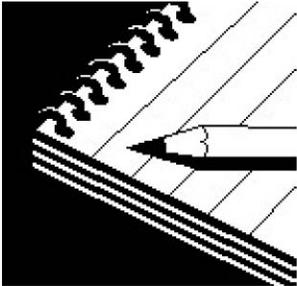




# The Burning Bush—Online article archive

## 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.**

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**Letter from Patrick McCafferty**

Dear Mr. Foster,

I too am glad to continue our exchange begun in the columns of the Belfast Telegraph and you are welcome to reproduce my correspondence with you in The Burning Bush.

I must begin by clarifying what I meant by my statement: “Now, however, it is no longer necessary for us to worry about the excessive and scrupulous demands of the old law”. I accept your rebuke for not, perhaps, expressing clearly what I meant. I refer to the old law in the context of Rms. 8:1-13. Paul refers to the “law of sin and death” and our having “been set free” from that law by “the Law of the Spirit which gives life in Christ Jesus”.

What we have come to is an entirely new way of keeping the Law. The Law is no longer written on tablets of stone. It is no longer observed merely externally but internally. The Lord has indeed said: “I shall give you a new heart and put a new Spirit in you; I shall remove the heart of stone from your bodies and give you a heart of flesh instead. I shall put My Spirit in you, and make you keep my laws and sincerely respect my observances” (Ezek. 36:25-27). He also says through Jeremiah: “deep within them, I will plant My Law, writing it on their hearts”. (Jer. 31:33). See also Gal 3:23-29.

For us, now, in the New Dispensation of Grace, the Law is not a code but a Person Whose yoke is easy and Whose burden is light (Mt 11:28-30). The Law is Jesus Himself. We no longer struggle under the burden of the Law as in former times. The Law, indeed, confronts us with our utter wretchedness and powerlessness; but the Person of our Saviour and Redeemer lifts us up and we can “look towards Him and be radiant, our faces not abashed”. (Ps 34:5). By living in union with the glorified Christ, no longer dependent on our own efforts which are truly worthless, He keeps the Law for us. He is the New Law. And we, as members of His Body, remaining in His Love, (Jn 15:9-10) can be said, therefore, to be keeping the Law, in that we are allowing Him to live and love in us.

Christ commands us to remain in His Love and to love one another as He has loved us. This is the work of God’s Holy Spirit Who has been poured into our hearts. (Rms. 5:5). You have stated: “But surely it is



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our union with Christ which has brought about our salvation. We possess eternal life once we are brought into union with Christ". True. PROVIDED we persevere with Him. As Catholics, we say that we ARE saved, we are BEING saved and we will BE saved. Our salvation has been brought about through Christ's Work – His life, death and resurrection. We possess eternal life now as a result.

However, even a priceless possession can be lost through carelessness, negligence and lack of gratitude. I return again to the Parable of the Unforgiving Debtor in Matt 18. This "wicked servant" showed contempt for his master's astonishing mercy. He cancelled his debt of 10,000 talents – 60,000,000 denarii. A denarius, as you know, is a day's wages. "Give me time" the servant had pleaded "and I will pay back the debt". Working five days a week, fifty weeks of the year, it would have taken him 28,000 years to pay his master back! The master mercifully pardoned him and, on his way out, he came across his fellow servant who owed him a comparatively paltry sum. We know the rest of the story.

Your statement, in relation to this parable "The Christian in his dealings with others, should ever remember God's merciful dealings with him", does not adequately deal with the issues the Lord brings to our attention in this parable. Listen to the Master's words: "You wicked servant, I cancelled all that debt of yours when you appealed to me. WERE YOU NOT BOUND THEN to have pity on your fellow servant just as I had pity on you?" And, in his anger, the Master handed him over to the torturers till he should pay all his debt. AND THAT IS HOW MY HEAVENLY FATHER WILL DEAL WITH YOU UNLESS YOU EACH FORGIVE YOUR BROTHER FROM YOUR HEART". The meaning of those words is crystal clear.

If salvation now possessed cannot be lost, then why would Ezekiel warn us about the fate of the upright man who renounces uprightness to do evil? (Ezek 3:20). If salvation now possessed cannot be lost, why would the Lord Jesus repeatedly warn all of His listeners, to cite just one example, "if anyone calls a BROTHER a fool he shall answer for it in HELL FIRE"? (Cf. Mt 5: 21-26). What are we to make of His Parable of the conscientious servant in Mt 24:45-51? He calls "blessed" that servant whose master's arrival finds him properly employed; and he warns: "But if the servant is dishonest and says to himself, 'my master is taking his time' and sets about beating his fellow servants and eating and drinking with drunkards, his master will come on a day he does not expect and at an hour he does not know. The master will cut him off and SEND HIM TO THE SAME FATE AS THE UNFAITHFUL WHERE THERE WILL BE WEEPING AND GRINDING OF TEETH". See also Luke 12:35-48.

Surely, in your understanding of "once saved, always saved", these Scriptures and many more are rendered null and void? It is easy to say 'I'm saved', 'I am a Christian'. However, we have Jesus' own Word: "It is not anyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' who will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but the person who DOES the Will of My Father in Heaven. When the Day comes, many will say to Me, "Lord, Lord, did we not PROPHECY in Your Name, drive out demons in Your Name?" Then I shall tell them to their faces: I have never known you; away from Me you workers of iniquity!" (Mt 7:21-23).

You make reference, Rev Foster, to the record of the conversion of the Thessalonians – I Thess. 1:4-10. Your four points notwithstanding, Paul urges them in Chapter 4 "we urge and appeal to you in the Lord Jesus, we instructed you how to live in the way that pleases God, and you are so living; BUT MAKE MORE PROGRESS STILL. You are well aware of the instructions we gave you on the authority of the Lord Jesus. God wills you all to be holy. He wants you to keep away from sexual immorality, and each one of you to know how to control his body in a way that is holy and honourable ...." (vv 1-7) He goes on, on the subject of brotherly love, to urge them again "TO GO ON MAKING EVEN GREATER PROGRESS" (verses 10-11).

He concludes his first letter to the Church at Thessalonika: "May the God of Peace make you perfect and holy; and may you be KEPT BLAMELESS for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Thess 5:23-24). In a similar vein, listen to Paul's warnings in II Thess. 3:5-15.



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On Lazarus, you wrote: “His (Lazarus’) coming forth was not in order that he might receive life as you teach. Surely you must see that your contention is ludicrous”. I do not teach or believe that Lazarus’ coming forth was in order that he might receive life. Having already received life, however, he had to cooperate with His Saviour by coming out of the tomb. Had he failed to come forth, the Lord Jesus’ raising of him would have been in vain. We too, having received new life in Christ, must come forth to serve Him in a life of love. We must live the new life we have received. We must make progress in the life of Grace. It is of this process of becoming that Paul speaks: “little children over whom I am in agony until Christ be PERFECTLY FORMED in you” Gal 4:19.

Christ being perfectly formed in us is clearly an unfolding of and growth in grace. It is the ongoing “putting to death of the flesh with all its passions and desires” (Gal 5:24). Peter too cautions us: “The possession and growth of these qualities (listed in I Peter 1:3-8) will prevent your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ from being INEFFECTUAL or UNPRODUCTIVE. But without them a person is blind or short-sighted, forgetting how the sins of the past were washed away. Instead of this, brothers, never allow your choice or calling to WAVER; then there will be no danger of your FALLING AWAY, for in this way you will be given the generous gift of ENTRY into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ”. (II Peter 1:8-11).

It is true that none can pluck us from out of the Hand of our Shepherd. However, we can choose to leave His side, God forbid! For this reason, we always keep in mind what is written in Hebrews: “We are not the sort of people who DRAW BACK and are LOST by it; we are the sort who keep faith UNTIL OUR SOULS ARE SAVED”. Heb 10:39). There must be no drawing back. We must persevere until the end. (Mt 24:13).

The Good Samaritan, indeed, did all that was necessary for the wounded man without assistance from him. This is certainly a beautiful picture of our salvation in Christ. However, it is also the clear meaning of Christ’s Parable that we are to imitate the Good Samaritan in our relationships with one another. We are called to be love in the world. “Love is the fulfillment of the Law” (Rms.13:10). Without Love “faith in all its fullness to move mountains” will be of no avail” (I Cor 13:2). Having explained to us clearly that the Samaritan with whom the Jews did not associate (Jn4:10) is our neighbour, the Lord tells us: “go and do the same yourself”.

Now, loving God and your neighbour as yourself, is the working out, the rendering effective of Divine Grace in our hearts – loving with Christ’s own Love. This is what we must do – “do this and life is yours” (Lk10:28). In the Canticle of Canticles, the Bride says to the Heavenly Bridegroom: “Then I shall give You the gift of my love.” (Cant7:13). Our poor, limited, inadequate love, given to the One Who Is Love, He transforms it in Himself. It becomes His Love. “My Beloved is Mine and I am His” (Cant2:16). All that belongs to Christ is lavished on us freely and, because we belong to Him, we are enriched infinitely by becoming sharers in the Divine Nature. (II Peter 1:4). See also, in this context, I Cor 3:21-23.

In conclusion, I am trusting totally and utterly in Christ. I recognize nothing in myself whatsoever that is of the slightest value. I depend on Him Alone and this is the doctrine that I ceaselessly propagate in my ministry of preaching, teaching and pastoral love, among the People of God entrusted to my care. I intend to walk with Him daily as I have done since early childhood. Anything that is of any value in me is not mine but is the result solely of His Grace. All of us, in whatever Christian tradition, are responsible for the graces we have received. (I Peter 4:10-11). We must, therefore, be good stewards and servants. “IF WE LIVE BY THE TRUTH AND IN LOVE, WE SHALL GROW COMPLETELY INTO CHRIST ... So the Body grows until it has built itself up in love”. (Eph 4:15-16).

Yours sincerely,

Patrick McCafferty.



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### *Reply from Ivan Foster*

Dear Mr. McCafferty,

It is clear to me that when you and I read verses such as Ezekiel 36:25-27, Jeremiah 31:33 and Galatians 3:23-29, you understand them to mean one thing while I see them as teaching something very different.

If I am not mistaken, the operation of God's grace and power referred to in these portions of Holy Scripture is understood by you to result in a union between the sinner and Christ which, in turn, results in the sinner being able to keep the law of God to the saving of his soul. That I think, you have made plain in your letters so far.

I, on the other hand, see that operation as God regenerating the soul whereby a new disposition, a new nature, is imparted and the sinner is made a new creature: "old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

I say that the person thus regenerated does not need to keep the law of God as a means of saving his soul. His soul is now saved and that by the imputing to him by God of the righteousness of Christ. The merits of Christ's perfect obedience to the law of God are reckoned to the believing sinner. Thus the sinner is saved from the consequences of his breaking of God's law by (a) Christ bearing the sinner's guilt and condemnation and suffering the eternal consequences of that guilt and (b) the sinner having credited to his account the perfect righteousness of Christ. This Paul stated clearly. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). The riches of Christ's righteousness become the believer's and the poverty of our sin became the Saviour's. Sinners are saved, not by their keeping of the law or somehow by Christ keeping the law through them, but rather as Christ their substitute undertaking for them at the cross all that was necessary for their salvation.

The benefits of Christ's work become the sinner's upon his believing of the gospel. In that moment, he is viewed by God as perfectly righteous. Therefore, he is not required to keep the law in order to be saved. It has been kept for him by Christ and there remains nothing more to be done. That is why the dying thief went to be with Christ within hours of his believing upon Christ. The time between his believing on Christ and his going to be with Christ was spent nailed to a Roman gibbet, unable to do and, most likely, say anything.

Yes, there is a keeping of the law of God from the heart by the Christian. That is the result of his regeneration but it is not in order to obtain his salvation. As I said of Lazarus, who provides us with a wonderfully clear picture of this matter, he obeyed Christ's call to come forth and so manifested the new life that he had received. He did not, as you must contend, obey in order to obtain the new life. How could he obey while yet dead? Life must come and then obedience. As Paul says in the verses in Galatians to which you have already made reference: "But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:23-26). We have a new relationship with the law. It is no longer a harsh schoolmaster teaching us the bitter lesson of our own wickedness. Now the law of God has been put within the justified sinner's heart as a rule by which to live and in which the new creature in Christ delights. "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:97). This is the cry of the true child of God.

You seek to support your argument that our getting to heaven depends upon our keeping of the law of God by quoting such warnings as those contained in Ezekiel 3:20; Matthew 5:21-26; Luke 12:35-48.



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A precious possession that is in my keeping may indeed be lost. That is very true. But my salvation is not in my keeping. My salvation has been obtained by Christ and is in His keeping and it is for that reason I say that once a true work of grace has been wrought in a sinner, that sinner can never be lost. "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:28-29). The keeping of the souls of the true children of God is not in their own hands. "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). "For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Timothy 1:12).

What mean these warnings against failure to obey God and to persevere and these exhortations to holiness that are found in so many places in God's word and to which you refer extensively? Holiness of life is the evidence that we possess true grace and are really born again. Like the good seed in the parable of the sower (Mark 13:3-23), there was a producing of a harvest which proved that it had truly taken root. If there is true union between Christ and the soul there will be the harvest of holiness. "If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him. Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother" (1 John 2:29; 1 John 3:7, 10). The perseverance of the true Christian is a manifestation of the fact that they are truly saved. It is not a result of their own efforts that brings about that perseverance, rather the Bible teaches that it is the result of God working in them to bring about what He purposed in Christ. "But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil (2 Thessalonians 3:3). Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5). Many have professed faith in Christ only to go back from following Him. This was not evidence of it being possible for a true Christian to lose their salvation. Rather, it is evidence of persons being deceived into thinking they are true Christians who really are not. Judas is an example. The people referred to by Paul in Hebrews 10:38-39 are examples, and so also are those referred to by John in 1 John 2:19. Those claiming to be righteous but who are not, will prove the emptiness of their profession by turning away from Christ to serve sin. They will be judged for what they really are, unconverted sinners who for a time pretended to be Christians (see Matthew 7:22-29).

All professing Christians are therefore urged to examine themselves and see if they truly possess Christ. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" (2 Corinthians 13:5).

One final point. You say that you are utterly trusting in Christ alone for salvation. However, you cannot say that you will be in heaven for you teach that you may yet fall away (Council of Trent sess. 6, canon 23). If you fall away and are lost then the sacrifice of Christ must not have been sufficient for your salvation. That which was required along with Christ's sacrifice in order to bring you to heaven, you did not fully supply and so were lost. Christ's work on its own could not save you. Surely you must see that your faith is not just in Christ alone, as you claim. Rather it is very much in yourself for you must supply that vital element by which heaven is made yours.

Mr. McCafferty, that is not the teaching of the Bible. The Good Samaritan provided all that was necessary for the recovery from death of the poor Jew beaten by robbers. That illustrates salvation by grace alone through faith alone.

Yours sincerely,

Ivan Foster.