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Living Water -- Peace with God

I believe that it is God's will that we who have found spiritual healing through Christ should speak out and testify about this to others, God's purpose being that of touching others through those He has already touched.

The Cry of Heresy

My conversion from Romanism to Christ did not come about in a moment but was the result of a long and, I must say, painful process that took several years. It began during my college days in Assisi, Italy. One day my professor was giving a lecture on Church history and he was dealing with pope Honorius I (626-638), one of the many popes who, according to the Church, taught error. Pope Honorius I became involved in the controversy regarding the Monothelite heresy, with which he agreed. This doctrine taught that Christ had one will, His own personal will. This was in contrast to the biblical teaching that He had two wills, His human will and the divine will. The Third Council of Constantinople (AD 680-681) condemned those who supported the Monothelite heresy, and this included pope Honorius I.

I was forcibly struck by the fact that even the Church of Rome recognized that pope Honorius I accepted heretical teaching whereas in 1870 the Vatican Council defined the Dogma of Papal Infallibility, which declared that the pope of Rome was absolutely inerrant in his solemn ex-cathedra definitions and decrees in matters of faith and morals. I had also learned how the Fathers of that council explicitly stated that, although the Dogma of 1870 had only just been defined, its truth had always existed, thus inferring that all the popes from St. Peter to pope Pius IX, who was still alive at the time, were all infallible. It was claimed that God inspired them all and that their succession was from the same divine source. I felt impelled to ask my professor how he could reconcile the fact that the belief of pope Honorius I was contrary to the official teaching of the Church. My professor replied that pope Honorius I did teach error, but that when he did so he was not speaking ex-cathedra as the pope, but as a private theologian.

Rome's Lack of Assurance

In the seminary where I was living, we did not follow a strict monastic life, although we had to perform certain penances and sacrifices, which included fasting and abstinence, and we had to go to the confessional and practice meditation, as well as take part in spiritual retreats. We were

taught that in spite of all this we could not be certain of our salvation, since one of the dogmas of the Church is that anyone who claims to be sure of his salvation is certainly lost.

Doubting Castle

I realized once more that the Church was contradicting itself, but for a time I did not dare say this to anybody, and so I kept on fighting my doubts single-handedly. Then one day, being deeply concerned, I felt I must speak to my Father Confessor. His reply was quick and blunt, "My boy, these thoughts are just temptations of the devil." It was clear to me that the Roman Church was trying to pervert the truth in saying that convictions from the Holy Spirit were the work of the devil.

I was far from being convinced. I knew John 3:16, which I quoted to prove that my concern had a solid foundation, but my boldness merely resulted in getting me a terrific lesson on humility and on blind obedience to the Church. As you probably noticed, it was blind obedience to the Church that I was told to have and not to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Confession Box

By this time I had ceased to go to the confessional regularly. I had never been enthusiastic about the spoken confessional, and when I went I did so more because of outward compulsion than by inner conviction. At times, I found the confessional to be a real burden and a cruel torturing of the conscience.

I stress this point because one of the arguments brought by Romanists is that it brings a sense of comfort to the penitent as he pours out his sins into the ear of the priest, whose absolution removes the burden of sin and guilt. It is true that a kind of comfort may be experienced in this way, but it has no lasting effect and is nothing more than a passing emotion. Later on, I served five years as a priest in the Roman Church. This may seem a short period, but it was long enough for me to learn a great deal about confession and the confessional. I heard the confessions of many people, some of whom I knew personally. In some of them there was deep sincerity and a longing to get deliverance from some besetting sin or vice, and yet these people, much to their own distress, had to come week after week, confessing the same sins which quite often were shameful and hated sins. "Why don't I get deliverance?" was their anxious question. My duty as their Father Confessor was supposed to bring them peace, but I could never give them a convincing assurance and neither could anyone else in my position.

The priest may tell the penitent that he is lacking in sincerity or not fulfilling the required conditions for a valid confession. Sometimes the priest would threaten to deny sacramental absolution for these habitual sins. One can imagine the terrible effect that this tyrannical method can have on the minds of these thirsty but blind souls.

Living Water

I cannot help thinking of that lovely incident in the life of Christ when He met the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well. There we have the true answer needed by thirsty souls. However,

people who are being deceived by being continually compelled to go to the priest for the quenching of their spiritual thirst never find the true answer. *“Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again.”* The Roman confessional is just like the water of Jacob's well. Water may satisfy, but only for a time. Jesus went on to say, *“But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life”* (John 4:13-14).

We see here that the true source of lasting satisfaction is the Lord Jesus Christ, who knows the secret need of every sinner and who has the water for each one. Jesus also said, *“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”* (Matthew 11:28). This offer comes from the heart of God; but no priest, bishop, or pope in the Church of Rome can ever give this peace of heart, which they themselves lack. People remain thirsty, heavy-laden, and helpless until God Himself satisfies them. Then, just as a stream fills a well, so the gift of God gives blessing after blessing with the promise of eternal life.

Perplexed Ordination

In my own search, I suddenly came up against a personal problem. The idea of giving up the vocation to the priesthood occurred to me, but I at once rejected it as a heinous temptation. I was doing my last year of theological studies and was almost ready to receive ordination. I also thought about the honor of my family, since in a Roman Catholic country it is considered a great privilege and honor to have a priest in the family. I thought of my parents and friends who were looking forward to seeing me celebrate the Mass as a priest. I now realize that these were insignificant considerations, but as I did not then know the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord. I felt powerless to follow my convictions.

I went through my ordination and became a priest, after which I was sent to a parish as curate-in-charge. I began my ministry with enthusiasm and even had some success, which removed some of my old doubts. In my parish work, I felt I was in a new atmosphere and in different surroundings and I felt I had a certain freedom that I did not have in my college life. I began to take the liberty of reading the Bible and other books, which were forbidden by the Church. Later on, as parish priest, I encountered many people and entered into religious discussions with them.

By God's Providence

One day, during an intimate conversation with a Franciscan monk, I had a revelation that shocked me. I discovered that he was going through the same painful experiences regarding the assurance of salvation as those through which I had gone. I began to ask myself, *“If the Church of Rome is the true Church of Christ, how is it that one of its best followers, a man of integrity and a disciplined life, is uncertain of his salvation and is suffering intense spiritual perplexity?”* My doubts revived and I found myself in another spiritual crisis, but one that this time eventually led to my release. The immediate consequence of this crisis was that the Mass, the Confessional, and other priestly duties became a great burden.

By Grace, God's Light

Then for a time I sought release in amusements. I found I was beginning to lose my sense of duty and, much to my shame, I found myself falling to worldly standards of life. My real need was not amusements but cleansing, not pleasures but spiritual renewal. What I needed was Jesus Christ. Was the Church able to lead me to the One Who could release me from this terrible situation? No, Rome could only apply its canonical punishment and so I was sent for a week to a monastery. The treatment was not adequate to the disease. I was still fighting alone a seemingly lost battle. Then one day a flash of divine light revealed the darkness of my heart. What was I to do? I decided to leave my parish and my parents and go to Rome. I had no definite plan in mind and had no friend in Rome to whom I could turn for help. On my first day's search in Rome, however, I was rewarded by the chance discovery of an Episcopalian Methodist Church. I was able to contact its minister, to whom I opened my heart and told him about my desperate situation. I soon learned, however, that leaving the Church of Rome was not as easy as I had thought.

Rome's Stated Curse on Converted Priests

The Lateran Treaty of 1929 was a great obstacle. Its fifth article, paragraph 2 reads: "Under no circumstances may apostate priests or those subjected to censure be appointed as teachers or allowed to continue as such nor may they hold office or be employed as clerks where they are in immediate contact with the public." This meant that I had to choose between retiring from any kind of public life or leave my country, parents, and everything that was dear to me. The latter was a terrific sacrifice, but I was given strength to do it and God opened the door for me in a remarkable way. The Methodist minister that I had met introduced me to Professor E. Buoniauti, an ex-Roman Catholic priest who, because of the Lateran Treaty, had to give up his position as a teacher of comparative religions and who was subject to canonical censure. This man made contact with Protestant societies in Switzerland, France, and Germany for me in order to find a place to which I could go for refuge from Rome.

In His Light We See

Weeks and months went by with no prospect in sight, when God brought into the picture another ex-priest, the Rev. M. Casella, who was now working in a parish in Northern Ireland. This was indeed a providential happening. Dr. Casella happened to be writing to Professor Buoniauti in Rome about a book. He was the man whom the Methodist minister had introduced me. In his letter, Rev. Casella mentioned how he had been enabled to leave the Church of Rome through an evangelical society in Dublin called The Priests' Protection Society. In his reply, Prof. Buoniauti referred to my case, and through this contact the final stage of my journey began.

The Priests' Protection Society came to my aid and enabled me to get a thorough training in Evangelical Reformed doctrine at Trinity College, Dublin, sponsored by the Irish Church Missions. I would like to express at this time my deep gratitude to The Priests' Protection Society for enabling me to come out of the darkness of Rome into the light of the Gospel.

Of course it has cost me much to leave my parents, my friends, and everything that was dear to me in Italy, but when I decided to obey the voice of God rather than the voice of the flesh and of the world, all my hardships were transformed into sweetness, especially since I have completed my spiritual journey from a sinful life to a personal knowledge of the Living Christ.

I would like to add a word of gratitude to the Irish Church Missions in whose buildings in Dublin I was taught to read the Word of God and where my eyes were opened to the light of the Gospel. The Prophet Isaiah taught about true, right standing before God in whom it is found, *“Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength:...”* (Isaiah 45:24) In detail the Apostle Paul teaches that God's righteousness is given to the believer through faith; *“But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference”* (Romans 3:21-22). The sinful condition of all is also clearly detailed by the Apostle Paul, together with the teaching of God's grace given freely without any human merit: *“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”* (Romans 3:23-24). By grace through faith a real transaction took place between God and myself. Like the Apostle Paul, I can confidently say, *“...I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith”* (Philippians 3:8-9).

God Hates Idolatry

“Every man is brutish in his knowledge: every founder is confounded by the graven image: for his molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them. They are vanity, and the work of errors: in the time of their visitation they shall perish” (Jeremiah 10:15).

It grieves me at this stage to refer to what I would call the great revelation I received on coming to England. I thought I had come to a biblical country, whereas, I found very little of biblical truth left in England. Rome is infiltrating from every side, and the so-called Bible churches keep the door opened to it. Roman practices have come into churches, and there is a blindness to their sinfulness which grieves God. It grieves the Holy Spirit to see the image worship of Rome so easily accepted by Bible churches. How great is the need of Christian witnesses today to show the sinfulness of idol worship! I believe until the churches have broken down their idols, we shall not see true biblical revival. *“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather **reprove them**”* (Ephesians 5:11).