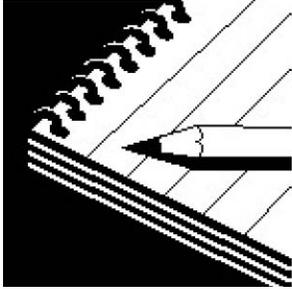


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Correspondence between a Roman Catholic priest and the Editor



A “Thought for the Weekend” appeared on the “churches’ page” of the Belfast Telegraph of 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 correspon-

dence 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.

Patrick McCafferty’s first reply by e-mail.

14 September 2002.

I write, Rev Foster, in regard to your letter to Belfast Telegraph’s Writeback 14/9/02. I further refute your “basic charge” that I am “erroneously interpreting” God’s Word in Luke 10:25-28 and Mark 10:20. Either out of malice or ignorance, you are misrepresenting what I mean in reference to the old Law. I do not, in any way, consider the Ten Commandments excessive. They are, indeed, as you put it, “a revelation of the perfect holiness God demands from mankind”. And upon our keeping of this Law, now in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, our salvation depends. The Law finds its fulfillment and fullest meaning in Jesus our Saviour. It is no longer a series of dos and don’ts, impossible for us to keep by ourselves. The Spirit of Love, Who is in the Father and the Son, Who has been poured into our hearts (Rms. 5:5), makes it possible for us to keep the New Law, the New Commandment, because now we are joined to Jesus Christ and He is become our Wisdom and our virtue and our holiness and our redemption. (I Cor. 1:30-31. By being joined to Christ we share in His love and goodness. We have no virtue of our own – only His Merits. We are joined to Him as the branches to the Vine so that He can produce the lasting fruits of His Love in us. However, Rev Foster, as the Saviour Himself explicitly says “Remain in My Love” and “cut off from Me you can do nothing”. Cut off from Christ we wither like dead branches. The Lord would never have warned us thus had it not been possible for us to stray from His Love. Our eternal salvation is conditional upon our remaining in Christ our whole lives long – as Wisdom Himself says: “those who persevere to the end will be saved”.

Salvation and forgiveness possessed now can be lost. Read the Parable of the unforgiving debtor in Mt 18 and mark well what the Lord says in verse 35. The debtor, who had been released from the colossal debt he owed his master, had his forgiveness rescinded when he failed to forgive his fellow servant, who owed him a comparatively paltry sum.

As regards the resurrection of Lazarus, certainly Lazarus was powerless lying in bodily



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death and the Lord's raising of him is, certainly, a demonstration of His mighty power over death and, more importantly, His raising us from spiritual death. Lazarus, however, DID co-operate with the Lord Jesus by COMING FORTH from his tomb. We, having been saved and redeemed by the Lord of Life, must also come forth to Him for the glory of God. We must demonstrate clearly by our way of living that life is at work in us. We must co-operate with God, otherwise all that the Lord has achieved and wrought for us will be in vain in so far as someone refuses to respond to grace.

Yours sincerely,

Patrick McCafferty.

Ivan Foster's first reply by e-mail.

Mon, Sep 16, 2002.

Dear Mr. McCafferty,

I was glad to receive your e-mail and happy to continue the exchange begun in the columns of the Belfast Telegraph. I would like to state immediately that I will be reproducing any letters we exchange by email in "The Burning Bush", a little publication I edit. You will have received the full text of the letters I sent to the Belfast Telegraph. They include those statements the Editor saw fit to exclude from the letters' column.

I wish to assure you that I was not acting out of malice when I replied as I did in my second letter. I would wish to stress that. I make no secret of my abhorrence of the doctrines you propagate but that does not mean that I would resort to dishonesty in responding to them. Were that necessary, then my confidence in my own beliefs would evaporate.

I do not believe I acted in ignorance. Your statement: "Now, however, it is no longer necessary for us to worry about the excessive and scrupulous demands of the old Law" can only be seen as an expression of your view that the "old Law" was "excessive" in its demands. You were wrong in making such a statement and you cannot avoid the rebuke for such by claiming that I misrepresented you. Now that would be malicious!!

It is clear that you believe that it is upon our keeping of a law that our salvation depends. Just what "law" is it we are required to keep, for you clearly contradict yourself between what you say in your first paragraph and what you say in your second paragraph? Let me show you what I mean. You say, "I do not, in any way, consider the Ten Commandments excessive. They are, indeed, as you put it, "a revelation of the perfect holiness God demands from mankind". And upon our keeping of this Law, now in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, our salvation depends. " Here you say that our salvation depends upon our keeping of the Ten Commandments. But in the next paragraph you say something entirely different. "The Law finds its fulfillment and fullest meaning in Jesus our Saviour. It is no longer a series dos and don'ts, impossible for us to keep by ourselves. The Spirit of Love, Who is in the Father and the Son, Who has been poured into our hearts (Rms. 5:5), makes it possible for us to keep the New Law, the New Commandment, because now we are joined to Jesus Christ and He is become our Wisdom and our virtue and our holiness and our redemption. (I Cor. 1:30-31. " Here you appear to be saying that we are saved by the keeping of a "new commandment" different from the "old law" because it is no longer a "series dos and



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don'ts." Just what is this "new law" you refer to and wherein does it differ from the "old law"? You claim that as a result of our being joined to Christ we are thus enabled to keep "the new commandment" and so accomplish the saving of our souls. But surely it is our union with Christ which has brought about our salvation. We possess eternal life once we are brought into union with Christ. Union with Christ is not in order that we might purchase our salvation by our obedience of the law but rather, having obtained salvation we now walk in the spirit of the law of God. You set the cart before the horse and claim the effect is the cause and the cause is the effect! The Christian rises to walk in newness of life because they have obtained salvation through faith in Christ rather than, as you claim, they obtain salvation by walking in newness of life. The new life within us is the result of God having saved us rather than the means by which we save ourselves. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them," Ezekiel 36:27. The walking in the statutes of God follows the work of regeneration rather than occasioning it. No matter how you package it, the Bible teaches that salvation is not by works but by the grace of God enabling the sinner to rest by faith in the finished work of Christ and that the new life thus received is manifested by the converted sinner beginning to walk according to the will of God set down in His Word. This truth is set forth in the record of the conversion of the Thessalonians, 1 Thess 1:4-10.

They received the gospel. The word receive means to take hold upon.

They followed Christ and Paul. The word followed means imitated.

Their whole lifestyle changed for they turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.

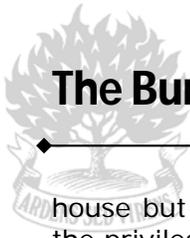
They already enjoyed deliverance from wrath to come. They were not hoping to earn it by a keeping of the law.

The role of works in the life of the believer is not as a means to life but rather as a manifestation of life. The sinner who is grafted into Christ the Vine will bear fruit — not in order to be made a Christian, a partaker of the life and grace of Christ — but as an evident result of his union with Christ.

Yes, Lazarus cooperated with Christ AFTER his resurrection and as an evidence of his having received new life. His "coming forth " was not in order that he might receive life as you teach. Surely you must see that your contention is ludicrous!

Your stating that a believer may fall away and be lost is, of course, an essential part of any theory which claims that the sinner must contribute to his own salvation. But since the Holy Scriptures teaches a salvation which is entirely of God, the true believer cannot fall away and be lost. "Salvation is of the LORD," Jonah 2:9. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast," Ephesians 2:8-9. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand," John 10:27-28.

When Peter fell "away" on the occasion of his vehement denial of Christ, it was a falling away from the fellowship of Christ not union with Christ. The prodigal son left his father's



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house but in so doing he did not cease to be a son of the father. He cut himself off from the privileges of his father's house but he was not cut off by the father. The privileges were still his to enjoy when he returned home. Likewise, Peter was still a child of God even though he spoke and acted more like an enemy for a time. When Peter repented, he did not form a new relationship but renewed his enjoyment of his continuing relationship with Christ. The parable of Matthew 18:21-35 does not support your view that the believer may fall away and be lost. Rather, it teaches us that God's dealings with His people are tempered by their dealings with others. It is the same truth as that stated (though commonly misunderstood) in Matthew 7:1-2. "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." This same truth was stated by the Psalmist in Psalm 18:26. "With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward." Likewise, Eliphaz the Temanite said, "Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same," Job 4:8. The Christian, in his dealings with others, should ever remember God's merciful dealings with him. "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors," Matthew 6:12. "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you," Ephesians 4:32. God does not pardon our sins only to resurrect them again on some future occasion and hold them against us. That cannot be for it would be contrary to the terms of the Covenant of Grace. "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more," Hebrews 10:16,17. This basically brings us back to my first letter and my pointing out that the Good Samaritan did all that was necessary for the wounded man, without assistance from him. This is the essence of the gospel of grace.

Yours sincerely,

Ivan Foster.