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Apostolic 'selfies'

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full," 1 John 1:1-4.

The "Independent" newspaper reported on 8th July 2018, that, "Philippines president Rodrigo Duterte says he will quit if someone can prove God exists." The proof the President required was "a selfie", the modern term for "a photograph that is taken of oneself, typically with a smartphone or webcam."

The President's statement sparked outrage in his largely Roman Catholic country.

It is also reported that he attacked the Roman Catholic Church for collecting funds from members, accusing it of using donations to "maintain the palaces and the luxurious things that the rest of humanity do not have". "If you are really helping people, why do you ask money from them?" he asked.

UNDERSTANDING

Now I can understand his outrage against the hypocrisy of Romanism and indeed I welcome his denunciation of its avarice. However, what he has seen of Rome's depravity and duplicity has driven him to atheism as has been the case in many Roman Catholic countries for we have seen it take place here on our own island. The Republic of Ireland has of late embraced the most wicked of views and practices, namely liberal views of abortion and the perversions linked to sodomy. That is the fruit of the people reacting against the baseless and empty teachings of Rome. It claims to be the "Church of Christ" but in fact it displays the behaviour and spirit of the "Church of Satan"! Doubtless, this will generate anger amongst devout Roman Catholics but I would only ask them to take a copy of the Bible and try and find within its pages any endorsement for Rome's doctrines on Mary worship, Transubstantiation, Purgatory, the Intercession of the saints and Angels, and above all, salvation by our works and good deeds!

The great Protestant Reformation was sparked by just such a searching of the Scriptures by troubled men and women in various lands some 500 years ago and their discovery that, as Article 22 says of Rome's teaching on Purgatory, the pontifications of Rome were "a fond thing vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God."

Would God that, our Roman Catholic neighbours, indeed Roman Catholics everywhere, were to heed the Saviour's exhortation: "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me," John 5:39.

As for President Rodrigo Duterte's request for a 'selfie' of God, we can help him! Selfies are but a very recent technical innovation but their equivalent from some 2000 years ago are abundantly preserved!

I am sure that he would not demand a 'selfie' as proof of the existence of the Spanish explorer, Ruy López de Villalobos who is accredited with naming the archipelago "Las Islas Filipinas" in honour of Philip II of Spain in 1543. Documents dating from that time offer sufficient proof!

My text above is but part of the documentary evidence that is more than equal to any dating from the 16th century. The Apostle John is testifying to the authenticity of the message he preaches. He speaks of One Whom he calls "the Word of Life". That is a title given to the Lord Jesus Christ. At His incarnation, "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth," John 1:14. Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh.

The gospel record testifies of this glorious truth. Here are but a few verses which set forth this cardinal



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gospel doctrine. "But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins," Matthew 1:20-21. "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory," 1 Timothy 3:16.

What John is doing in our text is setting out in the equivalent of a modern 'selfie', proof of the truth of which he speaks. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life." Here is evidence to support what John declares, evidence that would stand today in any ethical and fair court in the world. It is a witness's first-hand account of that which he has heard, seen and closely handled.

He was not alone of course, for the testimony of the Bible comprises many such witness statements.

Please consider the following verses.

"The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: to whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God," Acts 1:1-3.

"But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard," Acts 4:19-20.

"Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance. For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount," 2 Peter 1:15-18.

"And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them. And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things," Luke 24:36-48.

Just this morning in my Bible reading I came upon these verses in Acts 10:

"Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) that word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:



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Him, God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins," Verses 34-43.

It is to be noted that many of these statements were made in the very face of death, for the gospel message was, to all intents and purposes, considered a seditious and dangerous doctrine which must be suppressed even by slaughter.

There were no smart phones or cameras in the days of the apostles and the writers of the New Testament, but, and I repeat myself for emphasis, they have provided us with lasting evidence that defies the decaying influences of time, indisputable testimony of what they saw, heard and handled personally.

That which is surely still accepted in the courts of the Philippines ought to be sufficient proof for the President of that land! It has been enough for countless millions who, like the poor man who was healed of his crippling ailment and who suffered persecution by the Jewish leaders for daring to simply tell the truth that it was Jesus Who had healed him, believed and were saved for all eternity. He embraced that testimony of his eyes and ears and is even now in heaven. Listen to the record of John's gospel:

"They (Jewish leaders) answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out. Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him," John 9:34-38. Being convinced of the Messiahship of Jesus, he embraced Him by faith and was saved.

HEART OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

That is the very heart of the gospel message. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 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. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God," John 3:14-18.

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him," John 3:36.

"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name," John 20:30-31.

Many years ago, two men, convinced atheists, set out to disprove what they considered the two mainstays of the Christian religion, namely, the crucifixion of Christ and the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, later known as Paul the Apostle. Their research, far from proving their theories, led to their conversions to Christ. What they discovered may be read still in the book that was published, entitled: The Observations on the history and evidences of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Gilbert West; to which are added Observations on the conversion and apostleship of St. Paul; in a letter to Gilbert West by George Lord Lyttelton. The book, printed in the late 1700s, is still available and its contents are still worthy of consideration for they have never been refuted.

Fifty-four years ago, this poor sinner believed the record of God's Word concerning His glorious Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, how that He came into the world "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10), and



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believing I was saved. I have this wonderful 'receipt' in my pocket, indeed in my heart. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life," 1 John 5:10-12.

Today, I add my witness to the truth of God's Word. I considered it, heeded it, believed it and rested upon it for the salvation of my soul and I have the testimony of 54 years of peace and joy and the deliverance from the power of sin to endorse and affirm that what I believed is indeed true and trustworthy.

I would like to think that the President of the Philippines might have an opportunity to read these few words which are offered as a response for his request for proof of the truth of the Gospel, the Bible and the existence of God. What I would desire the President to do is resign himself to God's truth, casting aside all the follies he has been taught by the priests of Rome and embracing Christ as his Saviour and walk in the ways of God as set forth in the Bible. The Philippines would then have a President who would prove to be a blessing.

"Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people," Proverbs 14:34. What Moses said to Israel long ago is worthy of consideration by all political leaders. "Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it," Deuteronomy 4:5.

What a difference such obedience would bring to our nation as well as all other lands where it was embraced!

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