

An Appeal to Roman Catholics

There is an all-controlling conservatism in Catholicism which is very attractive to many people. Rather than discussion of truth, there is acceptance of dogma. The risky, exciting, challenging personal issues that arise out of a direct relationship with the Father and Son are never allowed to be experienced. It's a form of Islam—'submission' to an ideology, a system of thought, an authority, an inherited position and worldview that is assumed to be right, regardless of whether one personally accepts it or not. The meaning and value of individual persons becomes crushed beneath the edifice of a desperately required uniformity and conformity. In this sense, Catholicism, Islam and Communism, indeed many other religions and political philosophies, have much in common. By contrast, true, Bible based Christianity places a huge value upon the meaning and value of the individual. Jesus told a story about a shepherd with 100 sheep, who loses one of them. He leaves the 99 in the wilderness, and goes off to look for the lost one. Most shepherds would think that 1% loss was quite OK. But this shepherd—who represents Jesus—is most unusual. He is consumed with passion for the salvation of the individual. And that individual lost sheep represents you and me. Yes, I know, you likely think that because you're a church member, you're therefore OK, and you're not lost at all. But in our hearts, we know the truth- that no human organization can solve the deep feelings of lostness and loneliness which so many Catholics feel within them. Amidst the crowd of people entering church on Sunday, there are so many feeling lost... simply lost. Their lifestyles, words and even the look in their eyes indicate this is true. No performance of ritual can change this. But coming to Jesus personally, learning of Him directly from the Bible... this can and does radically transform human life in practice.

It may be objected that the Roman Catholic church do appeal to the Bible to justify their rituals and dogmas. This is true; but it is also true that people can justify anything from any book, including the Bible. A leading Roman Catholic, Raymond Brown S.S., explains: " In the Roman understanding a church usage of Scripture shows how a passage is relevant to church life, but is not necessarily indicative of what the original author meant when he wrote the passage" (*The Epistles of John* p. 208). This is another way of saying, in simpler terms: 'We look at our church life, our rituals and dogmas, and take hold of any Bible verse, even obviously out of its context, to justify what we are doing'. If we read or use the Bible text like this, then the cynic's view, that 'you can prove anything from the Bible', is indeed true. One moment we can use the Bible to justify the holocaust [as the Catholic church did]; the next moment we can use the Bible to justify pacifism. We'll never come to God's truth if we use His "word of truth" [as He calls it] like this. We must read the Bible and try to understand what the inspired authors really meant; and, whether it is convenient to us or not, seek to live our lives by what God really is telling us. This is the wonder of 'inspiration'—that the words we read in the Bible, the black print on the white paper, is indeed God speaking directly to us, not through any priest, not through or via anybody or anything else—but God Almighty speaking directly to *you*.

So we'd like to encourage you to read the Bible *for yourself*. Nobody can do this for you- no priest, church, human organization. Of course, it's a scary thing—to face God alone, through the pages of His word. When God wanted to speak to His people Israel directly, He assembled them in front of Mount Sinai and came down to speak with them. But they were scared, and wanted to have a mediator. And so it is with so many people—they'd rather hide beneath a hierarchy of priests and bishops, rather than come to God Himself. There is only one mediator between God and us—and that is "the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). We need no priest, Mary, church etc

to mediate for us. This means you can pray to God directly, through Jesus—with your own words, not those someone else tells you to say.

You see, God Himself, the God who really is there, existing beyond the billions of kilometers of space, beyond all the galaxies... that God who is a real being, not an idea, not a black box in our brain we call 'God'... that God invites *you* to have a personal relationship with Him. And He wants you to know Him, to get to know Him, to have Him as a Father. And as in any personal relationship, this requires personal communication. Not going into a building and saying the words you are told to say. But coming to Him, in the darkness of your own bedroom, or in the middle of the day, in your office or kitchen, saying your own words, asking Him to reveal Himself to you, telling Him you love Him, believe in Him and want to know Him more... And if you do this, He *will* hear your prayers and reveal Himself to you. And in the end, you will come to want to be baptized into His Son. Maybe you think 'Baptism? I was baptized as a kid! I'm OK!'. According to the Bible, baptism is something done by an adult, when they of their own free will decide they want to identify themselves with the death and resurrection of Jesus. The word 'baptism' as a word means to completely dip in water—because when we go under the water, we are connected with the death / burial of Jesus, and when we come up out of the water, we are connected with His resurrection. Then we are truly united with Him, "in Christ" as the Bible calls it, and we have the sure and definite Hope of eternal life with Him when He returns to earth. If you really believe these things, it gives you a wonderful perspective on life.

Whether we're lucky or unlucky in this life, healthy or sick, rich or poor, that's all just for this life—our real life, the eternal life, is what we look forward to, and this gives a different perspective to our present human experience. Of course, eternal life is hard to imagine—but just try, for a moment. Because this is what God is offering you. As a child, I used to think of this life as just a few millimeters, compared to an eternally long piece of string, that goes on and on and on and on.... and on. And I still can't think of any other way to think of it. But the point is, this is the life of the Kingdom of God, not life as we now know it—which wouldn't be much of a reward! In fact, to live for ever with our present experience of life would be a punishment if anything. No, the eternal life God is offering is not just eternal, it is the life which He and Jesus now live, the life of eternal joy and fulfillment and ultimate meaning. And we can start living it... right now.

So, what to do next? We sincerely want to help people come to know God. So we'd like to offer you a free book called *Bible Basics* which systematically explains the basic things about God according to the Bible.

Just fill in the form and send it to

Bible Basics
P.O. Box 3034
South Croydon
Surrey CR2 0ZA
ENGLAND

Name: _____

Address: _____

Or e-mail your request to: info@carelinks.net

You can visit our webpages

at <http://www.biblebasicsonline.com/> and <http://www.carelinks.net/>

