“I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do,”* He meant the work He did in behalf of sinners was complete and could not be added to. (John 17:4).

### **Back in the World**

In our last three years as scholastics, some of the group left the motherhouse for teaching assignments in the diocese. We returned in the summer, and it was great to be back together again. I needed the rest and relaxation after my first year of teaching forty-five students in grades five and six combined. I had no training in elementary education but was told there would be a blessing in obedience. In 1955, five months before my final vows, I left the convent due to health problems and returned to the home of my parents.

Back in the world, I was able to get on with my life, by completing my education at the University of Minnesota, earning a Bachelor of Science Degree in Elementary Education, and in 1957, married a man from a staunch Catholic family. We were blessed with two children. My husband's brother is a priest in our diocese; a humble, sweet man who writes poetry about nature, God, and his church.

### **Salvation’s Meaning Brought Home**

In 1972, my children, then ages twelve and five, were invited to a neighborhood backyard Bible club. We asked our priest-uncle if they could attend; he didn't seem to be concerned about it and gave his consent. This had to be the work of God! From that point on, our lives were dramatically changed!

The children came home each day with Bible verses to memorize. When they recited them, God touched my heart as well as theirs. I learned the most important truth about myself--**I was a sinner**, and, as such, **was separated from God!** Because God permits no sin or sinner in heaven, I was lost! How was I going to solve this sin issue? I wanted **to be sure** I would go to heaven when I died. I decided to study the Bible on my own. John 17:17, in which Jesus said to God, “*Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth*”, was the first verse the Holy Spirit used to motivate my study of salvation.

My search for answers began in Acts 16:31, “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved*”, and Acts 4:12, “*Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*” Moving on to Romans, I learned that Christ satisfied the just demands of a Holy God for judgment on sin by His death on the Cross. “*Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law*” (Romans 3:28).

It was an overwhelming realization that none of my past sins had ever been dealt with, even though I had confessed them to the priest and performed the prescribed penance! Going to confession had given me a counterfeit peace and security that my sins had been forgiven by the words of the priest plus the doing of penance. Actually, the priest does not have the power to forgive sins even if he claims he does so in the name of Jesus. Our sins are forgiven only by appropriating the shed blood of Jesus in our place. “*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God*” (Romans 3:23-25). God has never given authority to any person to make the decision as to whether another person's sins will be forgiven or not, as He is the only one who truly knows what is in that person's heart. My search caused me to be able to answer the question I asked of myself while in the convent as to why Jesus had to die on the Cross. **Jesus paid the price for my sin by His death on the Cross!** Jesus paid our hell-death penalty in full. Yes, we deserve hell for our sins. Remember, under no circumstance, will God allow sin or a sinner in His heaven. Jesus paid the penalty for our sin so we can spend eternity with God in heaven. The time had come for me to make a decision. Acting on the Bible, as my sole, absolute, and final authority of faith, I received Christ as my Savior in May of 1973. I wanted to shout from the roof tops so all the world could hear what Jesus has done for them by His substitutionary atonement and shed blood. “*And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*” (John 8:32).

### **True Christian Faith and the Roman System**

As I witnessed to my Catholic friends and relatives, I saw more clearly that the eternal destiny of many souls was at stake here. I was grieved by their response to the Gospel, they continued to believe that the Catholic Church was the one true church and they trusted it for salvation regardless of what the Bible said. In other words, they had been brought up allowing other human beings or a set of man-made rules to do their thinking for them. In 1545, the Council of Trent declared that church tradition was of equal authority with the Bible. To put anything on a par with or above God's Word is idolatry! In fact, the “leaven” of the Catholic system is the discrediting of the Bible as the sole, absolute, and final authority of faith.

We must think of God rightfully as He is revealed to us through His Word. God the Father and God the Son are one. In John 10:30, Jesus said, *"I and my Father are one."* Because Jesus Christ is God, our sins have been cleansed in the blood of God; only the perfect blood of God could wash them completely away in order to thus satisfy the demands of a holy and righteous God. The ground of my salvation or the basis of my justification is the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ, and, when I, by faith, receive (appropriate) the substitutionary atonement of Jesus in my place as full payment of my hell-death penalty, God imputes the righteousness of Jesus Christ to me. That is, He reckons me as righteous. In no way am I righteous of myself and as such in no way can I save myself or keep myself saved; **it is all of Jesus!** Jesus Christ is my righteousness. It is only "in Christ" that I am righteous. I am not worthy to approach God of myself. However, when I approach God in my substitute, that is, in Christ, I am accounted worthy to do so by God because He sees me in the perfect righteousness of His Son! Justification of the believer is instantaneous.

The Catholic system denies that we are justified by that faith which receives and rests on Christ alone for salvation which is freely offered to us by grace. Instead, they teach we are justified, not simply by faith in Christ, but by faith which has become activated by good works. This faith, as taught in the Catholic system, is said to justify the sinner, not because it rests on the righteousness of Christ, but because it is a righteousness inherent in man, a righteousness which is the product of baptism which makes an individual capable of obedience to the teaching of the Catholic system of divine grace through the sacraments. Justification is not of faith, but of the sacraments. So, therefore, the justification of the Catholic individual is progressive, being regenerated by baptism, being purified from time to time by confession and penance, growing in grace and holiness through the reception of the other sacraments, so that one day he or she will be holy enough to make it to purgatory! So, then, the Catholic believes he is accepted by God by his inherent righteousness which has been sacramentally infused at baptism and nourished by the worthy reception of the other sacraments. As the Catholic receives sanctifying grace attached to each sacrament, he or she is taught that he or she actually becomes righteous or holy on the basis of his own intrinsic word without any righteousness imputed.

### **My Mission Field**

The differences between the true Christian faith and the Roman Catholic system were becoming so obvious to me that in 1976, I left the Catholic Church and took my place with Bible-believing Christians. When I was saved in 1973, I told the Lord that I would be willing to go to the mission field anywhere. He took me at my word, and, in 1994, sent me to my mission field--dialysis. He permitted my kidney to fail first, and in order to survive, I need dialysis therapy three times a week. I thank and praise God in these circumstances as He has given me the opportunity to share His precious Gospel of Grace with seriously ill patients who need to prepare to meet God! The message of the Gospel, of all that the Lord Christ did and suffered is that the Lord Christ is ready to receive all sinners that come to Him. Jesus Christ saves all them, who come to God by Him. Believe on Him alone and you will be secure, accepted in Jesus Christ, that you may behold His Glory, knowing that such it will be for all eternity. The light and truth of the Lord are transforming. In the words of the Apostle Paul, *"we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."* (2 Corinthians 3:18)