

**A Catholic
tells his
Story**

by

John Ross

Herald of Hope Inc.

www.heraldofhope.org.au

My Story

John Ross



My name is John Michael Ross and this is my testimony of how I came to faith in Jesus Christ alone for my salvation rather than trusting in the teachings and sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church.

I would like to stress that I do not dislike Roman Catholics but I do dislike the Roman Catholic system and the men down through the centuries who have been responsible for introducing much doctrinal error into this church.

My Background

I am the eldest of 3 children born into a Roman Catholic family. I grew up in a small country town in Queensland. Both my parents were from Roman Catholic families and all my relations were Catholics. There were some in my extended family who were priests and nuns. As is the normal

Roman Catholic practice, I was baptised into the Roman Catholic Church as a baby. The Catholic Church was the predominant influence in my upbringing and I received my education in Catholic schools both primary and secondary. Growing up I had very little contact with anybody other than Catholics.

As a family we were serious and devout Catholics. We would always attend mass on Sundays and Holy days, say the Rosary and fulfil all the requirements laid down by the Roman Catholic Church. We had regular contact with priests and nuns. My sister entered a convent and was a novice for a few years.

My father was very regular in saying his daily prayers and taught us to say our prayers when we were young. As a young man he had been a seminarian studying for the priesthood. He had high moral values. In our home we had statues and pictures of Mary and Jesus as well as other saints, wore medals and scapulars. We would have been considered a model Catholic family.

There was something that happened that has stayed in my memory from boyhood. At the end of our street there was a "Church of Christ" and the pastor's manse was in our neighbourhood. One year we were painting our house, and the pastor from that church came over and helped us. He gave us the best part of a whole day of his time. On another day he helped us do some concreting. He and other members of that church made a favourable impression upon me as good, clean living people committed to Christ, their church and those around them.

As students of a convent school, we would be regularly taken by the nuns over to the church for confession and benediction. We had to “examine our consciences” and determine what sins we had committed so we could confess them to the priest. He would then give us “absolution” from our sins and ask us to do penance which was saying some “Hail Marys” or some other prayers.

It was stressed to us that if we had committed a mortal sin and this was not confessed, when we died our souls would go to Hell for eternity. This caused a lot of fear and anxiety in some children who worried if they had remembered all their sins and told them all to the priest.

Some days on our way home from school we would stop and enter the church to pay a visit to the “Blessed Sacrament” that was locked in the tabernacle on the altar.

I clearly got the impression from my Roman Catholic upbringing that salvation could be earned by doing the works prescribed by the church and these would keep you in good standing with it.

The belief that salvation could be earned by works is also supported by the following way of thinking that I had at the time.

I remember considering the possibility of becoming a priest. I even rehearsed in front of a mirror, the first sermon I would preach when I arrived as a newly ordained priest in my first parish. I thought that the only real way to serve God as a Catholic was by entering the religious life and that the sure way of getting to heaven would be by entering the priesthood. I knew that this would also please my parents and

bring them honour and prestige within the Catholic Church. I also knew that it would make me an important figure in the community.

I spent my high school years at a Catholic boys' boarding school. Once a month we could visit our families on a Sunday. Because it was a considerable financial sacrifice for my parents to send me to this school, I felt under pressure to meet the expectations they had for me. Most of these years were generally unhappy and I made few friends. About half of the teachers were priests. While they were strict, most of them were fair in the way they dealt with us except for a couple of priests who used excessive amounts of fear and corporal punishment to motivate us.

While we had to attend mass and chapel regularly, God seemed to play almost a non-existent role in the lives of the majority of us. The Bible was an unopened book and the basic facts of the Gospel were unknown to me.

After School Years

After school I gained employment in my hometown. At this time my interest in religion was minimal. The allurements of the world had taken priority. I knew that my parents expected me to attend mass and so, to keep the peace, I did.

About 18 months later, I was transferred with my work to a city well away from my hometown. Now I would be free to make my own decisions on how I wished to live my life away from the constraints of my family.

After leaving home I would only attend mass occasionally but still considered myself as

a Catholic. I thought that I would become a practising Catholic again probably when I met a Catholic girl and got married and had a family. If I knew then what would transpire in my life over the next couple of years, I could not have believed it.

I joined some service clubs and these occupied a lot of my spare time. Before long I had quite a large circle of friends and a good social life. Most weekends were busy with some activity. In the midst of the activity there were also times when I was lonely and disillusioned.

Leading up to my Conversion

I was aware of two recurring thoughts that were coming into my mind around this time. The first was a desire I had to read and understand what the Bible teaches and the second was a growing awareness of how much sin had entered into my life. I was in my early 20s and was thinking about what philosophies I would base my life on. I would enjoy discussions with groups of friends debating life related issues - politics, religion, philosophies of life etc.

Some would say "eat, drink and be merry" but I dismissed this as leading nowhere. Others thought that materialism and making money was the answer. Others said that if you lived a good life and your good outweighed your bad you would be ok. None of them talked about the spiritual aspects of life or brought God into their thinking. However, God was gradually drawing me to Himself by the thoughts, people and circumstances He was placing in my path.

My best friend met a Christian girl and had been converted to Christ. After their wedding they had become involved in

their Church and were praying for my conversion. They invited me to some Church functions and later to a Bible study group. They picked me up and took me to the Bible study.

I was happy enough to go because I was curious to know the Bible and I had seen the way my friend had changed after his conversion.

However, in my mind I was still a loyal Catholic, even though I was hardly ever attending mass.

I still believed what the Roman Catholic Church said about itself (never having looked into it closely) i.e. that it is the one true church founded by Jesus himself, with an unbroken succession of Popes leading right back to Peter, the first Pope. If you died in right standing with the Roman Catholic Church, it was the means of gaining entry to Heaven.

All other churches were offshoots that broke away from the one true church and had been formed by "rebellious Catholics" who started new religions based on their false interpretations of the Bible. Protestants were looked down upon and even "despised". Their bare empty churches could not compare to the imposing style of Catholic Churches. The Baptists I was associating with were held in low regard.

At this point I was still a Catholic and was not yet contemplating leaving the Catholic Church.

My Encounter with Christians

The people I was meeting at the Bible study group and at the church were genuine and friendly. They clearly reflected the qualities and attributes of Christ. They treated others

with love and respect. Their faith was living and real and there was real joy and enthusiasm in their praise and worship of God. They were eager to know Him more deeply. Christ was central in their lives throughout the whole week and not just for 1 hour on Sunday. This really appealed to me and I had never seen this level of joy and commitment previously.

I could tell they had a personal relationship with Jesus by the way they talked to Him in prayer just using their own words. He was like a personal friend to them. They also knew their Bibles well and their beliefs were based upon its clear teaching.

The purpose of their faith wasn't to try to earn God's acceptance but rather to show gratitude to Him for what He had done for them in paying for their sins on the cross.

This was a completely new discovery to me. The dead formal rituals of the Catholic Church were so empty in comparison to this. The contrast was so stark.

Week by week, little by little more amazing discoveries were being revealed. The Holy Spirit was showing me more and more as I studied God's word. The scriptural support for so many of the doctrines of Rome was nowhere to be found in Scripture. In fact, Rome's doctrines often contradicted the Bible. The verses that they so regularly use to support their doctrines are either taken out of context, twisted to say what they want them to say or their interpretation is contradicted by other scriptures in the Bible. Many have no scriptural support at all.

I felt so betrayed that a church making so many grand claims could lead me and

millions of others astray. Do the Catholic Clergy know the Bible? If they do, how can they teach what they know to be contrary to God's word?

The following list is some of the Catholic doctrines that have no support in Scripture.

1. Salvation by works and not grace alone.
2. The sacrifice of the mass.
3. Bread and wine becoming the literal body and blood of Christ.
4. The priesthood and its supposed powers.
5. Praying to Mary and other saints.
6. Purgatory and praying for the dead.
7. The absolution of sin by a priest.
8. Indulgences.
9. The offering of money to gain favour with God.
10. Infant Baptism.
11. Papal infallibility.
12. Jesus making Peter the first Pope.
13. Celibacy of the clergy.
14. Immaculate Conception of Mary.
15. Assumption of Mary.
16. Use of statues, relics etc.

These distinctive doctrines of Catholicism separate it from Biblical Christianity.

I would like to share some of what the Holy Spirit showed me from the Scriptures concerning some of these doctrines.

In relation to the Bible itself, I had been taught that it was a hard book to understand and that only the hierarchy of the Church had the required training and knowledge

to be able to interpret it. The faithful must accept their teaching as God's infallible word elevating them to a position higher than an ordinary believer.

The following verses encourage us to read, meditate on and obey the Scriptures and that they will guide us in life.

- *"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Ps.119:11)*

- *"O how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day" (Ps.119:97).*

- *"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Ps.119:105).*

- *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom" (Col.3:16).*

- *"And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim.3:15).*

The Bible nowhere teaches that only an elite group of clergymen has the ability to understand the Scriptures and impose its authority over all believers. God wants all Christians to read, meditate on and obey His Word. He wouldn't have given us something that we are incapable of understanding.

The Roman Catholic Church makes the claim that its teaching is based on tradition as well as the Bible. It says it gives equal honour to both scripture and tradition. In reality it gives more honour to tradition because its tradition contradicts the clear teaching of Scripture. The idea that oral traditions can be passed down accurately over centuries without becoming corrupted, is impossible. Christ strongly condemned the Jewish Rabbis whose oral traditions had perverted the written Word of God.

Why would he want the Church to rely on oral traditions which would do the same?

The Holy Spirit ensured that all the teaching he wanted us to receive was included accurately in the writings that make up the Bible that we have today.

- *“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ”*(Col.2:8).

The Lord helped me to understand that his Gospel is a Gospel of grace and not of works.

- *“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”* (Eph.2: 8-9).

The Lord showed me that we have inherited our sinful nature from Adam and we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Our sins separate us from a Holy God and our own efforts cannot make us acceptable in His sight. Only in Christ are we made acceptable in God’s sight. Christ took on himself what I should suffer for my sins and paid the penalty on my behalf in full. If we trust Jesus as our substitute, Christ’s righteousness is imparted to us making us acceptable before God.

- *“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him”* (2 Cor.5:21).

God showed me from 1Timothy 2:5 that Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and man.

- *“There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all”* (1Tim.2:5-6).

Therefore any prayers directed to Mary and the saints are clearly contrary to the teaching of God's word. I could also see that the mass, where Christ's sacrifice on the cross is said to be repeated, was also contrary to Scripture.

• *"And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified"* (Heb.10:11-14).

God also showed me from Exodus 20:4 & 5 that it was wrong to make any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in Heaven above or earth beneath or in the water under the earth and to bow down, kneel before and worship them. This verse has also been conveniently removed from virtually all of the Catholic catechisms.

My Great Dilemma

I was confronted with a dilemma greater than any I had faced previously in my life. Would my authority be the Roman Catholic Church or would it be the Bible.

I knew that if I severed my ties with Catholicism it would cause great distress and hurt, especially to my parents who had done their best for me. Naturally I didn't want to hurt them.

Even though it was a painful and distressing decision, because of the consequences it would have on my family, I knew I could not continue to attend mass and remain a Catholic when God had shown me the errors of Catholicism so clearly from His

word. I knew I would have to reject the Catholic Church and its traditions in favour of trusting in the authority of God's Word.

My Conversion

Around this time a visiting evangelist conducted some services at the Baptist Church I was attending. I knew that the time had come for me to accept Christ alone as my Saviour, relying only upon his finished work on the Cross for the forgiveness of my sin.

At the end of one of these services, I felt supernaturally moved to make my response to Christ. The evangelist prayed with me and led me to accept Christ as my only Saviour.

Amongst other verses that he shared with me on that night was John 5:24:

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24).

The assurance and joy that God's Word gave me then and continues to give me now, is so far beyond anything man made religion has to offer.

When I repented of my sins and trusted Christ alone for my salvation, I was "born again" by the Spirit of God. Jesus said,

• *"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).*

My life was transformed by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. The things of the world I had loved, I loved no more, and the things of God which I had not loved, I now loved.

• *"the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness*

unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor.2:14).

It is now almost 40 years since I accepted Christ as my Saviour. Over those years my relationship with Christ has grown stronger and my knowledge of Him continues to grow. As well as joy and peace He has given me guidance and purpose. He gave me a wonderful family and many Christian friends.

I will never regret choosing to follow Christ. He will become a living reality in the lives of any who come to Him in repentance and faith. He can transform and give purpose to anyone who desires a relationship with Him.

I know that there are many Catholics who have a genuine zeal and sincerely want to please God, but do you have assurance of your salvation? Are you attempting to establish your own righteousness by your morality, religious rituals or good works? The Bible teaches that righteousness produced in this way cannot save us from sin but that total dependence and trust in Jesus Christ and his righteousness is the necessary requirement to enter God's Kingdom. God imputes the righteousness of Christ to every genuine believer.

*•"But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and 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"** (Phil.3:7-9).*

There is so much more I could share about what the Bible says but the main reason I have shared my testimony is that someone once took the time to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with me and that resulted in my life being changed forever. Without that knowledge I would still be separated from God's love and be facing a Christless eternity.

I want to share this good news of God's salvation through Jesus Christ and his transforming power with as many as possible in the hope that they too will come into a saving relationship with Christ and know this same new life and purpose.

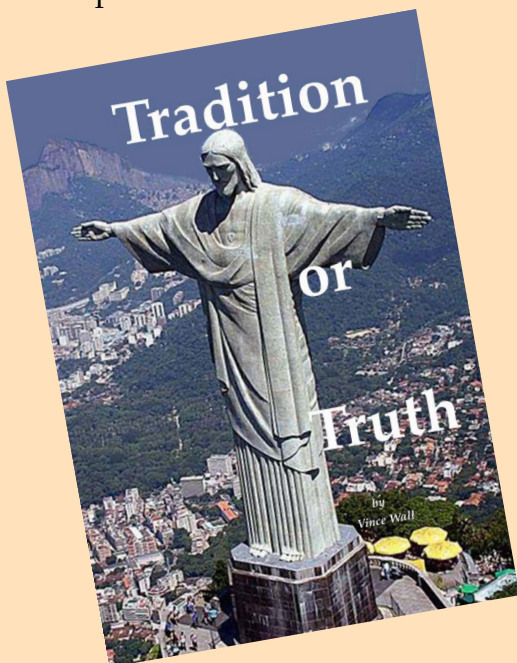
I trust and pray that anyone seeking to know the truth will come to see the light of the Gospel and that you will also be able to rejoice in the knowledge of Jesus Christ as your own personal Saviour. Jesus said,

- *"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me"* (John 14:6).

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13).

May I encourage you to place all your trust in Him alone and find a **Bible believing church** that will support and encourage you in the faith.

“The book, *Tradition or Truth* is available FREE on request; it examines many of the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church and compares them with the Bible”



Send your request
to the
Business Manager
Herald of Hope
PO Box 4216
Marayong, NSW 2148,
Australia

editor@heraldofhope.org.au

(Herald of Hope is a non-denominational Bible Prophecy magazine issued bi-monthly since 1948. It is dedicated to presenting the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Biblical truth of the Second Advent of Christ.)

***Request your FREE copy of the book,
The Basics of Bible Prophecy.***