



A Catholic tells his Story

BY JOHN ROSS

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My Story



My name is John Ross and this is my testimony of how I came from Roman Catholicism to faith in Jesus Christ alone for my salvation.

I would like to stress that I love Roman Catholics but I do dislike what the Roman Catholic hierarchy have done in allowing many doctrinal errors to enter into the Catholic Church throughout the centuries.

My Background

I am the eldest of 3 children born into a Catholic family. There are some in my extended family who are priests and nuns. As is the normal Catholic practice, I was baptised into the Church as a baby. The Catholic Church was the predominant influence in my upbringing.

We were serious and devout Catholics. We attended mass on Sundays and Holy days, said the Rosary and fulfilled the requirements of the Church. My father was very regular in saying his daily prayers and taught us to pray when we were young. In our home we

had statues and pictures of Mary and Jesus as well as other saints.

There was a "Church of Christ" at the end of our street and the pastor's manse was near our house. The pastor made an effort to reach out to us. One year we were painting our house and he came over and helped us. On another occasion he helped us do some concreting. He had a positive impact for Christ on me.

As students of a convent school, we were regularly taken by the nuns over to the church for confession and benediction. We had to confess our sins to a priest. He would then give us "absolution" from our sins and ask us to do penance which was usually saying some "Hail Marys" or some other prayers.

I got the impression from my Catholic training that salvation could be earned by receiving the sacraments and doing the works prescribed by the church and that these would keep me in good standing with it. Later as I studied the Bible I learned that God was not impressed by external religious rituals and that they could not atone for sin.

I spent my high school years at a Catholic boys' boarding school. While we had to attend mass and chapel regularly, God seemed to play only a minor role in the lives of the majority of the students. The Bible and the Gospel of Christ were unknown to me.

After School Years

After commencing work, 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. Later I was transferred to a city away from my hometown. Now I could make my own decisions on how I wished to live away from the constraints of my family.

After leaving home I only attended mass occasionally but still considered myself a Catholic. 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.

Leading up to my Conversion

Two recurring thoughts began entering my mind around this time. The first was a growing desire I had to read and understand the Bible and the second was a growing awareness that the self-centred lifestyle I was living was not very satisfying. I began to think about the more important issues of life.

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. They were involved in their Church and invited me to some Church functions and later to a Bible study group. I accepted the invitation because I was curious to know about the Bible and I had seen the way my friend had changed after his conversion.

However 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.

I believed what the nuns had said i.e. '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.' I was proud to be Catholic and felt our religion was superior to others. Protestants were generally looked down upon. Their bare empty churches could not compare to the imposing style of Catholic Churches.

I was not yet contemplating leaving the Catholic Church.

My Encounter with Christians

The people I was meeting at the Bible study group were genuine and friendly. They reflected the attributes of Christ and treated others with love and respect. Their faith was living and real and there was 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. Jesus was like a personal friend to them and they knew their Bibles well .

The purpose of their faith wasn't to try to earn God's acceptance through their own efforts but rather to show gratitude to God for what He had done for them in paying for their sins on the cross. I was beginning to gain some understanding of the true meaning of 'grace'.

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

Week by week the Holy Spirit was showing me more as I studied God's Word. The scriptural support for many of the doctrines of Rome was not in the Bible. Catholicism was indeed a mixture of truth and error. Rome's doctrines often contradicted the Bible. The verses regularly used 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.

I felt betrayed that a church making many grand claims for itself could be leading millions of people astray spiritually by promoting false doctrines. I asked myself, "Do the Catholic Clergy know the Bible?" If they do, how can they teach these false doctrines that are contrary to God's Word? I have to conclude that their knowledge of the Bible can only be minimal.

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.

The following verses encourage all believers to read, meditate on and obey the Scriptures.

• *“Oh how I love thy law! It is my meditation all the day.”* Psalm 119:97.

• *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.”* (Colossians 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 Jesus Christ.”* (2 Timothy 3:15).

The Bible does not teach 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 didn't give us something that we are incapable of understanding. The Catholic Church claims

that its teaching is based on tradition as well as the Bible. It gives equal honour to both scripture and tradition. In reality it gives more honour to tradition because its tradition often contradicts the 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...and not after Christ.”*(Colossians 2:8).

The Gospel is a Gospel of grace and not of works. What a revelation it is to a Catholic when it is realised that Salvation is the **gift of God** and cannot be earned.

- *“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).

The Bible teaches that 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” (2Cor.5:21).*

2Timothy2:5 teaches that Jesus Christ is the **only mediator** between God and man. Therefore any prayers directed to Mary and the saints are 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. (Hebrews 10:11-14).

My Great Dilemma

The time had come for me to take a stand. 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 but I knew I could not continue to remain a Catholic when God had shown me the errors of Catholicism. 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

I accepted Christ alone as my Saviour, relying only upon His finished work on the Cross for the forgiveness of my sin.

“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 or the world 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"*(John3:3).

My life was transformed by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit.

- *"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."* (2 Corinthians 5:17).

It is now over 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 and has always been faithful. He gave me a wonderful family and many Christian friends.

You will never regret choosing to follow Christ. He will become a living reality in the life of any who come to Him in repentance and faith. He can transform and give purpose to anyone who desires a relationship with Him. He longs to be in relationship with all his children.

I know that there are many Catholics who have a genuine zeal and sincerely want to please God, but you cannot come into a saving relationship with Christ if you are attempting to establish your 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 one who believes in Him. Paul wrote:

• *"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 not 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).

I 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:

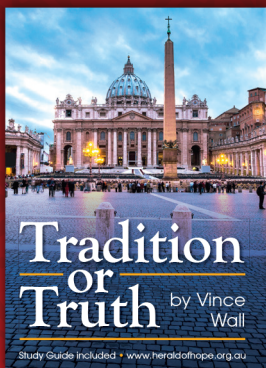
• *"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me"*. (John 14:6)

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

• *"For God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16).

John Ross

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.



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