



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, 2002. 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, 2002. These are the final letters we will publish.

Dear Mr. Foster,

There is no predestination to damnation. God created human beings in His own image and likeness. The Psalmist says: "what is man that You care for him? Mere mortals that you keep them in mind?" (Ps 8:4). God is mindful of His creatures and He wills that ALL be saved and come to knowledge of the Truth. He created us in love to share His Divine Life for ever. He created us freely. He had no need to do so. He has no need of us whatsoever; but because His very Name and Nature is Love, He chose to create us. He created no one to be damned. If a human being is lost for ever, it will be the result of their turning away deliberately from Him. Your quoting of Rms 9:14-21 proves nothing in regard to your opinions on salvation drawn from Calvin's invention. Paul's teaching must be read in the context of what follows. Read Rms 11:16-24. He warns the People of God: "Remember God's severity as well as His goodness: His severity to those who fell, and His goodness to you AS LONG AS YOU PERSEVERE IN IT; IF NOT, YOU TOO WILL BE CUT OFF". Read verse 24. Everything that God does, including His dealings with Pharaoh, is all for the ultimate purpose of revealing His merciful love and compassion to all the nations. "God has imprisoned ALL HUMAN BEINGS in their own disobedience only to show mercy to THEM ALL". (Rms 11:32).

God's Sovereign Will is that all people be saved for He loves all without exception. There is no favoritism with God. However, human beings loved by God can fall away by their own selfishness and sin. He gave us free will. He did not program robots. He certainly did not create an elite group who are saved no matter what they do, or fail to do. Listen to Paul again: "So then, my brothers, we have no obligation to human nature to be dominated by it. IF YOU DO LIVE IN THAT WAY, YOU ARE DOOMED TO DIE; but IF by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, YOU WILL HAVE LIFE" (Rms 8:12-13); and: "And if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, PROVIDED that we share His sufferings, so as to share His glory" (Rms 8:17). Lazarus was raised to demonstrate the power of Christ, the Resurrection and the Life, for everyone who believes in Him. The Father quickened Lazarus who was a corpse in a tomb. We, however, having been raised to life in Christ are required to walk in newness of life. (Eph 5:9-10). Whether you



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

will admit it or not, it is a simple fact that you, I and everyone else will be judged on our conduct and behaviour here on earth (II Cor 5:10). The evidence that we belong to Christ is written in Gal 5:5. Christ has said "by their fruits shall you know them". The human person has been allowed and called by God to co-operate with Him in the work of salvation. "Of You my heart has spoken 'seek His Face'. The woman with the haemorrhage set out herself, saying to herself: "if I can just touch the fringe of His cloak ...". There is reaching out towards God on our behalf. Of course, it goes without saying, that God is seeking us and that He certainly holds fast to us and is faithful. At the same time, our souls must cling to Him.

We are indeed justified by our faith in Jesus Christ as is affirmed by Rms 3:20 & 28, Gal 2:16 and Gal 3:11. That faith, however, makes its power felt through love. (Gal 5:6). The Person of Christ is the New Law. By being united with Christ, our sharing His Spirit, we are kept by the Law. The New Law of grace and love is written on our hearts, to be kept with our hearts. The person who is faithful loves as Christ loves. This is the clear sign of whether or not we are "in Christ". We must "remain in My Love" as He commanded. Our love must be something real and active. (I Jn 3:18). This real and active love is the proof of a living Faith. The Holy Spirit warns all Christians: "Faith without good works is dead" (James 2:17). Faith is useless without love. (I Cor 13:2). I repeat to you the Word of God for which you and those of your opinion have ever failed to give adequate response: "As a body without a spirit is dead, SO IS FAITH WITHOUT GOOD DEEDS" (James 2:26). According to God's Word, Faith without active love is a corpse.

You state: "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". I am not saying that. Faith and obedience are indeed the result of Life. It is Life working within us (II Cor 4:12). The works that we do in love we can claim no credit for whatsoever. It is God Himself Who does the planting and the watering and Who causes the growth; but it is self-evident WE MUST CO-OPERATE! We must allow ourselves to be cultivated by God – to grow in grace.

We human beings are weak. We depend daily and every moment on the grace of God. Cut off from Christ we can do nothing but, united with Him, "I can do all things through Him Who gives me strength".

Fr Patrick McCafferty.

Dear Mr. McCafferty,

I notice that you have begun to sign your name with the title "Father" before it. I am sure that you are aware of the injunction of Christ to His disciples when he was speaking against the scribes and pharisees: "And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven," Matthew 23:9. While the use of this title by you is not part of the present discussion, I feel nevertheless that I must point out to you that in using



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

it, you very obviously defy Christ.

Regarding predestination you say, "There is no predestination to damnation." As much as it is contrary to man's perceived wisdom, God's Word speaks of how "God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction," Romans 9:22. A precise statement of this doctrine is found in the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 3, paragraph 5. "Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, hath chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of His mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto: and all to the praise of His glorious grace."

You claim that God has no favourites. What of Romans 9:13? "As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." What of the nation of Israel? Were they not a chosen people? "For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people," Deut 7:6-7. Did not God restrict His dealings with the ancient world to this small nation with very few exceptions? Paul said of the Gentile nations in Ephesians 2:12: "That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." Did God not favour Israel as He favoured none other? Though Israel presently suffers the consequences of their rejection of Christ, yet it is clear from the prophetic scriptures that God will renew His dealings with the nation once more and as a result they will repent of their sins. Zech 12:10-12; 13:1. Their repentance does not initiate God's renewed dealings with them. Rather, God's renewed dealings with Israel INITIATE THEIR REPENTANCE!

Romans 11:16-24, to which you refer, does not militate against predestination but rather presumption. Had you but read all of the chapter you would have come upon Paul setting forth the doctrine of predestination in the verses 1-10. One verse in particular I will quote. "What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded," Romans 11:7. It was upon such verses as this that the Reformers based their understanding of the doctrine of Predestination.

Of course, those who are raised to life in Christ by the power of the Spirit of God are required to walk in newness of life, but not in order to assure them of heaven. That has already been assured by the act of regeneration that has already taken place. "But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you," Romans 8:11. The one in whom the Spirit of God dwells (the regenerated believer) will experience His quickening grace enabling him to "mind the things of the Spirit," Romans 8:5. Thus it is not the believer initiating works in order to assure himself of heaven, but God by His grace ensuring that those whom He has redeemed persevere in faith and holiness. Perseverance is the fruit of God working sovereignly within the one He has determined to save, as Paul teaches in Philippians 1:6 and 2:13. "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ," Philipians 1: 6.
"For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure," Philipians 2: 13.

In the face of your refusal to accept the simple teaching of God's Word, I can but quote these verses in the hope that light will yet dawn within your heart.

You say that : "We are indeed justified by our faith in Jesus Christ as is affirmed by Rms 3:20 & 28, Gal 2:16 and Gal 3:11." In truth you do not believe what you have written. Firstly, because the Council of Trent pronounces a curse upon any one who teaches justification by faith alone, and, secondly, because you insist that the person who believes in Christ must cooperate with God in order to be saved. Thus, according to you, faith in Christ alone does not justify. That only comes about through our works. The believer may be "unjustified" according to you, after he has been "justified." There are things that he must do, beyond his believing in Christ, in order to yet assure himself of heaven.

Justification, as set forth in the Bible, is an act of God whereby He freely justifies the believing sinner, not by infusing righteousness into him, but by pardoning his sins, and by accounting and accepting his person as righteous, not for anything wrought in him, or done by him, but for Christ's sake alone, nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to him, as his righteousness, but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ to him, his receiving and resting on Him and His righteousness by faith, which faith he has not of himself, it is the gift of God. In truth, we are talking at cross purposes for you use Bible terms to mean something other than what the Bible means by them. You are talking of baptismal regeneration when you talk of being raised to life. The "faith in Christ" of which you speak, is a faith which may link the "believer" to Christ today only to have him severed from Christ tomorrow because of some failure on his part. That is not saving faith. "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. The life that he "hath" is everlasting life. Having everlasting life, the believers "shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." John 10:28.

The faith that instantly and eternally justifies the sinner who believes in Christ will produce holiness. In regeneration the soul is quickened, by being united to Christ and, because we have not only His righteousness imputed to us and thereby we are justified in God's sight, but we also have a new and holy nature imparted to us, the newly made alive soul begins to walk in holiness. The holy works are not the result of an arrangement whereby the converted sinner decides to "cooperate" with God but rather they are the outworking of the sovereign grace of God within the soul.

Your gospel is that which Paul condemned the Galatians for adopting. They began with faith but thought that they would be made perfect by the law, Galatians 3:2-3.

God acted in mercy toward His elect while they were yet enemies. He did not, at the first, act toward them on the basis of their merits. Thus we were reconciled. How then are we to be saved? By God adopting a new principle upon which to act toward us now that we are born again? No, rather it will be upon the same basis — the righteousness of Christ not my works or the absence of them. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life," Romans 5:8-10. It was by grace that we were regenerated and it is by grace that we will be kept, not a mixture of God's grace and our works. Nothing about or in that one upon whom God set His love in eternity can or will alter God's purpose in love. Sinners will not get to heaven by self-sustained holiness but by the outworking of God's eternal purpose to save a people for His glory.

Might I put it this way. We breathe, because we are alive. It is the outworking of that principle of life within us. We cannot voluntarily cease from it. Holy works are as natural as breathing to the child of God and they **MUST** engage in them for their whole nature demands it. But their holiness is not engaged in for the purpose of obtaining or ensuring eternal life but because they have eternal life.

Sincerely,

Ivan Foster.