

Lest We Forget...

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Introduction

The news media gave wall-to-wall coverage to the illness and death (April 2, 2005) of John Paul II, the Roman Catholic Pontiff. I do not recall hearing anything, whether from local or national radio, television, or newspaper coverage, that did not praise him. Without controversy, he was an international figure and wielded great influence, among both Catholics and non-Catholics. Roman Catholicism reaped multiplied millions of dollars worth of free publicity from the spectacle of ritualistic, mystical, and superstitious pageantry related to his death and funeral mass. The fanfare concerning the selection and elevation of Benedict XVI soon replaced the coverage of events surrounding John Paul's illness and demise. Again, the news industry glorified all of the Catholic ritual, tradition, and ceremony, all but swooning over it.

Those who know and cherish the simplicity of New Testament Truth concerning the church know that the things we have been seeing and hearing in these spectacles bear not the slightest resemblance to that Truth. Unfortunately, history has not been a popular or well-taught subject for at least a couple of generations in our schools, and many, including some brethren, are grossly ignorant of its details relating to this religio-politico colossus. While this institution is in the forefront of our attention, we will do well to refresh our minds concerning a few pertinent particulars relating to it.

Lest We Forget...

Contrary to the oft-repeated references I have heard by media commentators, the Roman Catholic Church is not two thousand years old. They consistently equated it with "Christianity," which it most certainly is not. The two are completely unrelated. Those who have thus confused them have fallen prey to Catholic propaganda. Catholics would have men believe that their church is the one of which we read in the New Testament—the "original" church. However, one cannot believe them in this respect and believe the New Testament. The origin of Roman Catholicism is generally dated from the beginning of the Roman papacy in A.D. 606. At that time the Roman Bishop, Boniface III, claimed for himself the title of "Universal Bishop," the pope, the "papa" of the apostate church—and got away with it.

The rise of a universal bishop came only after five centuries, first of digression, followed by outright apostasy. Many departures from the doctrine, organization, worship, and work of

the church in the first century under the inspired direction of the apostles occurred in the second through the sixth centuries. By the beginning of the seventh century what passed for Christianity bore no resemblance to the church for which the Christ died and to which the three thousand were added on Pentecost. The claim of the Catholic Church to be the church of the New Testament is utterly absurd.

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The Roman Catholic claim of “papal succession” is as unhistorical as it is unscriptural, yet the reporters blithely repeated this claim numerous times. Neither John Paul II nor Benedict XVI was/is a successor to Peter. **First**, Peter was never a pope. While he was prominent among the apostles, he had no more or less authority than any of the other apostles. Jesus strictly warned them that they were not to seek ascendancy or authority over others as the “Gentiles” do in their political kingdoms (Mat. 20:25–28). **Second**, Peter was married (Mat. 8:14; 1 Cor. 9:5)—a poor model for a pope, who, as are all Roman Catholic clerics, is forbidden to marry. **Third**, Peter sinned and Paul rebuked him publicly (Gal. 2:11), an unimaginable circumstance for any of Peter’s so-called “successors.” **Fourth**, the Lord made no provision for any of the apostles to have successors. Matthias, selected to take the place of Judas, Jesus’ betrayer, was a replacement for Judas, not his successor (Acts 1:23–26). **Fifth**, as noted above, there was no pope between Pentecost and A.D. 606, so Catholics can hardly rattle a papal chain back to Peter. They cannot even get close to doing so for their papal “chain” reaches no further back than A.D. 606.

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The pomp, pageantry, and ceremony that drew so many “oohs” and “ahs” from the sycophantic media did not come from the New Testament. It rather came from a combination of Old Testament trappings combined with holdovers from the pagan practices of old imperial Rome that fell to the barbarian hordes in A.D. 476. From these sources, rather than from the Lord’s pattern for His church they borrowed their “holy water,” their elaborate and opulent vestments and mitres, their candles, their incense burning, and a host of other details of their ritual. Such things are as far from the practice of true religion as the East is from the West.

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I heard at least one reporter who had bought the myth that the apostle Peter’s bones rest beneath “St. Peter’s Basilica.” This, of course, made that architectural monstrosity a sacred place beyond comparison and surely made credible in their minds the Catholic claims of both church and papal succession. There is no proof that Peter was ever in Rome, much less that he died there or that his bones were ever brought there. Had he, however, traveled to Rome, died there,

and been buried on the plot averred by the Roman Church, the building built thereupon would be no more holy than any other burial plot.

Further, if Peter were able to see all of the sinful and shameful things that have been and are being done in his name from his Hadean resting place, he would surely be shaking his head in utter disgust. His alleged successor reigns in regal splendor from an earthly throne set in a one thousand-room palace. I visited “St. Peter’s” and the Sistine Chapel in 1979 and was impressed with their splendor. These two buildings are just two of the many elaborate and palatial structures inside the walls of the Vatican, a 110-acre self-contained “nation” within the city of Rome, which maintains its own police force, bank, and post office. I seem to recall the Lord telling Pontius Pilate: “My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence” (John 18:36).

I was not only impressed by the magnificence of these buildings and the earthly treasures they contained, but I was all but nauseated at the very thought of the one billion people who identify such crass material riches with the beautiful bride of Christ predicted in the prophets and depicted in the Gospel. How unlike all of this gaudy affluence and materialism of the popes was the life of Peter, who had to tell the man at the Beautiful Gate, “Silver and gold have I none” (Acts 3:2-10).

Additionally, the American press is apparently totally oblivious to the fact—or does not care—that “St. Peter’s” was built largely from money collected through the heresy of selling indulgences (so much forgiveness or release from purgatory granted in exchange for so much money). The poor and ignorant, barely eking out a living and virtual slaves to the pope and his underling bishops, were the principal victims. The sale of indulgences by Johann Tetzel was the “last straw” for Martin Luther, upon which he wrote and nailed to the door of the Wittenberg Cathedral his notorious “Ninety-five Theses” of complaints against Romanism on October 31, 1517.

Lest We Forget...

The pope is not the “Holy Father,” as numerous reporters have called him recurrently. The only thing that exceeds the arrogance of claiming the name of Deity for oneself is that displayed by those who dare call another human being by this title that belongs to the Almighty. Such is as astounding as it is damning. Jesus taught His disciples to pray to “Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name” (Mat. 6:10). We have no spiritual “father”

upon the earth, and for this reason the Lord warned: “And call no man your father on the earth: for one is your Father, even he who is in heaven” (Mat. 23:9). I never ceased to be amazed at how nonchalantly some unthinking brethren address or refer to a Romish priest as “Father.”

The pope is not the “Vicar of Christ,” another anti-Biblical and blasphemous title he has assumed for himself and by which many thoughtlessly address him. *Vicar* is related to *vicarious*—a substitute. Thus, in this title the pope claims to be the substitute or replacement for Christ upon the earth. It is rank heresy of the most presumptuous and vain glorious stripe for anyone to claim to be such, but the Roman Catholic Church shamelessly does so for its ruler. This claim includes the averment that the pope speaks for Christ and that his declarations are infallible when he speaks *ex cathedra* (i.e., “from the chair”). This *vicar of Christ* doctrine did not become official until 1870. I suppose “the chair” was not inspired before that date. How unlike the New Testament doctrine of inspiration (which gave its recipients genuine doctrinal infallibility in the first century) is this preposterous *ex cathedra* allegation (Mat. 18:18; John 14:26; 16:13; 1 Cor. 14:47; 2 Pet. 1:20–21). Joseph Smith had his hat; the pope has his chair. Inspiration never resided in a piece of furniture, but in the men to whom the Lord entrusted it.

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The reporters conveniently forgot to tell the public of the atrocities of which the Roman Catholic Church has been guilty through the centuries. It has not been reluctant to raise armies and engage in carnal warfare with its enemies. It sponsored the military campaigns involved in the bloody Crusades of the eleventh–thirteenth centuries. The infamous Spanish Inquisition of the fifteenth century is a part of its sordid history, by which means Catholic officials implemented unimaginable and unspeakably cruel forms of torture both to wring confessions—whether true or false—from suspected heretics and to punish those who thus “confessed.” Roman Catholicism has been extremely oppressive in the nations in which it is ascendant (e.g., Spain, Portugal, Mexico, South and Central America, et al.).

Observations on the Media and Benedict XVI

The media fell all over themselves praising John Paul II for the courageous way he upheld Catholic doctrine, even when one knew the liberal commentators sharply disagreed with the pope’s uncompromising stand on various issues. He stood for many of the things liberals hate and against many of the things liberals love. He refused to budge any on such things as abortion, artificial birth control, relaxing the church’s condemnation of homosexuality, ordaining women as priests, and allowing the clergy to marry.

During the “election” process by the College of Cardinals, there was much hopeful speculation by liberal media and liberal Catholics that the august council would choose a man who would be more open-minded. They could not imagine the election of one who would not bow to their pressures and inclinations. Ironically, since a man of the same doctrinal mold as John Paul was chosen, all one heard from the liberal media is disbelief and caterwauling at such a poor choice. The same courage of convictions they praised in the former they are now pummeling in the latter. Why, to hear them tell it, this new pope is completely out of step with contemporary man – an outright disaster – since he will not bow to their humanistic agenda.

I agree with one of the new pope’s early comments upon entering the office in which he decries the damnable and destructive nature of moral and doctrinal relativism. Liberals, whether theological or political, just never “get it” when objective authority is involved, and if Roman Catholicism is anything, it is authoritarian. The fundamental problem with the Roman system is that its authority is vested in men alone – one man in particular – rather than in Christ through His New Testament.

Conclusion

The extraordinary publicity given the Roman Catholic Church has served to place its egregious errors in sharp contrast with the simplicity of New Testament Christianity – the only Christianity there is in reality. Let us seek opportunities to discuss these errors (of which the foregoing are but a few of many, many more) with those who are ignorant of them.

[Note: I wrote this MS, and it originally appeared as an “Editorial Perspective” in the May 2005 issue of *THE GOSPEL JOURNAL*, a 36-page monthly of which I was editor at the time.]

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