

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

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The Roman State-Church

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Editor's note: The following was a sermon by Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones titled "The Roman Catholic Church," preached at Westminster Chapel in London, and originally published in The Westminster Record, May 1963.

There are certain things happening at the present time that make it imperative that every intelligent Christian should know something about Roman Catholicism. There are movements afoot and meetings taking place that are trying to bring a kind of rapprochement between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism; and there are people who rejoice in this and say that it is a wonderful thing that we are beginning to draw together again, and that we can cooperate in certain respects, and that this is a wonderful manifestation of the Christian spirit.

Now that kind of thing makes it imperative that we should understand something about what is happening, and as you look into the future the matter becomes urgent, for there are certain possibilities which must be envisaged. There are certain countries in the world that, if the modern trends continue, will have a great majority of Roman Catholics in them soon; so if we continue with the democratic principle of deciding our form of government by counting heads, there will be a Roman Catholic majority. It is not difficult to envisage certain possibilities that may result from that. Indeed that may even happen in this country given a certain number of years. So from all standpoints, it is imperative that we should look at

this position and at this great fact which is confronting us.

Whether we like it or not it is something that we have to do. The only answer to Roman Catholicism is the positive preaching of the Christian truth and the great Reformed doctrines. Negative protests are of very little value. They have been going on now for a number of years, but the facts are that the Roman State-Church is growing in practically every country and all the negative protestations seem to be of no value. The increase in Romanism is due to one thing only: a weak and flabby Protestantism that does not know what it believes.

The Roman Catholic System

This system known as Roman Catholicism is the devil's greatest masterpiece. It is a departure from the Christian faith and New Testament teaching. If you look at her casually, you might well think that the Roman State-Church is the most orthodox church in the world. If you are considering something like the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Roman State-Church appears orthodox. The Roman State-Church seems to believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the eternal Son of God; she professes to believe in the virgin birth; she claims to believe in the Incarnation; she purports to believe in Christ's miracles; she claims to believe in Christ's substitutionary work upon the cross and his bodily resurrection. She professes his ascension and his heavenly session.

At this point, the subtlety and equivocation come in and difficulty arises. To all that she adds, with a damnable plus, things that are utterly unscriptural and which, indeed, are a denial of the Scripture. Now this matter is extremely subtle. If you really want to know something about subtlety you have to read the literature of the Roman State-Church. She can appear to be everything and all things to all men. Her system is so vast and her subtlety is so great that she almost seems to be impregnable. Let me offer one example: You have heard it said that the Roman State-Church does not countenance divorce, and that if any of her members are divorced they shall be excommunicated. And then you suddenly read in the newspapers of the divorce of some Roman nobleman or woman, and you ask, "How can that happen?" Ah well, they are able to explain it. They say that there never really was a true marriage! The nominal marriage was merely annulled. They can explain everything; there is no difficulty. Their system of casuistry is such, and their developed argument is such, that they can appear to be facing in all directions at the same time.

How many faces has the Roman State-Church? Look at her in this country, then look at her in Ireland. Look at her in England, Spain, Italy, and Latin America; you will find it very difficult to believe it is the same institution. She is able to change her color and her appearance and her form. She is, I say, all things to all men everywhere; she is everything; she is a spiritual whore.

The apostle has told us that it is one of the characteristics of the Devil himself that he can transform himself into an angel of light. So can this State-Church. There is no limit, there is no end to the various "guises" in which she can appear. Here in this country, she appears as highly intellectual and encourages her people to read the approved version of the Bible; in other countries she prohibits their doing so and is not only not intellectual but deliberately encourages superstition. Here she seems to be tolerant, ready to listen and to argue and to concede and to be friendly; in other countries she is utterly intolerant, vicious, and vile in her persecuting zeal—but still the same body, the same institution, the same people. This is surely the Devil's masterpiece.

Here is a great body, an institution, that has from time to time throughout the centuries—and still is doing this very thing—manifested the wiles of the Devil in all its subtlety and deceitfulness, "with all deceivableness of unrighteousness" as the Scripture puts it. All this is clearly prophesied in the Scriptures. You will find it in the second chapter of Paul's second epistle to the Thessalonians. You have it depicted also in the second beast in the thirteenth chapter of the book of *Revelation*; it is also in the seventeenth chapter of *Revelation* in the picture of "the great whore" sitting on those seven hills, as Rome does and always has done.

All this has shown itself in history. It did so in this way. Here is something that came in and at one time monopolized virtually the whole of the Christian Church. It came in slowly, subtly, and worked its way in and eventually became almost universal in its control.

The Main Errors of Rome

1. Idolatry and superstition.

Now there is nothing that is so condemned in the Scripture as idolatry. We are not to make "graven images." But the Roman State-Church is full of images. She teaches her people to worship images; they worship statues and forms and representations. If you have been to any of their great cathedrals you will have seen people doing so. Go to St. Peter's in Rome and you will notice that there is a sort of monument to the apostle Peter, and if you look at one of the toes you will find that it is smooth and worn away. Why? Because so many poor victims of Roman Catholic teaching have been there kissing this toe! They bow with reverence and they worship images, statues, and relics. They claim to have relics of certain saints—a bit of bone, something he used—and it is put in a special place and they worship it and bow down before it. This is nothing but pagan idolatry.

2. Totalitarianism

The Roman State-Church claims that she is essential to salvation. Outside the church—*extra ecclesiam*, there is no salvation—*nulla salus*. She is absolutely essential. She puts herself between my soul and the Lord Jesus Christ. She arrogates that position to herself. You do not find anything like that in the New Testament, but you find it in

Romanism. She alone knows what the full truth is, she claims. She describes it, and she alone can define it and interpret it.

Over against that, of course, Protestantism teaches the “universal priesthood of all believers” and the right of every man to read the Scripture for himself and to interpret it under the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Rome denies that completely and absolutely. She, and she alone, is able to understand and to interpret the Scripture and to tell us what to believe. She says this partly because she claims that she has received “continuing revelation.” She does not believe, as Christians do, that revelation ended with what we have in the New Testament. She claims a continuing and a continuous revelation. She therefore does not hesitate to say that you must add to the truth in the Scriptures. While saying that the Bible is the Word of God, she claims that her tradition is equally authoritative and equally binding. That is the way in which she destroys the Bible, because she says things in her tradition that deny Biblical teaching.

Rome claims our totalitarian allegiance. She claims to govern us in what we believe and in what we do. She claims to be responsible for our soul and its salvation. We must therefore submit utterly and absolutely to what the church tells us and what the church teaches us. She has a totalitarian system. There is no question but that she binds the souls of her people absolutely, as much as Communism does, as much as Hitler did. It is a totalitarian system. The State-Church is supreme and thus stands between us and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. The Papacy

The pope is said to be the vicar of Christ. He is said to be a direct spiritual descendant of the apostle Peter—apostolic succession—who has all the authority of the apostle Peter. Thus, this person whom they call the Holy Father—though the Scripture tells us specifically not to call any man “Father” on Earth because there is only one Father, the Father who is in Heaven—is the “Holy Father,” the “Vicar of Christ.” And they say that speaking *ex cathedra* he is “infallible.” They defined that doctrine in 1870; they believed it long before. But now, as thus defined, his pronouncements are claimed to be infallible—as infallible as the Word of God, as infallible as Christ himself—for he is the

vicar and the representative of Christ. The power of this church is concentrated in this one man who speaks, as *2 Thessalonians 2* says, “as God.” He is worshiped by people; they bow down before him, and they express to him a sense of adoration that should be given to no one but the almighty God himself.

4. The Priests and Bishops

The priests and Bishops in the Roman State-Church are very special people. They do not believe in the universal priesthood of all believers. The only people who are “priests” are those whom the church herself has trained, and who have been ordained, and who receive something of this authority which comes from the “apostolic succession.” But *1 Peter 2:9* tells us that we are all priests: “You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood.” In other words, “a kingdom of priests.” No, says Rome, you are the laity, you are not priests, these alone are priests.

Then they attribute to these priests certain unique powers, such as that of working miracles. Here we come to a very central and crucial matter. They claim that the priest is able to change the water that they use in baptism so that grace enters into it. They claim that the priest is able to work a miracle in connection with the bread and the wine at the Mass, that he is able to work this miracle of what they call “transubstantiation.” They say that the bread is no longer bread but that it becomes the body of Christ, that the accidents of color and so on remain but that the substance has been changed into the body of Christ, and that this miracle has been worked by the priest.

That in turn brings in their whole doctrine concerning the sacraments. They have seven sacraments. They do not hesitate to teach that in those sacraments miracles are worked. Their theory is that this miracle worked by the priest in the water and the bread and the wine charges them with the grace of God in a special manner so that they work more or less automatically. Their phrase is that they work “*ex opere operato*.” In other words, it is no longer just water; it is charged with the grace of God, and therefore when it is put upon that child a miracle is worked in the child. Or when you take the bread in the Mass, you are really taking the body of Christ himself. There is not a word about this in the New Testament.

The priest is also the one to whom we must go and confess our sins, because he has power to pronounce absolution and to grant us forgiveness of sins. Nobody else can do it except this priesthood, these people to whom they allocate these special powers. So the people are taught to go and confess to them. There is not a word of that in the Scripture. We confess our faults to God and to one another in the Christian Church; but not to a “priest.”

5. Mariolatry

The cult of the Virgin Mary in Romanism is increasing rapidly. They say that she is the “Queen of Heaven,” and that she is the one to whom we should go primarily. In many of their churches, you will find that she is placed in front of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is almost hidden by her somewhere in the background. Why? This is what they say: She being human is much more loving and tender than he is; he is so great and powerful and authoritative, that he is stern; this is what they teach, this is the whole explanation of the cult of the Virgin Mary—that he is such that we cannot go to him directly. Ah, but fortunately she is there and she is loving; and after all she was his mother and she can influence him. So we should pray to the Virgin Mary and ask her to intercede on our behalf. She is right there between us and the Son of God, the Savior of our souls. And increasingly they have been adding to her power. They began in 1854 to teach the “Immaculate Conception,” which means that Mary was born free from sin. They announced in 1950 the doctrine of the Assumption of Mary—that she never died and was buried, but that she ascended up to Heaven even as her Son did. This so builds up the Virgin Mary and makes her so prominent that Christ himself is obscured.

6. The Saints

Lastly, add to the Virgin Mary the saints. Roman Catholic people are taught to pray to the saints. How does this come to pass? Well, their teaching is this: They believe in perfectionism in this life, and they say that some of these saints have lived a perfect life. The result of this is that they have acquired and built up so much “merit” that they have much more than they need for themselves; so they have a superabundance of merit. The result is that you and I, who may be failing and who are so lacking in merit, can go and pray to the saints and

ask them to give to us a certain amount of their superabundance. They call this work “supererogation,” that the saints can intercede for us and can even impart some of their over plus of merit to us to makeup the deficiency and the lack which is to be found in us. The merit of Jesus Christ is not enough; you must have something extra; it needs to be supplemented.

7. Anti-Christ

Take their teaching with regard to the question of justification—justification by faith. As Luther said, this is “the test of a standing or a falling church”—the whole glory of Protestantism, the thing that brought it into being. It is not surprising that Romanism is increasing when Protestants do not know what *justification* means. Romanism is bound to succeed while Protestants think that merely to live a good life is enough. It is not surprising that Romanism is sweeping through the countries and the nations. Roman teaching is that good works—meritorious works—are possible in man, in sinful man; that man can contribute something to his own justification. They believe that and teach that. We teach that “there is none righteous, no, not one,” that “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags,” or, as the apostle Paul put it in writing to the Philippians, “dung”—refuse, worthless. No, no, they say, there is value in it and it will count, it will help.

But still more serious is that ultimately they teach that justification is the result of baptism. That is where it all links up. In baptism, they teach, not only are your sins forgiven, but also a righteousness is infused into you; you are made righteous by your baptism. Though you were an unconscious infant, it does not matter; you are given this righteousness; your original sin is cancelled there, and you are given this positive righteousness. Incidentally, it is not the righteousness of Christ, according to them; it is a righteousness that is made by God for those who are baptized. They are not “clothed with the righteousness of Christ,” but they are made righteous in the sight of God. And the result is that they denounce as dangerous heresy the Protestant teaching of justification by faith alone.

Everything in their teaching makes one dependent upon the church. Are you saying that you can repent and go to Christ and believe in him and

be saved? No, you must have this operation worked upon you by the priest through your baptism. All along, it makes the priest and the church absolutely essential. You are helpless without them; you are bound to them. There is no direct dealing with Christ; you have always to go through these intermediaries. The Bible says that there is only one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. Not so in Rome—Mary, the pope, the priests and all the hierarchy and all the underlings, all these are necessary. So on this vital doctrine of justification they teach a lie.

Then you come to the question of the Christian life. Here is another serious matter. The emphasis is not so much upon holy living as upon our observation of ceremonies and rites. They teach their people not so much to strive after holiness and to understand the New Testament teaching about sanctification; they teach the people to attend Mass and to go and confess to the priest. There is none of this direct responsibility and holding men there before the teaching and exhorting them to practice it. No, the teaching is that you have to conform to the rules of the church. You watch the ceremonies, and you do what they tell you: You fast at certain times and you do this and don't do that, and you attend your priest and make your confession. You come to the Mass and then go and do virtually what you like. You are covered, you are put right again, and on you go. Instead of holy living in its simplicity as we have it in the Scriptures, you have ceremonies and rites and observances.

8. No Assurance of Salvation

Another serious error is that it completely denies the doctrine of "assurance of salvation." There is nothing more glorious than the doctrine of assurance of salvation. There is a magnificent statement of it in *Romans* 8:16: "The Spirit bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." Do you know what that means? There is nothing more wonderful than that, but the Roman Church denies it completely. There is no such thing as certainty in this life. Why? This is her argument, and it is quite plausible. (That is where the system is seen to be so devilish: No one less than the Devil could have worked it all out with this extraordinary ingenuity.) It works like this. In your baptism your original sin is cancelled and you are made righteous

and you are right with God. Ah yes, but what about post-baptismal sins, what about the sins that are committed after baptism? Your baptism has nothing to do with that. What are you going to do about that? That is the problem. Biblical teaching is that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin and unrighteousness; that what he did on the cross covers my past sins, my present sins, my future sins. The one act was enough. No, no, says Rome, it is not enough. The problem of your post-baptismal sins is a different one. What do I do about them? I must go and confess to the priest; he alone can deal with them.

But even he cannot deal with them all, so I may come to the end of my life, and here I am with these post-baptismal sins threatening me with Hell and damnation. What can I do? It is all right, they say, here is the sacrament of penance. The priest alone can administer that for you. So you have the sacrament of penance, you make an unusual confession, and you are given absolution.

Does that guarantee that I am all right? No, not even that! That takes you most of the way, but there will still be some sins that are not forgiven. What do I do about them? Well, fortunately, there is a place, they tell us, which is called "purgatory"; and I am allowed to go there to get rid of this remaining sin which is unforgiving, this post-baptismal sin that is unforgiving. What happens to me there? Well, my relatives who are still left are praying for me, and they are paying money as they do so. So you have all the "indulgences" and all the "prayers for the dead," and all your candles and the money paid. The more you pay, the sooner will these sins be dealt with in purgatory, and the sooner will this person be allowed to go on. According to Rome, the work of Christ is not enough; it must be supplemented in all these ways.

Conclusion

What is the result of it all? The subjects of the Roman State-Church are kept in ignorance and in a state of superstition. Not only that, it leads to a loose life and living. If you go to Mass you can do anything you like during the rest of the week. All anyone has to do is to obey what the church tells him, to hand himself over, and the church will look after his soul.

This system is altogether more dangerous than Communism because this is a Christian counterfeit; it exists in the name of Christ. This is the “scarlet woman”; this is the most horrible, foul deception of all because it uses Christ’s name. Communism is open and obviously atheistic.

The Protestant Reformers were not bigoted zealots; they were not fools. They had their eyes opened by the Holy Spirit. They saw this horrible monstrosity depicted in the Bible in the warnings against it, and at the risk of losing their lives they stood up and they protested. They began to assert justification by faith alone; the supreme, final, adequate authority of the Scriptures; the universal priesthood of all believers. They were ready to die for those truths, and many did die for them. If you rejoice in the approaches to Rome, you are despising the blood of the martyrs. “Ah,” but you say, “has not the Roman State-Church changed? You are simply looking back; you are speaking as if you lived in the sixteenth century—don’t you realize you are living in the twentieth century?” The proudest boast of the Roman State-Church is this, that she never changes. *Semper eadem* is her motto. How can she change? If she changes, she will be admitting that she was wrong in the past—but she was saying then that she was infallible, and that the pope is the vicar of Christ and that he cannot make a mistake. If she says that she is capable of change, she is denying her central claim! She does not say that she is changing, and she never will. The State-Church of Rome remains the same. If anything, she is even worse now. She has added things to what she taught in the sixteenth century, such as papal infallibility and the immaculate conception and assumption of Mary. No, there is no change in the State-Church of Rome, and if ever there is one great world church it will be because the State-Church of Rome has absorbed all the rest and swallowed them in their ignorance!

This is prostitution of the worst and most diabolical kind. It is indeed Antichrist; it is to be rejected; it is to be denounced; but above all it is to be countered. And there is only one thing that can counter it and that is a Biblical, doctrinal Christianity. A Christianity that just preaches “Come to Christ” or “Come to Jesus” cannot stand before Rome for a second. Probably what that will do ultimately will be to add to the numbers

belonging to Rome. People such as Billy Graham who hold evangelistic campaigns and say, “Ah, you Roman Catholics, go back to your church,” are denying New Testament teaching.

There is only one teaching, one power, that can stand against this horrible counterfeit; it is a Biblical, doctrinal, systematic presentation of New Testament truth. That was how it was done in the sixteenth century. Martin Luther was not just a superficial evangelist; he was a mighty theologian. So was John Calvin. So were all of them. It was that great system of truth, worked out in its details and presented to the people, that undermined the State-Church of Rome. Nothing less than this is adequate to meet the present situation.