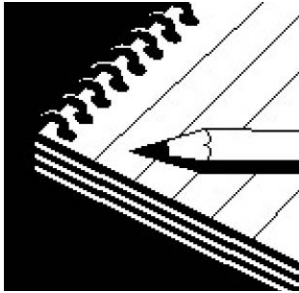




The Burning Bush—Online article archive

Correspondence between a Roman Catholic priest and the Editor



A "Thought for the Weekend" appeared on the "churches' page" of the *Belfast Telegraph* 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 correspondence within the pages of the

Belfast Telegraph on 14th September. I have underlined the words which the *Letters Editor* removed from my first two letters. Because of the length of the letters, this article will be continued next month.

Thought for the Weekend...

"You must love the Lord your God . . . and your neighbour as yourself." (Deut 6:5). "Do this and life is yours" (Luke 10:28).

The above words are Jesus' answer to a lawyer's question: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25). The lawyer, anxious to justify himself, posed a further question: "And who is my neighbour?" The Lord's reply is the beautiful parable of the Good Samaritan. (Luke 10:29-37). The Jews did not associate with Samaritans and considered them outsiders. They were certainly not regarded as brothers and sisters in the Faith. And yet, when the Lord wanted to illustrate how we are to treat one another as neighbours, friends and kin, He told of a Samaritan's compassion for a Jew who had been beaten, stripped and robbed. The Samaritan finding the poor man half-dead, showed himself to be really Christ-like. Jesus concluded by saying to the lawyer and the other listeners: "Go and do the same yourself". Jesus Himself came to us as a poor man with nowhere to lay His head (Luke 9:58). He emptied Himself of glory (Phil 2:7), in order to give us an eternal inheritance out of His own infinite riches (II Cor 8:9). The One, who was Himself a vagrant preacher of the Good News, calls us to take our places in "the Kingdom prepared far us from the foundation of the world" (Mt 26:34). However, what we must do in order to have eternal life is love and serve Jesus, present in the suffering and the poor. Every poor man, woman or child, no matter who he or she is, or where they came from, is the very Person of Jesus Christ — hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, imprisoned and an outcast. Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan makes it very clear that every human being is my neighbour, sister and brother. In a society that exacerbates divisions and pillories fellow human beings as 'alien' or 'foreign', we must strive to breach all the borders that exist between peoples. In doing so, we are throwing the doors wide open to Christ, We are doing the Father's Will and advancing Christ's Kingdom of love, justice, equality and peace. Jesus says: "Do this and life is yours" (Luke 10-28). Upon this hinges our eternal destiny - whether or not the Father will recognise us on the Last Day as His children.

Belfast Telegraph, 24/8/02



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

Rev. Ivan Foster's first letter with the words removed by the Letters' Editor underlined.

Dear Sir,

In his "Thought for the weekend" (Saturday 24th), curate Paddy McCafferty made a fundamental error in his interpretation of the conversation between the Saviour and the lawyer (Luke 10:25-37).

The lawyer was questioning the Saviour with the purpose of tripping Him up. Christ was therefore dealing with an opponent. As such, the Saviour set out to show the lawyer his own sinful and depraved heart and his inability to do that which is necessary under the Covenant of Works to save himself. This the Saviour did, as He always does, by bringing the sinner to the law of God "for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). Hence His question: "What is written in the law? how readeest thou?" Luke 10: 26.

The answer given by the lawyer is indeed the sum of man's requirement under the Covenant of Works under which Adam as placed and under which all his posterity are born. Undoubtedly, if a man does this, he shall indeed live, as Christ said, verse 28.

The lawyer's reaction shows that he felt the power of the Saviour's words. He felt that he must "justify" himself. Justify himself from what, we might ask. It must surely be the charge that while he had a knowledge of what the law required of him in order for him to earn eternal life, he had not fulfilled the requirements of the law. His quibble about who was his neighbour was a mere device to deflect from the simple truth, that the lawyer knew himself to be unable to keep the terms of the law in order to obtain eternal life by it. He wished to avoid having to acknowledge that he could not love God or his neighbour as required by the law because his heart was sinful and incapable of meeting the demands of the law.

Yet, strangely, Mr. McCafferty urges upon those, willing to heed him, actions which the lawyer, by his quibbling, was acknowledging to be impossible. The fact of man's inability to keep the law of God, and so earn eternal life, is central to the gospel of Jesus Christ. "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).

In answer to the second question of the lawyer, the Saviour does indeed tell the wonderful parable of the good Samaritan. Mr. McCafferty is correct in saying that the good Samaritan is the "Christ-like" figure in the story. The wounded, dying Jew is a picture of mankind. Now what does the Samaritan say to the Jew in order to deliver him from his plight? According to Mr. McCafferty's gospel, he would have instructed him in the things he must do in order to save himself. The parable contains no hint of this, but rather, the good Samaritan undertakes all the work necessary for the deliverance of the dying man. The dying man had but to submit to and accept the good Samaritan's ministrations. That is the message of the gospel as plainly declared in the Bible and no more plainly than in the answer given



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

to the Philippian jailer's question by Paul and Silas: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" "And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16:30-31).

Christ has undertaken all the requirements of the law necessary for the saving of His elect as Isaiah the prophet states. "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). Let none be deceived. The message of Christ to dying helpless sinners is not "This do and thou shalt live" but "Believe to the saving of the soul" (Hebrews 10.39).

Belfast Telegraph, 26/8/02

Patrick McCafferty's first reply.

The Law and Grace.

According to the Rev Ivan Foster, I "made a fundamental error" in interpreting the conversation between Jesus and the lawyer in Luke 10:25-37.

The lawyer may well have been attempting to trip Our Lord up. The Gospels also tell, however of another eager young man, who could not be described as an opponent of the Lord Jesus. This man "ran up, knelt in front of Him and asked: "Good Master, what must I do to be saved?" (Mk 10:17-22). Jesus' answer to him was in many ways similar to the advice He gave to the lawyer. It is abundantly clear, from all of the Scriptures, that our eternal salvation is conditional upon our following of Jesus Christ.

Rev Foster referred to "the Law" and our inability to keep its strictures. This is true.

Now, however, it is no longer necessary for us to worry about the excessive and scrupulous demands of the old Law. We live now in the New Dispensation of Grace. The New Grace is the Person of Christ. By opening our hearts to His Holy Spirit, it becomes possible, indeed, to love others with Jesus' own Love.

He commands: "Love one another as I have loved you". (Jn. 15:12) He would never have called us to do this, had He not made it possible for us to love in this way, through the action of His Spirit dwelling in us.

Finally, I wish to assure Rev Foster that "Mr. McCafferty's gospel" does not instruct anyone "in the things he/she must do in order to save himself/herself". As Catholics, we firmly believe that we do not and cannot save ourselves. We look to Christ alone, but we must cooperate with Him and follow the conditions and instructions laid down by our Saviour. (Jn 15:10).

Rev. Ivan Foster's second letter with the words removed by the Letter's Editor underlined.

Dear Sir,

I was deeply disappointed to see that six out of seven quotations from Holy Scripture were removed from my letter which appeared on August 31st. It is difficult, if not impossible to



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

present a case for a particular Christian doctrine if the only valid evidence upon which it is based is removed from one's letter. In the light of this, I wonder at the value of such an exchange! Nevertheless, I will respond to Patrick McCafferty and watch with interest just what happens to the quotations from the Bible contained within my response.

I repeat my basic charge against Mr. McCafferty of erroneously interpreting God's Word since he repeated the error in his reply.

When the young man referred to by Mr. McCafferty responded to the Saviour, he claimed that he had kept the Saviour's summary of the law of God in its entirety from his youth (Mark 10:20). According to Mr. McCafferty's gospel, that should have satisfied the Saviour. But instead, the Saviour said: "One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me" (verse 21). The Saviour was again dealing with a man who did not feel himself to be a lost sinner unable to keep the law of God. To convince such a one of his sin, He brought the man to the practical implications of the law. To love God with your whole being is to be ready at His bidding to sell all and bear the reproach of Christ. It was then that the young man was faced with the sinfulness of his heart and he went away from Christ because, despite his claims, he did not love God before all things (verse 22). The whole thesis of the message of Christ is to convince men that they cannot keep the law, being sinners. As Paul said : "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). I quoted this verse in my last letter but it was removed. The purpose of bringing sinners to the law is to convince them of their inability to keep its terms because of their utter sinfulness, and to teach them of their need of a Redeemer who would undertake for them the obligations of the law and to rest in His work wrought on the behalf of the elect. "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). This verse was also expunged from my last letter.

The dreadful description of the law employed by Mr. McCafferty when he spoke of the "excessive . . . demands of the old law" indicates his measure of ignorance of the Word of God. The Law of God, summarised in the Ten Commandments, was not excessive but rather a revelation of the perfect holiness God demands from mankind. It appears excessive to sinful man but God, its author, cannot be charged with making "excessive" demands upon His creatures. There is no "excess" in perfection. Nor is it the "old" law since it is still in power and has not been replaced.

Another example of Mr. McCafferty's poor exegesis is his use of John 15:12 as proof that salvation comes through our works. "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12), is not a law whereby the sinner obtains eternal life. Rather, it is a command to a sinner who HAS OBTAINED ETERNAL LIFE to show that this is the case by loving his brethren in Christ, an essential manifestation of the life of God within the soul. Just as Lazarus could only "come forth" after he was raised from the dead by the power of Christ, so the command of John 15:12 can be kept only by those who, convinced by the Holy Spirit of their utter sinfulness and inability to satisfy the law of God by their works, and likewise drawn by the same Holy Spirit to faith in Christ and repen-



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

tance toward sin, have, by His grace, been regenerated. They, as living saints, are now obligated and enabled to walk in the law of Christ. The prophet Ezekiel, amongst others, stated the process clearly. "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 36:26-27). The walking in Christ's laws comes after the receiving of new life from Christ. Mr. McCafferty's gospel would have us believe that the reverse is the case!

The dead Lazarus did not cooperate with Christ in his resurrection nor can the dead sinner cooperate with Christ in order to bring about his spiritual resurrection. The gospel message is one of grace alone, not grace mixed with our assistance of God.

Ivan Foster.

Monday September 9th.

Footnote: This correspondence is now closed. — Letters Editor.

Since this correspondence is ongoing, we will publish the subsequent exchange of letters on these important points of controversy between Rome and the Bible. Please pray for the blessing of God to rest upon this expounding of the doctrines of grace.