



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

Correspondence between a Roman Catholic priest and the Editor



A "Thought for the Weekend" appeared on the "churches' page" of the Belfast Telegraph on Saturday, August 24th. It was written by a Roman Catholic priest, Patrick McCafferty, curate of Sacred Heart Church in Belfast. While by no means a regular reader of this page, I did see it and was vexed to think of such popish nonsense being propagated in what was once a Protestant newspaper, the readership of which would still be largely nominal Protestants. I wrote a response and from that a correspondence flowed which has continued by e-mail, since the shutting off of the correspondence within the pages of the Belfast Telegraph on 14th

September. Because of the length of the letters, this article will be continued next month. *Rev. Ivan Foster, Editor.*

Letter from Patrick McCafferty

Dear Rev Foster,

The Sovereignty of Almighty God is beyond question. He created human beings in His own image and likeness and He wills ALL people to be saved and come to full knowledge of the Truth. He does not desire or will the eternal death of anyone, rather that they be converted and live. It is the Will of the Sovereign God that ALL people be saved. God created us in the image and likeness of Himself – this is the source of our human dignity; but that image of God in us was distorted and obscured by sin and its consequence – death. Christ, coming among us in the likeness of sinful flesh, heals and restores what was damaged and defaced. Through Him, God the Father restored us to His likeness. Your questions: How does the dead soul assist in its own resurrection? IT CAN'T! It is the sole work of Christ. Christ Alone, the Resurrection and the Life, brings us to true life. "Whoever lives and believes in Me will never die". It is necessary for us, however, having been raised with Christ, to live and believe. Paul explains this very clearly. Read Col 3:1-15. "Can you explain how faith and obedience may be exercised by a soul dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1) in order to assist in its own resurrection? By hearing and responding to My Beloved Who lifts up His Voice (Sg.2:10) and commands: "Lazarus, come forth!" Whence comes this power to exercise faith and obedience within the dead soul? Whence came Lazarus' power to hear the Voice and respond to its command "come forth!"? God the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus worked this great miracle to demonstrate His power over death for all who live and believe in Him. You state: "it is not our holding on to Him but His hold on us that preserves us". He certainly will not let go His hold upon us. However, it must be reciprocal. As the Psalmist says "my soul clings to You, Your Right Hand holds me fast". (Ps 63:8). Our souls must, perseveringly, cling to Christ.

You wrote: "Thus the warnings issued by Christ are not evidences that the genuine believer may be lost. Rather the warnings of Christ are the means that the all-wise God employs to effectively preserve His people from waywardness by granting to them the grace



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to desire holiness and dread and fear sin and its consequences". You are in grave error. If your opinion about eternal salvation is correct, then there is no need for the Lord to preserve His people from waywardness. They cannot go astray. Even when they backslide, they will "instinctively" return.

In fact, according to your logic and what you have written previously, you are incapable of knowing whether or not you truly belong to Christ. How do you know that you not merely a "professor of religion"? It would seem that the identity of genuine professors of Christ will not be known until the Day of Judgement!

You are convoluting the Word of God. The warnings issued by the Lord are evidence that it is possible for the upright man to renounce his righteousness and commit sin, as Ezekiel testifies. And for that sin he/she shall die. God forbid! Those who truly love the Lord become increasingly removed from the possibility of sin because they love Him so much.

The Lord Jesus says: "Unless you CHANGE and become like little children, you will NEVER enter the Kingdom of Heaven". We must be abandoned to God with child-like trust and utter confidence in His love and mercy. This "becoming" is the essence of the spiritual life – learning to lean on Christ Alone – to cling to Him Whose Right Hand is holding us fast.

Patrick McCafferty.

Reply from Ivan Foster

Dear Mr. McCafferty,

Your observations on Roman 9:14-21, among other things, deliberately ignore what God says of His dealings with Pharaoh in verse 17. "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth" (Romans 9:17). The whole point that Paul is making is that sinful man is in no position to question the actions of the Almighty, even when He raises them up to manifest his power in judging them. "As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid" (Romans 9:13-14). How inane your comments on these verses appear. You state what you would have us believe of your "god" while the Bible tells us what God would have us believe about Himself. That is the basic difference between the Bible and the teachings of Roman Catholicism. One is God's revelation and the other is man's invention. The questions I posed in my last letter have extracted from you a response which exposes the fallacy of your teaching.

In response to my question: "How does the dead soul assist in its own resurrection?" you say, "IT CAN'T!" Then in a response to my next question: "Can you explain how faith and obedience may be exercised by a soul dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1) in order to assist in its own resurrection? you say, "By hearing and responding to My Beloved Who lifts up His Voice (Sg.2:10) and commands: Lazarus, come forth!" You further respond to the rest of my second question: " Whence comes this power to exercise faith and obedience



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within the dead soul? by saying, "Whence came Lazarus' power to hear the Voice and respond to its command "come forth!""? God the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus worked this great miracle to demonstrate His power over death for all who live and believe in Him." Within the space of a few lines, you show the utterly illogical basis of your thesis. On one hand, you state that a dead soul cannot assist in its own resurrection, which of course, is quite true, and a few lines later you state that a dead soul may exercise faith and obedience and thus assist in its own resurrection. This is the length to which you must go in order to insist that man must assist in the saving of his soul by his own works, which is the foundation of the whole unbiblical system of works and rituals, penances and payments, that makes up Roman Catholicism. The works of faith and obedience, which you say assist in the resurrection of the dead soul, are in fact, evidence that life has entered the dead soul. The faith and obedience are not the cause of the life but the result of the life. Lazarus obeyed because HE WAS ALIVE! He did not obey in order to be made alive. This simple truth you seem unable to grasp or, should I say, unwilling to grasp, for it would demolish the whole edifice of your spurious gospel of works. The teaching of God's Word is that by an act of sovereign grace, God convinces the sinner He would save of his sin and misery, enlightening his mind in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing his will, and so He persuades and enables the sinner to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered in the gospel.

Salvation is by God's sovereign grace, utterly unmixed with man's works. I will quote again those verses that I set forth in my first letter, the teaching of which you have never yet addressed and little wonder, for they repudiate your whole notion of salvation by works. "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (Galatians 2:16). "But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith" (Galatians 3:11). "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Romans 3:28).

Sincerely,

Ivan Foster.